

Article

Partialist Options in Transreligious Pluralism

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Abstract

In her approach to religious pluralism, Jeanine Diller has advocated for partialism, the view that multiple religious engagement is needed for knowledge of the Ultimate. In this article, I expound on partialism, which I interpret as a transreligious view that posits a noetic threshold for knowledge of the Ultimate. Given this interpretation, I argue that there are two central ambiguities that the partialist needs to clarify. First, the partialist needs to explain whether the noetic threshold should be understood in a metaconceptual or perspectival manner. Second, the partialist needs to explain whether a tradition's noetic contributions are commensurable or incommensurable. I identify some of the advantages and disadvantages of each option, and I conclude with some future directions for partialist transreligious pluralism.

Keywords: religious epistemology; pluralism; partialism; transreligion; multiple religious belonging

1. Introduction

In many cosmopolitan and multicultural communities, acquaintance with persons of different faiths is commonplace. As persons in these communities get to know one another and learn more about each other's traditions, many persons begin to wonder about the implications of religious diversity (e.g., [Quinn and Meeker 2000](#)). Some of these questions are noetic or cognitive and concern the truth of the religion. Other of these questions are salvific or pragmatic and concern the living impact of these traditions. Today, many philosophers and theologians understand the options confronting persons with the help of a typology developed by [Race \(1983\)](#), who distinguishes between exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. For example, many persons in cosmopolitan or multicultural communities find strict salvific exclusivism, or the view that salvation can only be found within one tradition, implausible. Some of these people move to the inclusivist position that one tradition is maximally correct or that one tradition is maximally salvifically effective, but that other traditions are partially correct or salvifically effective. Others are inclined to the pluralist view that while some traditions may be erroneous, many traditions are not, and that among these traditions no one religion is more correct than any other and no one tradition is more salvifically effective than the others. Some of these pluralists are even pluralists in religious practice. These persons are also practitioners of more than one religion (e.g., [Drew 2011](#)). One could call these pluralists the transreligious.

The most obvious conceptual challenge for the religious pluralist is the incompatibility problem, or the problem of reconciling apparently contradictory religious propositions. As [Ward \(1990\)](#) succinctly puts it, multiple "religions claim to state truths about the nature of the universe and human destiny. . . [but] these truths seem to be incompatible" (p. 1).



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If two religions differ on some fundamental claim about ultimate reality, many wonder how the pluralist can maintain that both traditions are correct. In her approach to religious pluralism, Jeanine Diller has responded to this problem with a view she describes as partialism. According to this view, the Ultimate has different aspects and while different religious traditions may grasp different aspects of the Ultimate, no tradition has knowledge of the Ultimate's nature alone. In this article, I interpret Diller's partialism as the view that various religious traditions can have justified beliefs about the Ultimate's nature, but that knowledge of the Ultimate's nature requires multiple religious engagement. I contend that this view implies the existence of a noetic threshold that only transreligious pluralism is sufficient to meet. I suggest that there are two remaining ambiguities for such a view. First, the partialist needs to determine whether this noetic threshold should be interpreted in a metaconceptual or perspectival manner. Second, the partialist needs to determine whether each individual tradition's noetic contributions are commensurable or incommensurable. I then identify some possible combinations of these options, and I contend that there is arguably more reason for local affiliation in the perspectival variant.

To make this case, I start with a brief outline of Diller's initial formulation of partialism. I then introduce the metaconceptual and perspectival interpretations of partialism by contrasting Diller's view with some recent alternative models of religious pluralism. From here, I move to a consideration of whether the noetic goods partialism identifies are commensurable or incommensurable as I explain why partialism is consistent with both views. Having established these options, I close with a consideration of the various ways one could structure partialism. I argue that partialism exhibits less internal tension if it adopts a metaconceptual fungible formulation or a perspectival non-fungible formulation. I close with some ways each formulation of partialism might connect to other philosophical positions.

2. Jeanine Diller on Partialism

In the work in which Diller (2019) first introduces partialism, she begins by asking whether it is logically possible to affiliate with a tradition and engage in transreligious theology. Diller's view is that it is, and that in doing so the local affiliate is improving her noetic situation. In her view, a local affiliate is someone who either belongs to a tradition, identifies with that tradition, or both. For example, a Christian is a local affiliate if she is a member of a local church or identifies as Christian or both (p. 172). Belonging is recognitive: it requires acknowledge of both the group and the individual. Identification is cognitive: the individual can determine for herself how she understands herself (p. 173). According to Diller, to suggest that there can be a tension between local affiliation and transreligious theology is to presuppose that local affiliation involves belief (p. 172). While this is far from obvious, Diller accepts, as a matter of course, that local affiliation of either the belonging or identification type requires belief.

With this established, Diller suggests that there are three challenges that can arise for the local affiliate doing transreligious theology. The first challenge is motivational and concerns the grounds for examining transreligious theology in the first place. Diller suggests that through affiliation, individuals may become acquainted with the Ultimate. However, in doing so, affiliates may come to appreciate that the Ultimate "transcends human thought." This recognition may lead the affiliate to want to learn more about the Ultimate. Logic also suggests something of this need. After all, it is fallacious to infer that something is the way that it appears to be, particularly when one has reason to think that one's evidence is not representative. Thus, Diller argues that the local affiliate will want to gather more evidence about the nature of the Ultimate to ensure that her evidence is more representative (p. 175).

Of course, in doing so, the local affiliate is likely to run into some conceptual difficulties. After all, many religious traditions believe contradictory things. As the local affiliate engages with the intellectual resources of another tradition to learn more about the Ultimate, the local affiliate might come to recognize the multiplicity of conceptions of the Ultimate. In response, Diller notes that the pluralist need not recognize all traditions as true (p. 176). The local affiliate can reject some conceptions of the Ultimate. However, if the local affiliate is a pluralist she cannot logically reject all other traditional conceptions of the Ultimate. As we have seen, the pluralist believes that more than one tradition is correct about the Ultimate, and that among these correct traditions, no tradition is more epistemically correct than the others.

To deal with this problem, Diller invokes a distinction that Griffin (2005) has formulated in summary of the work of John Cobb. According to Griffin, there are two ways to think about religious pluralism. One can be identist about religion and think that there is only one Ultimate, or one can be a differentialist about religion and think that there is more than one Ultimate. At the same time, one can be an identist or differentialist about religious experience and an identist or a differentialist about soteriology. Diller says that she is an identist about the Ultimate for several reasons. Diller argues that identism about the Ultimate is more parsimonious and that it makes more sense to say that there is a singular Ultimate, because if there were several Ultimates, the various Ultimates would call for some total relation which would be Ultimate (p. 182). However, Diller also says that she is a differentialist about religious experience and soteriology (p. 181).

Of course, Diller realizes that in adopting this view, she is inviting deeper problems of coherence. In response, Diller says that it may only be through sustained engagement with a tradition that one comes to learn that one of the traditions is wrong (p. 182). Second, Diller suggests that many conceptual commitments of a religion may be only metaphors rather than literal truths (p. 183). Finally, and most importantly, Diller advocates the view she calls partialism, according to which the Ultimate has different attributes that different traditions can grasp. In this way, what looks like contradictions can be reconciled by recognizing that they are each spotlighting different attributes (p. 184). Diller appeals to an analogy between an optician and art critic. The optician might interpret the painting as being laid out on a mathematical grid and identify different colors at different coordinates while the art critic might describe that spot as part of the painting's subject. The two accounts might look like a contradiction, but they are just different ways of looking at different aspects of the same thing. The upshot for theology is the view that while each religion may grasp something of the Ultimate's nature, "no religion has full knowledge of the Ultimate solo" (p. 184).

With partialism in view, Diller examines the objection that engaging in transreligious theology can weaken local affiliation. Diller recognizes that this is a risk of doing transreligious theology. However, she adds that it is also possible for a person to remain committed to her tradition. Diller notes that there are examples of persons who have left a tradition as they investigate other traditions, but there are also examples of persons who have not. In the latter case, a person may move to a hybrid position and identify with two or more local traditions. Of course, in that case, it is not true that doing transreligious theology weakens local affiliation if the individual continues to belong or identify with the tradition.

3. Metaconceptual and Perspectival Partialism

I find the view Diller describes as partialism intriguing, but I want to point out a couple ways Diller leaves up partialism up to interpretation, and some different directions in which one might take the view. As the preceding section demonstrates, Diller pitches partialism as an answer to the question of whether it is possible to locally affiliate and do transreligious theology. However, the partialist could think about the relationship between

local affiliation and transreligious theology in two different ways, one more perspectival than the other. To illustrate these options, it will help to compare partialism to some other recent formulations of religious pluralism.

One important alternative to consider has been developed by Maharaj (2018) through an interpretation of the Hindu philosopher Sri Ramakrishna. As Maharaj explains, Ramakrishna engaged in a plurality of religious practices, including various forms of Hindu, Muslim, and Christian practices. As a result of engagement with these various traditions, Ramakrishna claimed “to have realized different forms and aspects of one and the same Divine Reality” (p. 88). As a result, Ramakrishna adopted a *vijñāna* view of God as infinite and both impersonal and personal. Because God is infinite, Ramakrishna believed that “there must be correspondingly infinite ways of approaching and ultimately realizing God” (p. 89). How does this model address the incompatibility problem? Because God is infinite and humans are finite, humans are not quite capable of truly appreciating God, but multiple religious paths may be up to the task of leading individuals to a religious experience of God (p. 90). An illustrative metaphor Ramakrishna uses is of multiple perceptions of a chameleon. Individual persons may argue about the color of the chameleon, and each may be correct about the color they have perceived. However, it is the *vijñāni* who has realized the infinite nature of God who can identify the animal as a chameleon whose colors change (p. 91). At the same time, Ramakrishna denies that the *vijñāni* has exhaustive knowledge of the nature of God (p. 92).

For Ramakrishna, a religious tradition can only claim to count as a path to God when it makes contact with God a central spiritual goal and when it prescribes ethical and spiritual practices that bring practitioners into contact with God (pp. 93–94). Ramakrishna also denies that all paths are equally effective. Only those paths that most “diminish egoism, selfishness, and body-consciousness” are those that bring individuals closer to God (p. 97). Of course, such a posture raises the question of how Ramakrishna identifies these criteria as the criteria for closeness to God. Maharaj argues that Ramakrishna is a pluralist in the sense of recognizing salvation in multiple traditions, none of which is best (p. 98). However, Maharaj denies that Ramakrishna has simply given a Hindu account of religious pluralism. Rather Maharaj contends that Ramakrishna’s perspective of the criteria for closeness to God is ultimately grounded in “the vast experiential standpoint of *vijñāna*” (p. 99).

Ramakrishna recognizes that distinct religious traditions can conflict on specific claims. As Hick (1989) observed, there are three types of such conflict: conflicts about historical matters, transhistorical matters, and ultimate matters (pp. 362–63). For example, two religions might disagree about whether Jesus was resurrected (historical matter), whether human beings are dualistically constituted (transhistorical), and about whether ontological monism is true (ultimate). Ramakrishna’s view is that religions can and do conflict on historical and transhistorical matters. Ramakrishna also maintains that there are genuine truths about these matters, and that not all religions can be correct about them. For example, Jesus was either resurrected or not, and human beings reincarnate or they do not. In this way, religious traditions can be mistaken. However, Ramakrishna’s emphasis is on ultimate matters and soteriology. Informed by his experiential standpoint of *vijñāna*, Ramakrishna emphasizes that conflict between religions about ultimate reality is often apparent, and that often religious traditions merely spotlight “a complementary” aspect of God (p. 107). Maharaj contends that such a view is safe from relativism because the infinite God constitutes the whole of reality, but no one tradition is capable of fully discerning that whole (p. 108).

Maharaj’s interpretation of Ramakrishna is sophisticated. The important point I want to emphasize for present purposes is the extent to which Ramakrishna’s *vijñāna* approach recognizes what we could call a meta-conceptual perspective. This model can be contrasted

with one developed by Schmidt-Leukel (2017) who articulates an interreligious theological approach to pluralism. In Schmidt-Leukel's view, pluralism is "a particular interpretation of religious diversity" (p. 1). Unlike Maharaj's interpretation of Ramakrishna which suggests that religious pluralism can be affirmed from an extra-traditional perspective, Schmidt-Leukel instead contends that religious pluralism "can be developed only from within the different religious traditions" (p. 1). Schmidt-Leukel accepts the definition of pluralism as the view that "more than one of these religious messages is true, although none is superior to all the rest" (p. 3). Such a view is distinct from relativism because the pluralist maintains that there are "valid criteria that allow for a reasoned assessment of religions," but that no religion is evidentially superior with respect to these criteria (p. 4). However, for Schmidt-Leukel pluralism must be advanced "as a hypothesis" (p. 125). One relevant alternative to the pluralist hypothesis is the hypothesis that all religions are false. In Schmidt-Leukel's view, the pluralist enters into interreligious dialogue with the assumption of a faith stance. For this reason, Schmidt-Leukel sees pluralism as connected to interreligious theology and as "the result of allowing one's theology to be transformed by the encounter with the religious other" (p. 127). Thus, we might say that Schmidt-Leukel adopts a version of a conceptual scheme approach tempered through a dialogical posture.

However, this move does not quite explain how to think about religious pluralism. Schmidt-Leukel's preferred model of religious pluralism is a fractal approach. A fractal is a mathematical concept that refers to "certain patterns, structures, or forms that display either a rough or strict self-similarity across various scales." Thus, a fractal has two key elements: recursiveness and scale invariance (p. 223). Among inorganic phenomena, various rock formations and ice crystals exhibit a recursive pattern at various scales. In organic phenomena, a broccoli or cauliflower floret is a well-known example of a structure that repeats its pattern at various scales (p. 224). In philosophy, Schmidt-Leukel cites Elmar Holenstein as a comparative thinker who identifies recurring structures in different cultures (p. 226). In comparative religion, Schmidt-Leukel argues that well-known typologies of religion into the prophetic, the mystical, and the sapiential are not emblematic of distinct religions, but characterize all religions. As Schmidt-Leukel says, "almost everything that is found in one of the major religious traditions seems to reappear in some way or another in other religions as well" (p. 229).

Schmidt-Leukel's fractal approach suggests that structural patterns recur in every religion at three levels: the interreligious, the intrareligious, and the intrasubjective (p. 233). Such structural recursion can be couched in terms of diversity involving both similarity and difference. For example, interreligious dialogue might invite a shared commitment to a view of the Ultimate, while an individual religion involves a commitment to a view of the Ultimate, and an individual person can be committed to a view of the Ultimate. However, the differences can also recur. One religion may be more prophetic than another, but an internal religious community can have more prophetic and more sapiential elements while an individual may also shift through these different focuses in their life. The important point is that in the fractal model, "the religious other is never completely or wholly other." Rather "central aspects of the other's religion have parallels in one's own tradition" (p. 235). Such a posture renders the fractal view a form of pluralism insofar as it supports the idea that diversity is not "an expression of falsity or inferiority, as is presupposed by exclusivism and inclusivism" (p. 237).

The point that I want to emphasize with respect to the options open to the partialist can be appreciated by reflecting on the contrast between Ramakrishna and Schmidt-Leukel. Ramakrishna is an advocate of a metaconceptual approach to religious pluralism while Schmidt-Leukel is an advocate of a tradition-based approach. These options are not exhaustive. In addition to these approaches, one might also advocate what I would call a

transversal theological position. Thus, there are at least three ways to think about religious pluralism. Religious pluralism could be endorsed from a meta-conceptual perspective. Religious pluralism could be endorsed from a modified tradition's perspective. Or religious pluralism could be endorsed from two or more perspectives. The middle option does not give us a model of multiple religious belonging and thus transreligious identification. So, it can be bracketed. However, I also think that differentialism strains the second option. I am not denying that a Christian could believe that Buddhist satori is a genuine experience of God. Rather if Christian salvation and Buddhist satori are different types of experiences, it is hard to see how the Christian could recognize this without implicitly moving to a metaconceptual perspective or shifting perspectives. To see this, contrast the modified tradition approach with inclusivism. The inclusivist Christian reads satori as a dim appreciation of the Holy Spirit. Schmidt-Leukel reads Christian soteriology and Buddhist satori as manifestations of the fractal divine. The fractal is a repeating pattern. I can recognize its other manifestations from within my own perspective because I can recognize the resemblance. If there is no resemblance, it seems to me that my recognition of that manifestation involves some shifting away from my own perspective. In any case, my interest is in developing a model of transreligion or multiple religious belonging. So, for this purpose, Diller's partialism needs to be understood either as a meta-conceptual posture or a perspectival posture.

As it is commonly defined, pluralism is the view that there are valid criteria of rational assessment of religions and that no religion scores higher than any other with respect to these criteria. What I take Diller to have noticed in her advocacy of partialism is the observation that this definition of pluralism is consistent with an additive treatment of distinct religious traditions' scores with respect to these criteria. In this way, I take it that Diller is implicitly advocating what I will call a noetic threshold. According to the interpretation I think is most consonant with contemporary epistemology, a religious tradition can have a justified belief about the Ultimate's nature, but to genuinely know the Ultimate's nature, an individual must engage with different religious traditions. I take it that this view of the epistemic situation explains the epistemic imperative Diller is gesturing towards with partialism. Such a view seems plausible enough. I might have the justified belief "Bruce Wayne is a nice guy" in virtue of my hearing about his charitable efforts, but I arguably know "Bruce Wayne is a nice guy" when I learn that he is also Batman. If *prima facie* justification is what I have when I come to a conclusion in review of my available evidence, knowledge is what I have when I approach complete acquaintance of all possible evidence (e.g., [Chisholm 1977](#)).

Now, the question that I am asking is about how to understand the epistemic condition of the agent who reaches this noetic threshold. It is perhaps easiest to understand this agent as having reached a particular meta-conceptual perspective. However, there is another possibility. To see this, imagine how the partialist might accommodate some of the insights of Schmidt-Leukel's approach. Schmidt-Leukel thinks that pluralism can be affirmed from within a particular religious perspective. If that is right, then pluralism can be affirmed from within more than one religious perspective. Thus, partialism could also be understood as the view that an individual can shift from one conceptual scheme to another. Now, if this is so, one wonders how to understand the transreligious agent's reaching of the noetic threshold partialism seems to posit. To see this, consider the way each conceptual scheme might be able to defer to another. Suppose for example an agent who is both Christian and Buddhist. Such a person faces incompatibility questions, but these can issue from within each conceptual scheme. Perhaps our agent opts for a substantialist interpretation of Buddhism or a process interpretation of Christianity. Now suppose that from within each perspective our agent has come to affirm the possibility of distinct religious experiences

and forms of salvation within other traditions. In the case that the agent engages in discrete religious practices, undergoes such experiences, and lives into distinct forms of salvation, the agent can return to each conceptual scheme so to speak with a set of semantic and episodic memories that each scheme can recognize are and can be coded in distinct ways. In this case, the agent will have satisfied her transversal expectations, but she will not have had to construct an interstitial space or syncretized her faiths. However, the unification of her memory and her life itself can provide reason to think that it is the same reality to which these distinct schemes and experiences refer, defusing the worry some critics of pluralism have about pluralist grounds positing one ultimate reality in the first place (e.g., [Netland 1986](#)).

Consider an analogy to the history of philosophy. Suppose for example that I am considering the proposition (E) “a duck is swimming in my backyard.” If the partialist accepts partial incommensurability, we might say that E is a theoretically thin observation sentence or piece of common sense. However, we might also say that E is consistent with both (A) “A non-rational substance with a telos is in my backyard” and (H) “A cavalcade of mechanisms is operating in the puddle in my backyard.” Our A-scheme might be able to recognize the H-scheme in virtue of the fact that E can serve as an intermediary for a translation of A into H, even if A and H cannot be directly translated into one another. That is what it would mean to affirm partial incommensurability. The present point is that the A-scheme and the H-scheme could also both recognize that each scheme made successful predictions in virtue of a similar procedure, even if neither scheme could generate those predictions itself. This might be somewhat mystifying to both schemes, but the process is not altogether different than the cognitive process I engage in when I take my car to a mechanic because I believe he has a theory about what is wrong with my car that I do not understand and my sense that he is right when I pick up my car and the car seems to be operating correctly.

A crucial question here is whether in this case the partialist has affirmed a metaconceptual center. It appears not. Just as there is a difference between establishing consensus and erecting a foundation, there is a difference between sharing some ground and adopting the same view. Another analogy, this time to ethics, is illustrative. I might make a donation to charity on the grounds that both the categorical imperative and greatest happiness principle advise it, but that is not the same thing as identifying which view is the absolute correct view. Of course, the partialist is suggesting the transreligious person is in a somewhat different epistemic situation than this analogy suggests, but the point is that recognition of agreement is not de facto establishment of a totalizing or absolute perspective. Thus, I conclude that partialism can be taken in either a more metaconceptual or a more perspectival direction.

4. Commensurable and Incommensurable Noetic Goods

The preceding has articulated two ways to think about partialism. However, some questions remain about how to think about partialism in practice. In the preceding, I have interpreted partialism as positing a noetic threshold. According to this view, to know the Ultimate one must gather evidence from different traditions. There are different ways to logically formulate this thought. A threshold interpretation suggests that multiple religious engagement can be sufficient for knowledge of the Ultimate. At the same time, a threshold interpretation suggests that multiple religious engagement is necessary for knowledge of the Ultimate. Thus, multiple religious engagement is necessary and sufficient for knowledge of the Ultimate. This is not surprising. That is just how thresholds work. However, this leaves a question about whether any particular contribution to the threshold itself is necessary. No single contribution is sufficient. That much is clear. That is the point

of partialism. However, it is logically possible to believe that a contribution to the meeting of a threshold is necessary, even if it is not sufficient.

To see this, consider an analogy. Consider a slightly advanced security system with two locks: A and B. To unlock A, I need a code, but to unlock B, I need two different keys. Now, suppose that unlocking A will also automatically unlock B, and vice versa. In this way, neither the code nor the keys are necessary to unlock the system. However, both the code and the keys are discretely sufficient. Suppose however that no one except the designer of the system knows the code, that the system's designer has passed away, and that the designer never divulged the code. In that case, the two keys are jointly sufficient to unlock the code, but they are also practically necessary. No one is going to unlock the system without each key.

Another analogy corroborates this idea. Suppose that you need ten cents to purchase a stick of gum and you have eight coins in your pocket: seven pennies and a nickel. In that case, no one of your pennies is necessary to make the purchase, but any collection of five pennies is necessary. However, in this case, the nickel is necessary to make the purchase. The nickel is not sufficient. You could not purchase the stick of gum with just the nickel, but it is also true that you cannot purchase the stick of gum without the nickel in this scenario. Thus, there is a sense in which, in this context, the nickel is non-fungible. It cannot be traded out. Yes, a nickel is equivalent to five pennies. In general, nickels are fungible goods. However, in this context, the nickel is practically non-fungible. Thus, given this background information, we can conclude that if you have purchased the stick of gum, you have spent the nickel.

One final analogy will help illustrate further. Consider a six-string guitar in standard tuning: E, A, D, G, B, and E. As this exposition demonstrates, a guitar in standard two tuning has two strings tuned to E. However, the two strings have different pitches. The two E's are two octaves apart. The thicker string tuned to E has a lower pitch and the thinner string tuned to E has a higher pitch. Both are necessary for a guitar to be standard tuned, but each is insufficient. The two E strings are thus literally and practically non-fungible. They cannot be traded out or swapped for one another. In other cases, I might be able to get away with swapping. Ideally, I will want to tune a string to A with a slightly larger diameter than the string I want to tune to D but suppose I can produce a sound close enough to standard tuning if I were to replace either string with the other. In that case, I have a set of strings jointly sufficient for standard tuning, not every string is itself necessary, but it is necessary to have two strings with a certain proportionality to one another (e.g., the E strings).

Now, my question is whether we should think about partialism along the lines of these analogies or not. More precisely, my question is whether the noetic contributions that each tradition makes to reaching the noetic threshold partialism implies are commensurable or incommensurable. If the noetic good each tradition contributes to the transreligious agent's epistemic condition is commensurable, then we have what we could call fungible partialism. Fungible partialism suggests that any combination of traditions meeting the noetic threshold will suffice for knowledge of the Ultimate. However, if the noetic good each tradition contributes to the transreligious agent's epistemic condition is incommensurable, or if some of these goods are incommensurable, it is possible that a tradition could be necessary for knowledge of the Ultimate, even if it is insufficient. In this case, we would have what we could call non-fungible partialism.

Is non-fungible partialism still pluralism? That will depend on how we understand the necessary tradition's contribution to the partialist's noetic threshold. In the coin analogy above, the nickel is clearly more valuable than the pennies. Given the above definition of pluralism as the view that more than one tradition is correct about the Ultimate, and

none of these traditions is more correct than the others, an outsized noetic contribution from a tradition would vitiate pluralism. However, if a tradition's noetic contribution is incommensurable, there might be no sense in which that contribution can be said to be greater than another tradition's. The guitar analogy is illustrative here. At the same time, even if there is a sense in which one tradition's contribution is greater than another tradition's, that contribution might still be consistent with pluralism so long as that contribution is only greater in some particular respect. The key and lock analogy is illustrative of this respect. Suppose for example that the Ultimate has two essential aspects, one of which is mercy and the other of which is almightiness. Suppose further that Christianity does the best job at demonstrating God's mercy, but that Islam does the best job at demonstrating God's almightiness. Suppose also that to meet the noetic threshold of partialism an agent must know both essential aspects of the Ultimate best. In that case, our agent will need to affiliate with both Christianity and Islam. Neither tradition will be sufficient, but both will be necessary. Neither tradition will be more correct about God all things considered, but both traditions will do their respective work better than the other. In that case, the transreligious agent will have to affiliate with both Christianity and Islam to know God, but she is still a pluralist by definition because she rightly believes that among the correct religious traditions no tradition is more correct all things considered than the other.

I suppose the question is whether such an agent is still a pluralist in spirit. How should we think about partialism? In her recent work, Diller (forthcoming) has advanced an argument for partialism from a consideration of deep space and deep time. The details of the argument should be considered in their fullness, but for present purposes, we can summarize the argument as depending on two primary claims. The first claim is that if there is an Ultimate, the Ultimate would want to connect with all civilizations. The second claim is that given the vastness of time and space, it is unlikely that the Ultimate connects with all civilizations in the same manner. The conclusion is that if there is an Ultimate, it is likely that the Ultimate connects with civilizations in at least more than one manner. Suppose that these premises are true. In that case, the conclusion of the argument is likely, and it can be justifiedly accepted. Notice however that such a condition is similar to the lock and key analogy I introduced above. After all, I have no access to these alien civilizations. Bringing down my Christianity and Islam example, I might say that it is theoretically possible that there are other traditions that demonstrate God's mercy and almightiness as well as Christianity and Islam. However, Christianity and Islam are still practically necessary for me to affiliate with given the empirical contingencies of my life on Earth.

5. Partialist Options

With these options in mind, it is now possible to appreciate several possible formulations of partialism. In Section 3, I argued that one could formulate either a metaconceptual or perspectival partialism. In the Section 4, I argued that one could formulate either a fungible or non-fungible form of partialism. This suggests four possible formulations of partialism. Which formulation should the partialist endorse?

Let us start with metaconceptual partialism. The second set of partialist options suggests that we could formulate either a metaconceptual fungible partialism or a metaconceptual non-fungible partialism. The former would suggest that the metaconceptual perspective is a perspective from which one can perceive the commensurability of each tradition's noetic contribution while the latter would deny that the invocation of a metaconceptual perspective renders each tradition's contribution commensurable. Now, I suppose that the question to ask here is whether it makes sense to affirm a metaconceptual perspective if the noetic contributions of each tradition are incommensurable. What work is the

metaconceptual perspective performing in that case? Perhaps Ramakrishna's chameleon analogy is illustrative here. In that case, the metaconceptual perspective would consist of a more evidentially complete representation. To my mind, the problem with this analogy is that the chameleon is not different colors concurrently. Differentialism about the Ultimate suggests that the Ultimate has different aspects concurrently, but if epistemic acquaintance with these aspects is incommensurable, it is hard to see how to achieve a representation of these aspects.

Now consider perspectival partialism. The second set of partialist options suggest that we could formulate either a fungible perspectival partialism or a non-fungible perspectival partialism. The former would suggest that each perspective produces goods that can be translated into goods from another tradition while the latter denies that this is possible. Here, I suppose that the question to ask is whether it makes sense to say that the perspectives are incommensurable if the noetic goods each produces are commensurable. In what sense would each scheme be legitimately discrete? Consider Ramakrishna's chameleon analogy once more. Red is a different color than green. English has these two words for both colors. Danish has *rød* and *grøn*. We can build a one-to-one correspondence between these terms. The terms are commensurable. That is what the partial incommensurabilist expects given that color terms help populate observation sentences. If we could continue this kind of translation work up the theoretical ladder of each conceptual scheme, one begins to wonder, with Davidson (1973), how we can speak of conceptual schemes at all. The partial incommensurabilist says that this cannot be done. Theoretically rich concepts can only point downward to observation sentences with which they cohere, but ultimately these observation sentences underdetermine the theoretical schemes. This suggests that incommensurable noetic goods imply genuine perspectivalism.

If the preceding is correct, there is considerably less tension within partialism if we adopt either metaconceptual fungible partialism or non-fungible perspectival partialism. A few other analogies are illustrative and corroborate this conclusion. If we think about partialism in a more theoretical fashion, we might think about each noetic contribution of a religious tradition as producing an integer and the noetic threshold of partialism as the summing of these integers. The activity of summing is our metaconceptual perspective and each tradition is akin to a function. However, if we think about partialism in a more practical fashion, we might think about each noetic contribution of a religious tradition as a dry good and the noetic threshold of partialism as the weighing of these goods. The activity of weighing would just be the common component in the production of apples and the production of oranges.

Diller's choice to go identist about the Ultimate and differentialist about religious experience and soteriology is responsible for this discrepancy. Suppose that the differentialist elements suggest a non-fungible perspective. One might think that the empirical facts are suggestive here. As Diller notes, it is hard to see how we could translate Christian experience and Buddhist experience into one another (p. 180). That is the reason why Diller opts for differentialism about religious experience. However, if these traditions are contributing noetic goods to the transreligious agent's cognitive economy, differentialism suggests that these goods are incommensurable. Thus, if it is correct to say that perspectivalism is a better fit for noetic incommensurability, then partialism exhibits less tension if understood in a more perspectival fashion. As the preceding section demonstrated, this would leave open the possibility that some particular tradition is practically necessary for knowledge of the Ultimate. For some, I suspect that this might be an advantage of partialism. It would provide some practical reason to remain locally affiliated, as Diller set out to demonstrate with partialism.

However, I suppose that this view depends on some further philosophical commitments. One question the partialist should ask is about the nature of evidence. If we adopt a phenomenal view of evidence, partialism makes more sense as a form of perspectivalism, for the reasons just given. However, if we think that religious experiences and religious practice suggest true propositions and we think it is these propositions that count as evidence, then the partialist could represent propositions numerically and treat the noetic threshold as met when a sufficient number of these propositions are justifiedly accepted. In that case, partialism could be understood as a metaconceptual position on religious traditions. As one considers these options, it is hard not to be struck by the way in which partialism can open up into different long-standing philosophical directions. Perhaps that is a sign of both the fecundity of the approach and the need for more philosophical attention to the view.

6. Conclusions

In this article, I have interpreted the view Jeanine Diller describes as partialism as the position that religious traditions can have justified beliefs about the Ultimate, but that knowledge of the Ultimate requires multiple religious engagement. I have interpreted partialism as positing a noetic threshold and raised several questions about this threshold. In doing so, I have argued that partialism is best understood as a perspectival approach recognizing incommensurable noetic goods of different traditions or as a metaconceptual view positing commensurable noetic contributions. I have argued that there is more reason for local affiliation in the perspectival approach, but that further philosophical attention to partialism is called for.

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