

Public Abstract

First Name:Matthew

Middle Name:Paul

Last Name:Konieczka

Adviser's First Name:John

Adviser's Last Name:Kultgen

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:WS 2007

Department:Philosophy

Degree:PhD

Title:Critical Pluralism: A New Approach to Religious Diversity

The world's religions provide a wide range of competing religious claims. The problem of religious diversity is that, while many of these claims are inconsistent with one another, they often seem to rest on roughly equal evidence. This creates a significant problem for anyone who seeks to know which religion, if any, is true. My dissertation examines the various responses to this problem and proposes a unique solution. While some claim that the wide disagreement on religious matters is reason to discard all religious claims as false, I provide an extensive argument in favor of a particularly religious position I call "Critical Pluralism." Critical Pluralism occupies a middle ground between those who claim that all major religions are somehow equally true and those who claim that one religion alone is true. On my view, religious belief systems often provide inadequate yet partially true accounts of a transcendent reality. Many religions *approximate* the truth to some degree. Some even do so a great deal better than others. Nonetheless, there is not a single religion that exclusively captures the truth.

How we understand religious claims, of course, has far reaching consequences in philosophy, theology, and interreligious dialogue. The Critical Pluralist views the diversity of religions as various limited ways of "pointing toward" the transcendent. Perhaps understanding religious diversity in this way may allow religious believers of all faiths to recognize the spiritual insights of other traditions while acknowledging each tradition's shortcomings as well.