



Religious Diversity in Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi and John Hick

Mevlana Celaledin-i Rumi ve John Hick'te Dinsel Çeşitlilik

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Abstract

Religious pluralism has become one of the most contested issues in contemporary philosophy of religion and is generally discussed within the frameworks of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. This article provides a comparative analysis of religious pluralism in the thought of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, one of the leading Sufi figures of Islamic intellectual tradition, and John Hick, a prominent representative of modern philosophy of religion. Mawlana's understanding of religion is grounded in the metaphysics of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being) and in the moral-metaphysical dimension of divine love. For him, the infinite self-disclosures of the Absolute Being constitute the ontological foundation of religious diversity. Accordingly, Mawlana develops an inclusive and pluralistic perspective in which every faith is regarded as a partial manifestation of divine truth. Although he was well-versed in theological and philosophical debates, Mawlana did not follow the methods of theologians or philosophers when addressing such issues. For him, engaging in excessively abstract reasoning was not a valid path to truth. His conceptions of life, humanity, and religion are shaped by the idea of being. The vastness of being corresponds to his understanding of life and religion, for both emerge from and continue within the essence of existence. To Mawlana, the realm of being is too vast to be grasped by the senses, and its source lies deeper than both the material world and the realms of imagination and sensation. Although Mawlana's reflections on religious diversity can be analyzed through the contemporary paradigms of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, it becomes clear that he transcends these frameworks through a more profound and holistic vision. The seemingly contradictory tendencies of exclusivity, inclusivity, and pluralism observed in Sufi discourse stem from the dialectic between the outer (*zāhir*) and inner (*bāṭin*) dimensions. Thus, the inclusive and pluralistic attitudes in Sufism are not mutually exclusive. Hick, on the other hand, constructs his pluralism on an epistemological basis, interpreting religious diversity as the plurality of human responses to the "Ultimate Reality" within the limits of human cognitive and cultural conditions. Drawing on Kant's ontology and epistemology, Hick reinterprets the divine by postulating God as the "Ultimate Reality" at the center of his pluralistic framework. This distinction has generated major debates in theology and philosophy of religion, particularly concerning the possibility of revelation. According to Hick, there is a sharp distinction between Reality in itself and Reality as conceptualized and experienced through religious traditions—an indeterminacy that arises from metaphysical uncertainty. Each religion asserts absolute truth claims, yet these claims cannot be verified by any objective criterion. Therefore, no religious tradition can make a complete or final claim about the nature of Reality. The fundamental difference between the two approaches lies in their orientation: while Mawlana proposes a God-centered and religion-centered pluralism, Hick advocates an experience-centered one. The study concludes that Mawlana offers a more holistic framework that preserves the authenticity and socio-cultural dimensions of religion, whereas Hick's model, though compatible with modern values such as liberalism and tolerance, risks undermining the essence of religion through its reductionist tendencies.

Keywords: Philosophy of Religion, Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, John Hick, Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism.

Öz

Dinî çoğulculuk, çağdaş din felsefesinin en tartışmalı meselelerinden biridir ve genellikle dışlayıcılık, kapsayıcılık ve çoğulculuk paradigmaları çerçevesinde ele alınmaktadır. Bu makale, dinî çoğulculuk düşüncesini İslam düşüncesinin önde gelen sûfilerinden Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî ile çağdaş din felsefesinin önemli temsilcilerinden John Hick'in yaklaşımları üzerinden karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Mevlânâ'nın din anlayışı, vahdet-i vücûd metafiziği ve aşkın ahlâkî-metafizik boyutu üzerine temellenir; ona göre Mutlak Varlık'ın sonsuz tecellileri, dinî inançların çeşitliliğini zorunlu kılar. Dolayısıyla Mevlânâ, her inancı ilahî hakikatin farklı bir yansıması olarak kabul eden kapsayıcı ve çoğulcu bir yaklaşım geliştirir. Mevlânâ kelim ve felsefe alanında tartışılan konulara vakıf olmasına rağmen, söz konusu meselelere çözüm getirmek istediğinde kelamcılarının ve filozofların yöntemini takip etmemiştir. Aşırı soyut terimlere boğulmuş istidlali şekiller ile zaman geçirmek, Mevlânâ için geçerli bir yöntem değildi. Mevlânâ'nın, hayat, insan ve din kavramı, varlık üzerine şekillenmektedir. Varlık kavramının genişliği, hayat ve din telakkisi ile eş olacaktır çünkü din ve hayat, varlığın sinelerinden çıkmakta ve orada devam etmektedir. Mevlânâ'ya göre varlık âlemi, duyarlarla hissedilmeyecek kadar geniş, kaynağı ise maddi dünya değil, hissedilen ve hayal edilen âlemden daha derindir. Mevlânâ'nın dini çeşitlilik konusu her ne kadar çağdaş din felsefesi perspektifinden dışlayıcılık, kapsayıcılık ve çoğulculuk paradigmaları ile değerlendirilse de, onun bu paradigmaları aşan daha derin ve bütüncül bir bakış açısına

sahip olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Mutasavvıfların söylem ve eylemlerinde dışlayıcı, kapsayıcı ve çoğulcu gibi birbirleriyle çelişik gibi gözüken tutumları, onların zahir-batın diyalektiğinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Onlarda görülen kapsayıcı ve çoğulcu yaklaşım tarzı birbirleri ile uyum sağlaması mümkün olmayan durumlar değildir. John Hick ise dinî çoğulculuğu epistemolojik temelde kurar ve dinî farklılıkları, insanın sınırlı bilişsel ve kültürel koşulları içinde “Nihai Gerçek”i tecrübe ediş biçimlerinin çeşitliliği olarak yorumlar. Hick, Kant’ın ontoloji ve epistemolojisinden hareketle böyle bir çoğulculuk tasavvuru arayışına girmiştir. Kant’ın ahlaki temellendirmek için bir postülat olarak varsaydığı Tanrı’yu, Hick, “nihai Gerçeklik” olarak varsayarak dini plüralizm anlayışının merkezine yerleştirmiştir. Bu ayırım kelam ve din felsefesinde vahyin imkânı konusu gibi çok ciddi tartışmaları beraberinde getirmiştir. Hick’in yaklaşımına göre, Gerçek’in kendisi ile dinî geleneklerce kavramsallaştırılıp tecrübe edilen Gerçek arasında keskin bir ayırım vardır. Bu ayırımın sebebi metafizik belirsizliktir. Her din mutlak hakikat iddiaları ile ortaya çıkar. Fakat bu iddiaları objektif bir kriterle kanıtlamak mümkün değildir. Bu nedenle hiçbir dini gelenek, Gerçek’in doğası hakkında tam ve nihai bir iddia ileri süremez. Bu iki yaklaşım arasındaki temel fark, Mevlânâ’nın Tanrı ve din merkezli, Hick’in ise insan tecrübesi merkezli bir çoğulculuk geliştirmiş olmalarıdır. Çalışma, Mevlânâ’nın yaklaşımının dinin otantik yapısını ve toplumsal-kültürel boyutlarını kuşatan bütüncül bir perspektif sunduğunu; buna karşılık Hick’in çoğulculuğunun modern değerlerle uyumlu olsa da indirgemeci bir yaklaşımla dinin özünü aşındırma tehlikesi barındırdığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Felsefesi, Mevlânâ, John Hick, Dışlayıcılık, Kapsayıcılık, Çoğulculuk.

Introduction

Religious pluralism has become a central topic of discussion in contemporary philosophy of religion. In today’s literature, the phenomenon of religious diversity is generally addressed around the three main paradigms: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Within this framework and especially when the relationship between Islam and other religions is at issue, the Sufi tradition and its prominent representatives are frequently referenced. Of these Sufi figures, one of the most frequently cited is Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi.

Religion is a dynamic phenomenon that has attracted the interest of humanity throughout history and continues to be a diverse and complex part of human existence. The reality of religion, which can also be seen as a worldview, a form of life and existence, has a comprehensive and existential influence encompassing many areas of life. In other words, religion is essentially one of the ways in which humans understand existence. Archaeological, anthropological, phenomenological, and historical studies conducted in the field of religion offer an immense contribution to religions in both academic and cultural terms. Religions usually possess fundamental and order-giving character through the central tenets of moral and ethical guidance contained within them. That is, one of the main elements that gives a culture and a civilization its color is its conception of religion. The manifestations of the preconceived notions of religion may be apparent in different ways and forms. These lead to the diversity arising from religion. Religious diversity and differences are initially accepted as enhancing humanity’s spiritual and cultural development, as are differences in other fields. However, this has not always been the case. Differences in religious conceptions and “truths” have become a vehicle for a number of philosophical-theological, social, and political factors. On many occasions, these perceived differences have led to conflict, from difference in thought to armed conflict. Therefore, this phenomenon of religious diversity and difference has remained a topic of debate that continues to generate much interest across many fields, including Eastern and Western philosophies and academic investigation.

The subject of religious diversity can be traced back to periods when different religions emerged. Data from the study of the history of religion shows that religions have often been in contact with each other as human societies interact, in positive or negative ways. Each of what Popper termed “the major religions” emerged independently during the period known as the axial age and in societies where a certain religion was dominant or multiple religions were present. Buddhism emerged in an environment where Hinduism already existed. Christianity arose in a society where Judaism was widespread and developed in the world of the Roman Empire, where various pagan elements and belief systems were dominant. Islam, the last major monotheistic religion, emerged in the Arabian Peninsula during a historical period predominantly inhabited by polytheists, but also by Christians, Jews, and Sabians. The emergence of religions in various forms at different times and places is a historical reality.¹ The various religious traditions of the world have approached reality from different perspectives and experiences, developing, through myths and symbols, different theologies, philosophical systems, sacred rituals, art forms, moral values, and lifestyles. The perception of reality in its different forms is a natural evolution of this process. Individuals with the same cultural and historical background may exhibit great differences in terms of psychological make-up, mental capacity, and aesthetic sensibility. This diversity paves the way for humankind to develop differences in religious understanding and experience.² Just as different cultures, ethnic structures, geographical features, languages, sciences, arts, and moral teachings on earth should be accepted, few should be classed as inherently right or wrong. Religious diversity may also be viewed from this perspective. If a human is seen not as a member of a specific ethnic group but simply as a human, and if every language is accepted directly as language, not as one language among others, then similarly, religion should be perceived as religion without the need for any comparison. From this viewpoint, living one religion actually means living the essence of all religions. When considered within a broader framework, diversity in religions and other areas should be seen as the way existence manifests in different linguistic, intellectual, and cultural molds³ and thus religious diversity should be considered a natural phenomenon. Religious diversity, viewed like this gains a range of dimensions when adherents of various religions have to live together, or come into contact with each other. After the Industrial Revolution, during the transition from traditional societal structures to modern society, major changes occurred in many areas of life. Especially in the 20th Century, a significant wave of migration, including Muslims, to Western countries began for various reasons. These migrations have altered the nature of religious debate, often elevating them to a central focus in areas including international politics, theology-philosophy, sociology, and security.⁴

Addressing all these topics here in their entirety would exceed the boundaries of this paper. However, fundamental concepts that form the essence of this subject, such as ‘plurality in

¹ Rahim Acar, “Dini Çeşitlilik”, *Din Felsefesi*, eds. Recep Kılıç et al. (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2016), 287.

² Mustafa Eren, *John Hick'te Dini Çoğulculuk* (İstanbul: Otorite Kitap, 2016), 82.

³ Frithjof Schoun, *Varlık, Bilgi ve Din*, trans. Şehabettin Yalçın (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1997), 126; Id., *Dinlerin Aşkın Birliği*, trans. Yavuz Keskin (İstanbul: Ruh ve Madde Yayınları, 1992), 36.

⁴ Recep Kılıç, “Küreselleşme ve Din üzerine”, *Din Kültür ve Çağdaşlık, 2004 Yılı Kutlu Doğum Sempozyumu Tebliğ ve Müzakereleri*, (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2007), 58.

religion,' 'religious pluralism,' and 'religious diversity,' will be compared within the framework of the understandings of religion expounded by Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, a 13th Century Sufi thinker living in Anatolia, and John Hick, a contemporary representative of religious pluralism. In the process of globalization, the most prominent paradigm has been 'religious pluralism' which falls under the umbrella of religious diversity. Although the concepts of religious diversity and religious pluralism are sometimes used interchangeably, there is a significant difference between them.

1. Religious Diversity in Mawlana

Ibn Arabi (d. 638/1240), who systematized the subject of religious diversity within the philosophy of Sufism and became a source of inspiration for the mystics and Sufis who came after him, sees God in his unique style as the source of diversity in the universe. Ibn Arabi, who holds a foundational place in the formation of Islamic metaphysical thought, influenced people with vastly different religious beliefs and backgrounds, from Spain to the Far East. Similarly, Mawlana (d. 672/1273), who established and nurtured what is called "Anatolian Irfan" (*gnosis*), a human-centered philosophy, in these lands, paved the way for distinguished thinkers, such as Sadrettin Konevi (d. 673/1274), Yunus Emre (d. 720/1320), Hacı Bektash Veli (d. 669/1271), Niyazi Mısri (d. 1105/1694), and Sheikh Bedrettin (d. 823/1420). Mawlana, who developed a Sufi understanding following the teachings of Ibn Arabi, established a religious discourse based on tolerance and religious diversity, unlike contemporary traditional religious understanding of that period of history. "Religious pluralism," which is contemplated within the context of the issue of religious diversity, generally focuses on the following questions.

*"In the face of evident religious diversity, the following questions arise: a) is only one religion "true and salvific?"; b) alongside this "true" religion, are other religions also accepted as "true and salvific?"; or c) are all religions equal in terms of their truth value? Among these, if option (a) is accepted, it is termed exclusivism, acceptance of option (b) is called inclusivism and option (c) is defined as religious pluralism."*⁵

The teachings of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi are as valuable for contemporary humanity as they were esteemed in his own time. Mawlana was a sage, a scholar, and a poet who was nurtured within the cultural basin of Islamic civilization, a civilization whose roots are grounded in the truths of revelation and which was nourished and developed by the springs of knowledge, wisdom, and *gnosis* (*irfan*) flowing from both the West and the East.⁶ Undoubtedly, the social, political, and geographical factors of his upbringing were decisive in the formation of Mawlana's timeless, universal system of thought. Many great personalities who changed the course and direction of history captured the spirit of their age. Thus, the region in which Mawlana lived and the cultural elements that gave that region its unique color are of paramount importance.

Political developments of Mawlana's time were also influential in his transformation into a historical personality who has transcended the ages. We know that the period in which Mawlana lived (the 7th century AH / 13th century CE) was a very politically troubled era. In his lifetime,

⁵ Recep Kılıç, "Dinî Çoğulculuk mu, Dinde Çoğulculuk mu?", *Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 7/19, (Haziran 2004), 13.

⁶ Bilal Kuşpınar, "Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî'de Tevhid'in Açılımı ve Yorumu", *Mevlânâ ve İslam*, ed. Bilal Kuşpınar (Konya: Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi Kültür Yayınları: 2017), 11.

Asia and Europe and particularly Anatolia and the Islamic world, were in a period of dissolution marked by great difficulties. From the West, the Crusader invasions ravaged Anatolia and the Islamic world, while the Mongols coming from the East destroyed many of the material and spiritual centers of the Islamic world. Alongside this external siege, the internal power struggles of the Anatolian Seljuks and the subsequent Babai Rebellion near Amasya, had resulted in societal pessimism.⁷ It was perhaps natural that this pessimism and hopelessness would cast doubt and anxiety upon the future of Islam, which was developing within that threatened civilization. In the face of these developments, Mawlana provided an existential response and demonstrated a great example of struggle in both emotion and thought. Although he was well-versed in the topics debated in the fields of theology (Kalam) and philosophy, when he sought to provide solutions to these issues, he did not follow the normal methods of the theologians and philosophers. Exerting his effort to consider inferential forms smothered in excessively abstract terms was not a valid method for Mawlana.⁸ Mawlana's thoughts on religion, which were formed during this troubled historical period, will be discussed within the framework of his understanding of existence, humanity, and God.

1.1. Being

Mawlana addressed a variety of distinct subjects within a framework of unified (tawhīdī) wholeness. In his system, every being is interrelated within an organic unity. The subject of being, as an ancient topic of philosophy and religion, has always attracted the interest of thinkers, who have asked themselves how existence came to be. Ancient philosophers sought the primal matter of being with a sense of curiosity and wonder. Alongside Greek thinkers who proposed that being originated from water, air, fire, and earth, there were also those who thought that being emanated from a Prime Mover eternally. Theistic religions generally believe that being was created by God's command of "kun fa-yakūn" (Be, and it is). Although such a belief is fundamental to Islam, different perspectives about being have arisen within Islamic thought. Three main schools of thought, the Ittiḥādiyya, (Unionists), the Ḥulūliyya (Incarnationists), and the Ishrāqiyya (Illuminationists) have addressed the God-Existence relationship in different ways. The Ittiḥādiyya claimed that God and man unite; the Ḥulūliyya that God can enter the human heart; and the Ishrāqiyya that being emanates from God as light emanates from the sun. The efforts of the falāsifa (philosophers), who mostly followed a Neoplatonic line, to explain being through the theory of emanation (nazariyyāt al-ṣudūr) are well known. Mawlana, inspired by the views of Sufis such as Hallaj-i Mansur, Bayezid Bistami, and Ibn Arabi, who laid the first seeds of the philosophy of the Oneness of Being (waḥdat al-wujūd) and grounded it in the metaphysics of the Qur'an and ḥadīth, brought depth and vitality to the issue of the oneness of being.⁹ Mawlana's deepest and most mysterious elaboration on Tawḥīd (Divine Unity) and being is seen in his interpretations within the framework of the

⁷ İdris Türk, "Mevlânâ'nın İlmî-Manevî Şahsiyetinin Oluşumunda Şems'ten Önceki Dönemin Rolü", *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 15/30 (Aralık, 2016), 509.

⁸ Mehmet S. Aydın, "Mevlânâ'da İrade Hürriyeti", *İslam Felsefesi Yazıları*, ed. Mehmet S. Aydın (İstanbul: Ufuk Kitapları, 2000), 96.

⁹ İbrahim Ağâh Çubukçu, "Mevlana ve Felsefesi", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 26/1, (Ağustos 1984), 101.

famous metaphysical theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, whose subject, method, and principles were defined by Ibn Arabi and systematized by his student, Sadreddin Konevi, and which was debated for many years within the gnostic tradition.¹⁰

Mawlana sprinkled his views about being, life, humanity, and religion throughout all his works, but he particularly embroidered them, stitch by stitch, in an artistic form in the *Fīhi Mâ Fih*, the *Mathnawī*, and the *Dîvân-ı Kebîr*. This study will attempt to explain his views on religious diversity and tolerance, primarily by providing examples from these three works. Mawlana's concepts of life, humanity, and religion are based on being. As religion and life emerge from the bosom of being and continue there, the breadth of the concept of being reflects his conception of life and religion. According to Mawlana, the world of being is too vast to be perceived by the senses, and its source is not the material world but the realm of the unseen (*'ālam al-ghayb*), which is broader and more satisfying than the world that is felt and imagined.¹¹

“God, reveal to our soul [can] that station where speech appears without letters.

So that the pure soul [can] may make its head its foot and run to that distant and vast plain of non-existence.

*The world of non-existence is a very vast realm. This fantasy and existence receive nourishment from that realm, emerge from it and are sustained by it”.*¹²

God is the center of the circle of being, the beginning of life, and the One who gives direction and power to the flow of being. The perceived world is a reflection of God's creativity and will, and the place where His beauty and majesty are manifested. The soul (*jān*), a fragment of spirit and a drop from the divine ocean of life was, before taking the form of material life and entering the mold of the body, free from the anxiety of the self, in a state of spiritual journey, and blessed with God's infinite grace and favor.¹³ Mawlana indicates that form is merely an appearance and that one who transcends form can comprehend the Oneness of Being. He describes every object in nature as a messenger of God, even as an appearance of His Essence. According to Mawlana, being began to be disclosed through God's command “Be.” In truth, everything is transient with the exception of God, who is permanent. This world is like an illusion or a shadow. As humans discover themselves and strive to become worthy of the essences within themselves, they begin to see the Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).¹⁴ *Waḥdat al-wujūd* is generally a metaphysical construct formed around the idea that the only reality and truth to which the term “Being” can be absolutely applied in the true sense is that the sole true being is God, and all other beings or so-called beings, or in philosophical terms, contingent beings, are nothing but a nonentity or a shadow beside that Supreme Being. In Sufi understanding, *waḥdat al-wujūd* is a genuine understanding of Tawhid (Divine Unity), a concept, which Western authors and philosophers who study this subject have sometimes expressed as monism.¹⁵

¹⁰ Kuşpınar, “Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî'de Tevhid'in Açılımı ve Yorumu”, 32.

¹¹ Rahman Moshtagh Mehr, “Mevlânâ'ya Göre Varlık ve İnsan Hayatı Kavramı II”, trans. Kadir Turgut, *İ.Ü. Şarkiyat Mecmuası*, 20, (Haziran 2012, 175.

¹² Mevlânâ Celaleddin-i Rumî, *Mesnevî I*, trans. Veled Çelebi İzbudak, ed. Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1991), 248-249.

¹³ Mehr, “Mevlânâ'ya Göre Varlık”, 176.

¹⁴ Çubukçu, “Mevlana ve Felsefesi”, 103.

¹⁵ Kuşpınar, “Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî'de Tevhid'in Açılımı ve Yorumu”, 32.

According to Mawlana, the essence and the core of being are one. There are many paths leading to the Kaaba, and if one looks at the paths, separation is great and infinite; but if one looks at the goal: the purpose, the destination is one. There is no being except God. He is the One Absolute, and Necessary Being.¹⁶ Mawlana illustrates this subject in the *Mathnawī* as follows:

“If ten lamps are present in one place, each is distinct from the other in appearance. If you turn your face from their light, undoubtedly it is impossible to distinguish the light of one from the other. If you count a hundred apples and a hundred quinces, each one is separate. If you squeeze them, a hundred no longer remain; they all become one.”¹⁷

Mawlana elaborated on various aspects of the principle “unity in multiplicity”, in classical Sufi thought. This approach also forms the basis of his understanding of humanity. Human beings are one in their original creation. However, they differ in their color, geography, languages, races, lifestyles, customs, and traditions. Here, diversity and pluralism manifest in the created world, while unity and oneness reside in the essence of the Creator, the Being. In this respect, the whole of humanity, whether believing or non-believing, from eternity to eternity, is the servant of God, the Infinite Being. God is one and unique in His essence, and this oneness and uniqueness are exclusive to Him, beyond quality and quantity.¹⁸ Mawlana says that the ability to see the unity in being can only be achieved through the purity of the heart’s eye.

1.2. Human

Mawlana’s *Mathnawī* includes numerous examples that illustrate the positioning of humans in a special place within the hierarchy of being. According to Mawlana, although humans possess the potential to elevate themselves and even rise above the angels, they are also incomplete beings in some respects. As imperfect and limited, humans struggle to comprehend God’s existence and his truths.¹⁹ In essence, humans are great beings, and everything is inherent within them. However, the darkness and veils do not allow what is inside to be seen. Some philosophers have defined humans as speaking animals with an animalistic side that is nourished by lustful desires. The nourishment of their essence, that is, their human side, is knowledge, wisdom, love, and the beauty of God. The animalistic side of humans flees from the Divine, Haqq, while the human side flees from the world. Every human is a complex universe. Humans consist of thought and love; the rest is flesh and nerves.²⁰ According to Mawlana, transcending this animalistic aspect and becoming a child of heaven is only possible through love and purity of the heart. Mawlana explains the sparkle of the heart through the famous competition between the Chinese and Roman artists, which he relates in the *Mathnawī*.

“O son. Roman artists are Sufis. They have no lessons to be memorized; they have no books. But they have thoroughly polished their hearts, having been purified from desire, greed, miserliness, and hatred. The purity and clarity of the mirror are the attribute of the heart. Countless limitless forms can be reflected in the heart. Here, the intellect either falls silent or is left bewildered. The reason is as follows: is the heart God,

¹⁶ Mevlânâ, *Fîhi Mâfih*, trans. Meliha Ülker Anbarcıoğlu, (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1969), 68.

¹⁷ Mevlânâ, *Mesnevî I*, 54-55.

¹⁸ Kuşpınar, “Mevlânâ Celâleddin Rûmî’de Tevhid’in Açılımı ve Yorumu”, 24.

¹⁹ Yusuf Tan, *Mevlânâ Düşüncesinde Tanrı - İnsan İlişkisi* (Isparta, Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Master Thesis, 2012), 108-109.

²⁰ Mevlânâ, “Preface”, *Fîhi Mâfih*, xiv.

or is God the heart? Every reflected image, except the heart, which is both numbered and numberless (both immersed in multiplicity and finding unity), passes away and is not eternal... Those who have polished their hearts are freed from color and scent. In every breath, they effortlessly perceive beauty. They have abandoned the image on the shell of knowledge and have raised the banner of direct vision (ʿAyn al-Yaqīn). They have abandoned thought, found the sea of familiarity, and have been annihilated in recognition.”²¹

As is evident, when one attains the state of witnessing Being and His unity in the purity and brightness of one’s heart, the transient appearance of the human and the universe vanishes.²² Unity is perceived. It is understood that everything gains existence through God. Only humans are the recipients of God’s love. As humans know themselves and their place in the cosmos and perform their actions for the sake of God, they are elevated. The human who loves God and disciplines themselves attains the station of being God’s beloved. In the fervent moments of love for God, the human, transported beyond himself or herself, sees the unity in being. They grasp that everything other than God is like a shadow or an illusion. In this state, the lover and the beloved become one in being.²³ The human is the only being in existence that is the recipient of all God’s attributes. They are God’s astrolabe. Since the Almighty God created humans from His own knowledge, as the knower, the knowing, and the known, humans, in the astrolabe of their own existence, occasionally see God’s manifestation and unique beauty. Everything is within the human. They are the mirror of God’s Beauty (Jamāl).²⁴ Therefore, they should seek every desire from within themselves. Mawlana interprets the teaching in religious texts regarding the human as God’s vicegerent, a noble being, the best of stature (aḥsan-i taqwīm) and created in His own image, as the human being created as a place of manifestation for the divine names and attributes. According to Mawlana, within the hierarchy of being, the human is like a mirror that can directly perceive the divine names and attributes.²⁵ Mawlana expresses this human characteristic with the following statements:

“O you, who are the copy of God’s book, and O you, who are the mirror of the Beauty of the Sovereign! There is nothing in the universe except you. Seek every desire from within yourself, for everything is you.”²⁶

One of the most important elements of Mawlana’s discourse on humanity is the issue of the unity of humanity. Mawlana, who described himself as “The Slave of the Qur’an and the Dust on the Path of Muhammad,” emphasized the unity of humanity and also that the human, as a being, is worthy of respect and love. He reads the Qur’an’s principle of tawhid (oneness) through this philosophy of unity. He demonstrated the importance of the Covenant by stating that all humanity was present together at the moment of the Covenant (*Mīthāq*), and that its origin is one and the same.²⁷

²¹ Mevlânâ, *Mesnevî I*, 278-279.

²² Çubukçu, “Mevlana ve Felsefesi”, 109.

²³ Çubukçu, “Mevlana ve Felsefesi”, 104.

²⁴ Mevlânâ, “Preface”, *Fîhi Mâfih*, , xiv.

²⁵ Hüseyin Kurt, “Mevlana’da İnsanlığın Birliği ve Diyalog”, *Harran Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Uluslararası Mevlânâ ve Mevlevîlik Sempozyumu, Mevlânâ Celaleddin Rumi’nün 800. doğum yıldönümü anısına, Bildiriler II*, eds. Abdurrahman Elmalı, Ali Bakka (Şanlıurfa: Harran Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi, 2007), 167.

²⁶ Mevlânâ, *Fîhi Mâfih*, 121.

²⁷ Kurt, “Mevlana’da İnsanlığın Birliği ve Diyalog”, 168.

In Mawlana's view, the path to comprehending the unity of humanity passes through love for humankind; "Love all people so that you may always find yourself among flowers and rose gardens. If you consider them all enemies, the image of enemies will come before your eyes, and it will be as if you are walking among thorns and snakes, day and night."²⁸ For Mawlana, the essential matter is the human being. According to him, to love humans is to love God. The human is the microcosm, God is the macrocosm. Mawlana, through the experiences he acquired, grasps the essence of humanity. When describing humans, he uses the language of love. The essence is love. The only thing that makes a human actually human is love. Mawlana's perspective on humans is pragmatic and realistic; he accepts humans with their faults and merits.²⁹

"Through love, bitter things become sweet; through love, copper turns into gold. Through love, dregs and muddy water become clear and pure; through love, ailments find healing. Through love, the dead are revived; through love, kings become slaves. This love is also the result of knowledge. How could someone captivated by absurdities ever sit upon such a throne?"³⁰

In Mawlana's philosophy, the acceptance of human unity and love for humanity leads us to respect all people without discrimination. The human is worthy of respect because they carry within them the breath of the infinite. For this to manifest in action, they must be shown respect. The reason for respecting humans is that they possess a heart, understood either in a literal sense or as a metaphor for emotions and empathy.³¹

"Although the Kaaba is His house of grace and bounty, my body is also His house of secrets. God is traditionally believed to have inspired the construction of the Kaaba, but the builders did not themselves enter it. However, to this house my body no one has come except that eternally living God. You have seen me, so you will know that you have seen God, and you have circumambulated the Kaaba of truth, the true Kaaba. To serve me is to obey God and to praise Him. Do not think that the Divine is separate from me. Open your eyes wide and look at me in such a way that you see the divine light in the human."³²

Mawlana says that the first step in respecting others is not to marginalize them. Serving them is the second step. He loves and deems humans worthy of service, because they are human. Service, as a requirement of human respect, is considered unconditional in Mawlana's teachings. One who is not prepared for such service cannot be a guide for humanity or a leader in the caravan of eternity.³³ Without grasping the integrity of Mawlana's thought, specifically addressing his views on any subject can often be misleading. Therefore, regardless of the topic, it is necessary to consider the roots of his thoughts within the framework of the unity of being, humanity, and God.

1.3. Concept of God

²⁸ Mevlânâ, *Fîhi Mâfih*, 306.

²⁹ Kurt, "Mevlana'da İnsanlığın Birliği ve Diyalog", 173.

³⁰ Mevlânâ, Celaleddin Rumî, *Mesnevî II*, trans. Veled Çelebi İzbudak, ed. Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1991), 117.

³¹ Kurt, "Mevlana'da İnsanlığın Birliği ve Diyalog", 170.

³² Mevlânâ, *Mesnevî II*, 172.

³³ Kurt, "Mevlana'da İnsanlığın Birliği ve Diyalog", 170.

The focal point of Mawlana's understanding of religion centers on his conception of God (Allah). For him, God is the Truth. Mawlana's efforts are directed toward attaining the truth. On the path to attaining the Truth, acts of worship and other religious rituals are the necessary steps along the way.³⁴ For Kurt, Mawlana does not seek unity in the form of religions. Form is like the vessels of various colors and patterns in which water-carriers place water. A wise person does not look at the vessels but rather at what they contain. Mawlana is seeking water. He also does not wish to get stuck in the ice. After all, when it melts, does ice not become water? So, in Mawlana's view it is neither correct nor necessary to unite the ice or the vessels. What is necessary is to be one in the water, in the essence.³⁵ In accordance with the theory of the Oneness of Being (waḥdat al-wujūd), develops a holistic outlook and hence looks at everything in life from that universal outlook. Mawlana, who defends the universality of the religion of love, believed that the essence of all religions has emanated from love. All prophets, including the Prophet of Islam, are prophets of love. From this perspective, it may be suggested that Mawlana believed all religions were the same and accepted the religion of love as the one true religion. The thought that Mawlana referenced and was influenced by on this subject is based on the teachings of the Oneness of Being, divine love, and the one religion, which existed before Attar and was later systematized by Ibn Arabi. Quoting Mawlana's statement - "The seventy-two faiths and sects, in reality, do not exist; I swear by God that all of these are within me"³⁶, Tan claims Mawlana argues that all religions converge into a single religion, that the name of this religion is the religion of love. In order to justify this view, Mawlana also explained the reality and reasons for religious differences. According to Mawlana, everyone's conception of God is different, and God is given different names, but God and His message are the same everywhere. In the belief of a universal religion, people should meet on common ground, and the world that appears to be full of opposition and difference should become truly understandable. Therefore, Mawlana, who finds it wrong to limit religion only to shari'ah, believes that the path of love is the only way out. Thus, no religion has priority over another because they all arise from the same universal source, namely love.³⁷ Mawlana considered the subject of religion of Islam within the framework of shari'ah, tariqa (the path), and haqiqa (the Truth). In the introduction of the fifth volume of the *Mathnawi*, Mawlana clarified the distinction between these three concepts, particularly between religion and shari'ah, as follows:

*"Shari'ah is like a candle; it shows the way. However, holding the candle does not mean the path has been traversed. When you set out on the path, that journey is the tariqa. When you reach your goal, this is the haqiqa. Therefore, it has been said "if the truths were to be revealed, the sharias and paths would become invalid"."*³⁸

In this volume, Mawlana, discusses in detail the concepts of shari'ah, tariqa, and haqiqa, which together constitute aspects of religion. This perspective excludes all kinds of reductionist

³⁴ Mustafa Tekin, "Mevlâna Celâleddin Rûmî (ö.1273)'nin Din Anlayışı", *Tasavvufîlmi ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi*, 3/7, 2001, 269.

³⁵ Kurt, "Mevlana'da İnsanlığın Birliği ve Diyalog", 168.

³⁶ qtd. in Aysel Tan, *Bir Din Felsefesi Problemi Olarak Mevlana'da Dinî Tecrübe* (Ankara: Gece Kitaplığı, 2020), 138.

³⁷ Tan, *Bir Din Felsefesi Problemi Olarak Mevlana'da Dinî Tecrübe*. 138-139.

³⁸ Mevlânâ, Celâleddin Rumî, *Mesnevî V*, trans. Veled Çelebi İzbudak, ed. Abdülbaki Gölpinarlı, (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1991), i-ii. (Dibace)

approaches and presents a unifying (tawhīdī) perspective that addresses religion in all its dimensions. The shari'ah, as understood by those who stress only the exoteric or legal aspect of religion, is like a soulless heart. The discerning person (‘ārif), is the one who comprehends the deep spirit behind the shari'ah. The ‘ārif who comprehends this is the one who discerns the essence of the Divine (al-Haqq), its manifestations, its names and attributes, and the boundaries of divine decree and destiny. These are achieved through gnosis and ma'rifah, the self-experiential-illuminative knowledge of an Arif. Then the essence of shari'ah becomes asceticism (zuhd) and piety (taqwā). Therefore, according to the gnostic tradition, curbing the desires of the self and worldly wants comes at the beginning of worship. The person who becomes conscious of asceticism and piety is compared to one who sows seeds in their field. The person who attains the experience of knowing God (ma‘rifatullāh) is in the position of one who harvests the crops of these sown seeds³⁹. At the same time, that person possesses the ability to view all issues, including religion, universally. This is the truth behind Mawlana's understanding of religion and the world, which has transcended ages and acquired a universal quality.

Mawlana, who captured the universal dimension of religion within an Islamic framework and addressed this topic in nearly all of his works, encapsulated this universal perspective with his words: “Do not despise any unbeliever. What if they die as a Muslim? What knowledge do you have of the end of their life that you turn away from them completely?”⁴⁰ While expressing such thoughts, Mawlana establishes the theological foundation of his ideas by also referencing the Quranic verse: “If your Lord had willed, He would have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ.” (Quran 11:118.) Proceeding from the intellectual ground formed by Quranic metaphysics and with the self-confidence he possessed in Islam, Mawlana kept communication channels open with all adherents of different religions and other people. This attitude is that of a Muslim who is always open to universality. Those who do not demonstrate this attitude fail to recognize the universality of Islam. Mawlana was aware of the occasionally fanatical attitude of some Muslims, which caused him pain and discomfort, and he struggled against this during his lifetime. Mawlana opposed all forms of fanaticism. In his philosophy, fanaticism is dangerous, regardless of the religion or other system it is present in. By inviting adherents of other religions to combat fanaticism too, Mawlana demonstrated true humanism and universality.⁴¹

2. Mawlana's Perspective on Other Religions

One of the most important Sufis undoubtedly referenced in the contemporary philosophy of religion in terms of religious diversity is Mawlana. Considering the relationships between religions in general, and Islam's relations with other religions in particular, it is apparent that many Sufis tend to be more truthful to their primary sources, the Qur'an and the Hadith. Carlo

³⁹ Fatma Bayhan, *Dini Çeşitlilik Problemi Açısından Mevlânâ Düşüncesi*, (İzmir, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, 2012), 108-109.

⁴⁰ Mevlânâ, *Celaeddin Rumî, Mesnevî VI*, trans. Veled Çelebi İzbudak, ed. Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1991), 377.

⁴¹ Sönmez, Vecihi, “Evrensel İslam Düşüncesinde Mevlana Örneği”, *Oş Devlet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 22, (2017), 69.

Carretto's statement,⁴² "Even if theology divides, mysticism unites the adherents of all religions, and when a certain level of being (spiritual perfection) is reached, all 'believers' experience the same reality," is frequently cited on this matter. One of the most important factors behind Mawlana's prominence among Sufis is his universal invitation. Reminding the controversial discussion, "Come, come, whoever you are, come again", attributed to him⁴³, the inclusive invitation emphasized in Mawlana's sayings can be found in numerous examples throughout his entire corpus that convey this meaning.⁴⁴ In the relationships between religions, three perspectives, exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, have become generally accepted. Researchers working on the subject of Mawlana's understanding of religion have conducted their research from the perspective of this triple paradigm.

Known for his works on Mawlana and regarded as one of the most eminent Mathnawihāns, Şefik Can based his perspective on Mawlana's statement that "Separations are in the journey, not in the path itself," indicating that Mawlana did not consider all religions identical but believed the truth of religions to be one. According to Şefik Can, the reality is that since everything and all beings are manifestations of the divine attributes and names, things that appear to be opposed to one another are grounded in a wisdom beyond the grasp of our intellect. Everything is, in essence, under the dominion of the Divine. Everything is from the Truth. Every follower of religion and denomination is likewise fulfilling God's command, walking on the path of destiny drawn by Him. Given this truth, we have no right to say anything against anyone. Each adherent of any sect considers his own belief correct, even while it differs from others, and has walked along the path he deemed true.⁴⁵ Mawlana explained this issue in the following verses from the *Mathnawī*:

"Hidden stairways exist in the world, leading step by step up to the heavens.

Every cloud has its own stairway, every journey, its own sky.

*Each one is unaware of the other's state. It is a vast realm, without beginning or end."*⁴⁶

These lines suggest that, regardless of the religion a person belongs to, each believes only his own religion to be true, and considers those of other religions to be astray. Mawlana, however, does not think in this way. He believes that, regardless of religion, a person is on the path seeking the Truth; that is, the person is walking along the way destined and appointed for them by the Almighty. For this reason, Mawlana does not despise anyone outside of Islam, nor does he accuse anyone of unbelief. In this sense, religions outside Islam are not the True Religion, but they are religions willed and decreed by the Truth. As Mawlana indicated, the Muslim worshipping in a mosque, the Christian performing the liturgy in a church, the Jew turning devoutly to God in a synagogue—all of them are thinking of God. To separate people, their beliefs, and their paths according to their religions, such as Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists,

⁴² in Eva de Vitray Meyerovitch, *İslâm'ın Güler Yüzü*, trans. Cemal Aydın (İstanbul: Şule Yayınları, 1998), 11.

⁴³ For further discussion, see Yakup Şafak, "Mevlânâ'ya Atfedilen 'Yine Gel...' Rubâîsine Dair", *Tasavvuf: İlmî ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 10/24 (2009), 75-80.

⁴⁴ Rıfat Atay, "Dinsel Çoğulculuk Açısından FarklıMevlana Okumaları: Bir Çözümleme Denemesi", *Harran Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 16, (Temmuz-Aralık 2006), 79.

⁴⁵ Şefik Can, "Mevlânâ'ya Göre Din İman Küfür", *V. Milli Mevlânâ Kongresi*, (Konya: Selçuk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1991), 20.

⁴⁶ Mevlânâ, *Mesnevî V*, 210.

or Magians, is a matter of form. The Almighty has spread His table not only for Muslims but also for non-Muslims, even for the unbelievers, nourishing them generously. He does not divide them as believers and unbelievers.⁴⁷ Mawlana said:

*“There is a realm beyond both unbelief and Islam, and in that void, we have a passion.
When the gnostic reaches that place, he gives up his head; for there, neither unbelief nor Islam has any standing.⁴⁸
At this time, the earth is like an egg; the bird within the egg is imprisoned in utter darkness, its wings broken, humiliated, and despised.
Know that unbelief and faith are like the white and the yolk of this egg, for a barrier separates them, and they do not intermingle.
By His grace and bounty He took the egg beneath His wings, so that unbelief vanished, faith vanished as well, and the bird of unity suddenly emerged from the egg.”⁴⁹*

In his readings of Mawlana, Şefik Can frequently emphasized such passages, highlighting the profound tolerance toward religious diversity that Mawlana espoused. Şefik Can’s view was that Mawlana did not regard all religions as identical; rather, he regarded the truth of all religions as one.⁵⁰ Can’s approach has been considered to support the exclusionary paradigm (exclusivism) among contemporary philosophers of religion. On the one hand, Şefik Can maintained an absolutist and exclusivist stance by asserting that Islam invalidates other religions, while on the other hand, he also stressed Mawlana’s call, that one must look not to temples but to hearts, and that one must not become fixated on outward forms and stigmatize people.

Examining Islam’s view of other religions from a different perspective in the works of Ibn Arabi, Mawlana, and Yunus Emre, Cafer Sadık Yaran referred to the lamp and light metaphor in the *Mathnawī*, taking as his basis the statement “The lamps are different, but the light is the same.” Like Can, Yaran also agrees with the idea that “Separations are in the journey, not in the path itself.”⁵¹

*“Moses—you too are Moses, and Pharaoh as well. Seek within yourself both of these enemies.
Moses will remain in religious teachings until the Day of Resurrection. The light is always that same light, not another light; what changes is the lamp.
This lamp and wick are different, but the light is not another light, it is always from that world.
If you look at the lamp, it perishes; for duality and confinement within number belong to the lamp.
But if you look at the light, you are freed from duality and from the material limitations of the corporeal world that has a beginning and an end.
O essence of existence, the opposition between the believer, the Magian, and the Jew is entirely due to perspective and vision.”⁵²*

Here, Mawlana emphasized that the ultimate source of religions is God. Although the prophets are different, the divine light they radiate is one. Even though different prophets were chosen and sent at different times, even though some differences emerged under the influence of

⁴⁷ Can, “Mevlânâ’ya Göre Din İman Küfür”, 22.

⁴⁸ Mevlânâ, *Dîvân-Kebir IV*, trans. Abdülbâkî Gölpinarlı, (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 2011), 64.

⁴⁹ Mevlânâ, *Dîvân-Kebir IV*, 81.

⁵⁰ Can, “Mevlânâ’ya Göre Din İman Küfür”, 21; Atay, “Mevlana Okumaları”, 84.

⁵¹ Atay, “Mevlana Okumaları”, 85-86.

⁵² Mevlânâ, *Mesnevî II*, 101.

changing historical, social, cultural, and geographical conditions, the essence and radiance of the divine message will remain forever one. According to Mawlana, everyone may preserve the external form of their own religion. On the condition of affirming unity in essence, there is no harm in remaining friendly with the adherents of other religions. In response to the evaluations that attribute a pluralistic approach to Mawlana, it should be noted that, although authors who regard him as pluralistic may understand this statement differently, when one considers its context in the *Mathnawī*, the essential emphasis here is on the sameness of the essence of religions.⁵³ It is thought that the material that allows Mawlana to be interpreted as pluralistic is not sufficient to regard him as a wholly radical pluralist in the manner of John Hick. Therefore, it might be thought that Mawlana is closer to an inclusivist than to the pluralist paradigm.⁵⁴ Beyond those who interpret Mawlana as closer to the inclusivist paradigm, there have also been those who, in parallel with interpretations in the West, have regarded him as a radical pluralist. One of those who interpret Mawlana within the pluralist paradigm is Mahmut Aydın. Aydın, by referring to examples and metaphors used by Mawlana in his works, such as the “Elephant Story,” “Moses and the Shepherd,” and the stories of the “Four Strangers” and the “Grapes,” and grounding them as well in Quranic references, interprets Mawlana as a thoroughgoing pluralist. Aydın, too, seeks to ground Mawlana’s view of religious pluralism in the incomprehensibility of God.⁵⁵ The notion that God cannot be fully comprehended through human categories is one that contemporary advocates of religious pluralism seek to illustrate by appealing not only to the lamp-and-light metaphor but also to the frequently cited Elephant Story. The story appears in the *Mathnawī* as follows.⁵⁶

“The Indians brought an elephant into a dark barn to show it to the people. Many men gathered in that pitch-dark place to see the animal. However, the barn was so dark that it was impossible to see. In that darkness, where one could not see even a hand before the eyes, they began to touch the elephant with their hands. One of them happened to grasp its trunk and said, ‘The elephant resembles a water-pipe.’ Another placed his hand upon its ear and said, ‘The elephant is like a fan.’ Another had his hand upon its leg and said, ‘The elephant is like a pillar.’ Yet another touched its back and declared, ‘The elephant is like a throne.’ Each one, according to the part they had touched and how they had imagined it, began to describe the elephant. Their words and opinions thus became contradictory: one said it was like a branch; another said it was like an alif. Had each of them held a candle in his hand, their differences in speech would not have remained. The eye of sensation resembles only the palm; for the palm cannot grasp the whole of the elephant at once. The eye that sees the sea is one thing; the eye that sees the foam is another. Leave the foam aside and look with the eye of the sea.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Cafer Sadık Yaran, “İbn Arabi, Mevlana ve Yunus Emre’ye Göre “Öteki”nin Durumu”, *İslam ve Öteki*, ed. Cafer Sadık Yaran, (İstanbul: Rağbet Yayınları, 2018), 390.

⁵⁴ Atay, “Mevlana Okumaları”, 91; Bayhan, *Dini Çeşitlilik Problemi*, 60.

⁵⁵ qtd. in Atay, “Mevlana Okumaları”, 96.

⁵⁶ Atay, “Mevlana Okumaları”, 88.

⁵⁷ Mevlânâ, Celaleddin Rumî, *Mesnevî III*, trans. Veled Çelebi İzbudak, ed. Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1991), 101-102.

This is a stern critique by Mawlana against those who rely for reaching the knowledge of the Truth on their sense perceptions and/or partial intellect or reason. More explicitly, it means that God cannot be confined within the molds of any religious tradition or culture and that everyone experiences Him through their own cultural limitations and linguistic frameworks. In other passages of the *Mathnawī*, too, there are expressions that support the pluralist thesis. Mawlana asserts that the prophets conveyed in different forms to different communities, the same light they had received from the same source, and that making distinctions among them or considering one faith superior to another constitutes a problematic approach from a religious perspective. According to Mawlana, religious diversity arises both from the ontological status of God and from His will. God has clearly willed the plurality of religions, so that, as expressed also in the Quran, people may compete in doing good and thereby come to a deeper understanding of God.⁵⁸ Although Mawlana's view on religious diversity is often evaluated from the perspective of contemporary philosophy of religion within the paradigms of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, it can be thought that he possessed a deeper and more holistic perspective that transcends these paradigms. The seemingly contradictory attitudes of the Sufis in their discourse and practice, such as an exclusivist, an inclusivist, and a pluralist, stem from their dialectic of the outward (*zāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*). The inclusive and pluralist approaches observable among Sufis are not mutually irreconcilable approaches. On the outward level, at the level of reason, within the social and political sphere, and under the responsibility of the intellectual, as a religious authority serving as a potential means of guidance for people, or, as in the case of Al-Ghazali, as an adviser trusted by statesmen confronted with the attacks of other religions and harmful movements, they developed a discourse corresponding to exclusivist and inclusivist approaches. However, on the level of the heart, and thus not of the outward but the inward, and in terms of the individual, as love and gnosis, they adopted a stance toward the "other" corresponding to the pluralist paradigm.⁵⁹ Here, an important detail requires attention. The Sufis, mystics, and poets possess a pluralist outlook within their own distinctive approach. They did not base their beliefs on rigid rationalist, nihilist, or agnostic foundations, but rather on the doctrine of the unity of being, connected to esoteric experiential states as well as on the ethics and metaphysics of love as a manifestation of the transcendent within human hearts.⁶⁰ Mawlana viewed existence not with the eye of the flesh but with the eye of the heart. He declared repeatedly that the differences and separations evident to the eye of the flesh disappear when viewed with the eye of the heart. This is the essence of his call to vision. Although the historical authenticity of the attribution remains debated, the famous quatrain ascribed to Mawlana bears the quality of a universal message, from past to present.

*"Come, come, whoever you may be, come!
Whether you are an unbeliever or an idol-worshipper, come!
This is not the lodge of despair,*

⁵⁸ Atay, "Mevlana Okumaları", 95.

⁵⁹ Yaran, "İbn Arabi, Mevlana ve Yunus Emre'ye Göre "Öteki"nin Durumu", 414.

⁶⁰ Yaran, "İbn Arabi, Mevlana ve Yunus Emre'ye Göre "Öteki"nin Durumu", 416.

*Even if you have broken your repentance a hundred times, still come!*⁶¹

Mawlana calls all humanity, regardless of religion, color, or language, to this lodge. In essence, this appeal forms a remedy for the existential crises of meaning and despair, and the temporal maladies of nausea, fear, and trembling, experienced when people have lost all hope. With this summons, Mawlana calls for the breaking of all chains and walls that divide people and that also serve to prevent individuals from encountering their essence; he calls everyone to goodness, righteousness, and truth. This is what he means to travel among the seventy-two nations while remaining grounded.⁶²

“Like a compass, with one foot I stand firmly upon the sharia, while with the other I traverse the seventy-two nations.

The seventy-two nations each hear their own mystery from us. We are like the reed flute that unites two hundred nations and sects in a single melody

”⁶³

With the compass metaphor, Mawlana, anticipating the judgments and accusations that might be directed against this vast, inclusive, and pluralist thought, clearly sets forth his own religious view and stance.

3. John Hick and Religious Pluralism

In today’s Islamic world, thinkers including Frithjof Schuon, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and William C. Chittick, drawing upon the flexible religious understandings of the Sufis, assert what may be called the transcendent unity of religions of a metaphysical-mystical character. In the contemporary Western world, there is liberal philosophical religious pluralism placing God at the center of human existence and being, as supported by P. Tillich and N. Smart, and influenced by Humanist, Buddhist, or Marxist traditions. However, there is also philosophical religious pluralism, led by John Hick and W. C. Smith. The Western-oriented religious pluralism represented by Tillich, Hick, and Smith is closely connected to Christian theology.⁶⁴ The pluralist paradigm of Hick and like-minded theologians and philosophers differs fundamentally from the conception of the so-called traditional school holding the view of transcendental unity of religions, represented by Rene Guenon, Schuon, and Nasr. According to this school, “Absolute Truth” is one and unchanging. If so, why do different religions claim to speak of the same “Absolute Truth”? The “Absolute Truth” is fixed, yet it expresses itself in different times, cultures, and forms. According to another understanding, the Absolute, with its boundless absoluteness, cannot be contained in the non-absolute world. To remain in communication with human beings, it must assume an absolute form, a mode of manifestation, a style, and the garb of a doctrine. Consequently, it is unnecessary to assert that the traditional school regards religions merely as forms. The traditional school also speaks of the very essence of a divine

⁶¹ Mevlânâ Celâleddin-i Rumî, *Rubailer*, trans. Abdülbâkî Gölpınarlı, (İstanbul: İnkılap, 1969), 23. For further discussion, see Yakup Şafak, "Mevlânâ'ya Atfedilen 'Yine Gel...' Rubâîsine Dair", *Tasavvuf: İlmî ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 10/24 (2009), 75-80.

⁶² Kurt, "Mevlana'da İnsanlığın Birliği ve Diyalog", 171.

⁶³ Bediuzzaman Furuzanfer, *Mevlâna Celâleddîn*, trans. F. Nafiz Uzluk, (İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1985), iv.

⁶⁴ Latif Tokat, "Dini Çoğulculuk Hangi Açıdan Mümkündür", *Milal ve Nihal İnanç Kültür ve Mitoloji Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 4/2, (Ocak 2007), 51.

reality beyond forms and modes of manifestation. Thus, this school maintains that the unity of religions must be sought not in phenomena but in the noumenon. In this sense, all divine religions are accepted as one.⁶⁵ There is, therefore, a clear difference in principle between the pluralist paradigm represented by Hick and the understanding of multiplicity in the traditional school and of that expounded by the Sufis. Hick locates the source of difference in human experience and seeks to arrive at pluralism through an inductive method where the decisive element is the human being. According to the understanding of the traditional school, however, the primary source of pluralism is “Absolute Truth” itself. That is, “Absolute Truth” manifests itself in different forms and times—a feature that is not philosophical but rather religious.⁶⁶

The religious pluralism that Hick proposed is an approach that accepts all religions, especially the major living religious traditions, as equally valid paths to God. This understanding rejects the truth claims, and values differences between religions. The pluralist paradigm of religion asserts that the ways leading to God are more numerous than the stars. According to Hick,

“the great world faiths constitute different human conceptions and perceptions of, and a response to, the Ultimate Reality. In each of the great traditions, the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness is explicitly present; as far as human experience can disclose, it is present to an almost equal degree. Therefore, the religious traditions should be regarded as spheres or paths of alternative soteriological teachings available for men and women to find salvation and liberation.”⁶⁷

In the philosophical sense, “religious pluralism” deals with the relationship between competing religions or Shari’ahs. Theoretically, the great world religions constitute different apprehensions of the one ultimate divine reality, expressed through diverse concepts, and represent the various human responses to it.⁶⁸

Besides Hick, there are also other thinkers who seem to advocate this pluralistic position. The statements of the famous Russian writer Tolstoy, which set forth his understanding of religion, also support the paradigm of religious pluralism. Tolstoy questions the existence of so many different religions and states that we have no right to declare one of them on the basis of preference as the true religion. In this context, people when evaluating external forms of religion tend to regard their own beliefs as salvation and those of others as a source of suffering.

According to Tolstoy, this is a mistake, because although religions differ in their external forms, they point to a common essence in their fundamental principles, which represents true religion.⁶⁹ Religious pluralism is also in harmony with today’s broader perspective of humanity, conceptualized in terms such as multiculturalism, coexistence, tolerance, relativism, and postmodernism. It seeks to resolve the problematic claims of diverse religious truths and absolutes through democracy. Yet here a distinction must be made; there is a significant difference between cultural pluralism, which allows different religions to be freely expressed, and “metaphysical pluralism,” which makes no distinction and accepts the truth claims of every

⁶⁵ Eren, *John Hick’te Dini Çoğulculuk*, 113-114.

⁶⁶ Eren, *John Hick’te Dini Çoğulculuk*, 114.

⁶⁷ John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, (New York: St. Martin Press, 1985), 47.

⁶⁸ Eren, *John Hick’te Dini Çoğulculuk*, 108.

⁶⁹ Leo Nikolayeviç Tolstoy, *Din Nedir?*, trans. Murat Çiftkaya (İstanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 1998), 59.

religion as equally valid. What renders the former correct does not logically necessitate that the latter also be accepted as correct.⁷⁰

Philosophically grounding religious pluralism, Hick placed not religion but God at the center of his view. When the concept of an unknowable God is taken as the center and when it comes to choosing between religions, no criterion is valid other than the moral transformations to which religion gives rise in the life of the individual and in society. Although this perspective may appear reasonable, it is highly problematic from both religious and philosophical standpoints. For instance, what is the divine reality towards which all the great religious traditions are directed? Can Yahweh and the impersonal Brahman, Shiva, and the Tao, and others truly be regarded as equal? Hick attempts to overcome this problem by centering on the concept of "Ultimate Reality." According to Hick, the concept that transcends the gods experienced under specific names in all traditions, that encompasses these different conceptions, and that is appropriate to them all, is "Ultimate Reality. The distinction between "the Real in itself" and the "Real" as thought and experienced by humanity is understood in different ways within each tradition. For example, in the Christian tradition, this distinction forms a conception of God as infinite, eternally self-existent, as a creator, and redeemer. Among Muslim and Jewish mystics, this distinction is expressed as al-Ḥaqq and the Soph, respectively. What is emphasized here is that the being-in-itself is one. This idea constitutes the heart of Hick's understanding of religious pluralism.⁷¹ Such an approach, however, excludes the phenomenon of authentic revelation, which is believed to be a special source of knowledge upon which religion is built. The element that shapes a religion's conception of scripture, divinity, and faith is its doctrine of revelation.⁷² If revelation is understood not as originating from a transcendent source but entirely as the result of a human experience, an altogether different basis for religion emerges. This distinction constitutes the essence of Hick's understanding of religion. John Hick explains all dimensions of religious life, including conceptions of God, through human experience. Religious experience is one of the deepest dimensions of religious life, but the problem here lies in the one-sided relationship between religious experience and the "Ultimate Reality", that is experienced. In this, the active subject is human being. Therefore, Hick's conception of "Ultimate Reality" which is static, ineffective, and crucially closed to communication and relationship, is very problematic from the standpoint of ontology and religious epistemology. Hick developed such a conception of God by drawing upon Kant's ontology and epistemology. Whereas Kant postulated God as a necessary assumption in order to ground morality, Hick postulated "Ultimate Reality" and placed it at the center of his understanding of religious pluralism. This distinction has led to deep debates in Kalam and the philosophy of religion, such as the possibility of revelation. In Hick's approach, there is a sharp distinction between the Real in Itself and the Real as conceptualized and experienced by religious traditions. Consequently, no tradition can put forward a complete and final claim regarding the nature of the Real, since human experiential categories cannot be directly applied to the Real itself. This metaphysical indeterminacy in

⁷⁰ Kılıç, "Küreselleşme ve Din üzerine", 59.

⁷¹ Eren, *John Hick'te Dini Çoğulculuk*, 113.

⁷² Kılıç "Dini Çoğulculuk mu, Dinde Çoğulculuk mu", 15.

Hick's approach can be regarded as a rational starting point for religious pluralism, but it also fuels nihilism and agnosticism in terms of religious claims of possessing the absolute truth.

Another impasse of Hick's paradigm of religious pluralism is its suggestion of reducing religion to morality. While it is true that many religions contain moral demands, reducing religion to morality is not a condition that theistic religions can accept. Grounding moral goodness apart from metaphysical truth is not regarded as coherent in either philosophical or theological terms. Likewise, to accept different religions as equally true by taking into account their truth claims would abolish the very reason for the existence of religions, which would conflict with basic principles of logic.⁷³

This approach can also be thought of as illuminating the perception of religion in Eastern and Western thought. According to Hick, just as the manifestation of differences in mentality is evident in East and West, so do these differences appear in perspectives on religion. Linguistic, social, political, theological, and artistic forms occupy a determining position within these mentalities and worldviews⁷⁴. In the West, under the concept of religious diversity, the ideas of exclusivism, inclusivism, and religious pluralism have been discussed from the mid-18th century onward. This has happened for socio-cultural, theo-political, and economic reasons as well as due to paradigm shifts within the church's own theology. In the East, particularly within Islamic culture, the understanding of "plurality in religion" and "religious diversity" has very old roots. In the words and actions of Ibn Arabi, Mawlana and Yunus Emre, who are all important thinkers within the Sufi tradition, have all considered the question of religious diversity within the framework of Islamic metaphysics. The pluralist and inclusivist declarations of the Sufis can be understood not as irreconcilable contradictions but as indicators of flexibility in their approach to the phenomenon of religion.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the difference in mentality between East and West remains and cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

The approaches of mystics and poets to religious pluralism, in contrast to the rigid, rationalist, agnostic, or nihilistic views of modern philosophy of religion, rest upon the basis of esoteric experience. Their approach is based on the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which makes the human experience of transcendent truth possible; the metaphysics of love as the manifestation of transcendence in the heart and an ethic derived from this conceptual foundation. Mawlana tells us that when being is viewed with the "eye of the flesh," differences and separations appear, whereas the "eye of the soul" perceives the unity of being beyond these differences. This perspective constitutes the essence of his universal call.

Although Mawlana's understanding of religion may be associated with the pluralist paradigm espoused by the modern philosophy of religion, it can be suggested that his approach contains a distinctive conceptualization that transcends these paradigms. It is not unusual to encounter

⁷³ Kılıç, "Dini Çoğulculuk mu, Dinde Çoğulculuk mu", 16-17.

⁷⁴ Tokat, "Dini Çoğulculuk Hangi Açıdan Mümkündür", 95.

⁷⁵ Ali Baltacı, "Doğu ve Batı Düşüncesinde Dini Çeşitlilik: Bir Giriş Denemesi", *Bitlis İslamiyat Dergisi*, 2/1, (Haziran 2020), 24.

paradoxical ideas in the discourses of poets and mystics. In Mawlana's understanding of religion, too, there are statements that appear contradictory for readers who lack the metaphysics Islamic spirituality and Sufism. Yet, when these ideas are considered within a holistic system of thought, they emerge as meaningful emphases pointing to different dimensions of Truth.

One may find a sort of coexistence of both inclusivism and pluralism in Mawlana's discourse on religion. For, according to him, the "Absolute Being" manifests Itself in infinite forms within time and space; the diversity of religious beliefs is the natural result of these infinite manifestations. Therefore, Mawlana does not regard any faith as outside this ontological ground; rather, he evaluates each as a different manifestation of the Divine Truth. On the other hand, John Hick's paradigm of religious pluralism rests primarily on an epistemological foundation. Hick interprets the truth claims of different religions as the plurality of ways in which the "Ultimate Reality" is experienced within the limited cognitive and cultural conditions of human beings. At first glance, this approach may appear to overlap with Mawlana's conception of religious diversity, yet there is a fundamental distinction between them. In Mawlana, the determining element of religious pluralism is God and religion itself, whereas in Hick the determining element is entirely human experience. This difference profoundly affects the outcomes of the two approaches. Mawlana's understanding of pluralism offers a more comprehensive and holistic framework in terms of both the authentic character of religion and its social, cultural, and practical manifestations. By contrast, although Hick's paradigm of pluralism appears more compatible with modern values, such as liberalism, democracy, and religious tolerance, it could be suggested that it contains the risk of eroding the essence of religion and may ultimately open the door to nihilism.

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