
BOOK REVIEW

Interreligious Hermeneutics and the Pursuit of Truth, by J. R. Hustwit. Lexington, 2014. 164 pp., Hb., \$80 ISBN 978-0739187388

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J.R. Hustwit brings interreligious dialogue to the fore in this text by girding it with the full-blooded-ness he argues that is often missing. Taking seriously the agent's pursuit of reality and truth, Hustwit gives a "philosophical account of interreligious dialogue that regards the truth claims of religions as frequently commensurable and rationally contestable" (ix). In so doing, he nudges the reader along down the path toward taking dialogue seriously beyond mere tolerance. After all, he contests, the spirit of interreligious dialogue ought to at some point be about new knowledge and sacred realities for those involved.

Demonstrating a command of modern and contemporary philosophy of religion (e.g. John Cobb, Jr., Derrida, Dilthey, Gadamer, Habermas, Hegel, Heidegger, John Hick, Kant, Lyotard, C.S. Peirce, Ricoeur, Schleiermacher, Tracy, Whitehead, and Wittgenstein), Hustwit proposes a mode of "fallibilist hermeneutics," which "stipulates that the goal of dialogue is to understand in the sense of appropriation, and [that] genuine incompatibilities among interpretations demand a truth-directedness to discourses" (99). Although he claims that it remains impossible to "conclusively verify any of our truth claims" (99), he doesn't leave the reader hopeless. In the final chapter (Chapter 6), titled "Reconstructing Pluralism," Hustwit strives to do just this by endorsing a "pluralistic rehabilitation of metaphysical claims that depend on criteria like coherence and consensus for their justification" (99). Needless to say, this book is not for the faint of heart when it comes to engaging deep religiously philosophical traditions, but nonetheless Hustwit makes it accessible.

Instead of providing an overview of the first five chapters, in which Hustwit beautifully and sophisticatedly deconstructs the various hermeneutical pitfalls of contemporary pluralisms, here I dwell on the final chapter of reconstructing pluralism and, in particular, its focus on constructive postmodernism (CPM) and the resulting implications. Recognizing the frustratingly destructive nature of various elements of modern postmodernism, Hustwit turns to CPM's C.S. Peirce, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne as allies in the project

to reconstruct pluralism. Germane to the proposal of this book, CPM shares the insight of fallibilism that “determinacy and relationality are possible among words, persons, and communities as long as we realize that the claims made have not been given in any final or guaranteed sense and are always subject to revision” (112). Such an insight is indeed great news for those engaged in interreligious dialogue, for it allows persons with different religious identities, backgrounds, and languages to, at the very least, arrive at some provisional, but nonetheless genuine, commensurability in their co-learning on the nature or reality and the sacred. In short, Hustwit demonstrates that his proposed fallibilist hermeneutics “is a natural ally of the more metaphysical branch of CPM, as both seek ongoing creative revision of interpretations, tentatively and with humility” (113). To the objection that if commensurability is granted, then ugly theological hegemony will surface and produce one dominant global “monofaith,” Hustwit counters with a significant rebuttal explaining why such a unified religious world order is practically unlikely, conceptually impossible, and simply undesirable.

Overall Hustwit provides a text that takes seriously the very real hermeneutical challenges in interreligious dialogue. A conviction of the text declares that “only when the relativity of human interpretation is paired with the thesis of an underlying ontological unity does one have a tool for dealing with religious diversity and pluralist theology in a helpful way” (116). In so doing, he proposes one meta-narrative in place of others (e.g., Hick’s “transcendently unifying *Real*”), but that is fine with Hustwit since after all, he claims, “meta-narratives are unavoidable” (116). Hustwit contends, quite helpfully, that “the most adequate response to religious diversity is some sort of differential pluralism” which here means an understanding that disagreements between and among people of various religions reflect “real ontological breaks” (117). This does not mean we need to give up and declare all religions incommensurable, incompatible, or non-complementary, but rather we can remain hopeful that there is indeed the very real possibility that the world’s religions are largely complementary. Hustwit ends the text with perhaps his most powerful and informative statement on the spirit of his project:

interreligious dialogue, under the aegis of fallibilist hermeneutics, offers an interpretation that affords a realist dimension to religious truth claims, thus preserving the gravitas appropriate to religious discourse while valuing novelty and difference as both a challenge and an opportunity for real progress toward theological truth. (118)

This text is a most welcome addition to the emerging and growing interdisciplinary field of interreligious studies. To be sure, it draws heavily on the author's scholarly area of the philosophy of religion and rushes confidently head-on into deep waters about the nature of truth in interreligious dialogue; waters, it seems, that many in other disciplines are unwilling to wade or are simply unequipped to travel in. We can all learn from Hustwits' thorough, yet accessible, text.