CHAPTER 1

Resurrection and Life Hereafter: Hick's Position

John Hick, a prominent and contemporary philosopher of religion has probed into the subject of death and life hereafter very extensively under various titles like human destiny, present and future life, as-chatological verification and so on. His basic work on the subject is *Death and Eternal Life*.

Of course, scarcely does any of his writings miss this subject of perennial interest. Even a casual reader will not miss his consistency on the subject.

Hick's writings have a predominantly Christian background owing to the tradition he belongs to. A careful study reveals that Hick, although consistent so far as the interest on the subject is concerned, is not consistent on his position on the subject. This inconsistency is perhaps a mark of his progressive thinking. His essay on 'Human Destiny' in *Philosophy of Religion* of the early sixties portrays 'early Hick'
and his later voluminous writing on *Death and Eternal Life* (published in 1976) and its companion volume *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (published in 1985) speak of 'later Hick'.

The division of the work of John Hick into two distinct phases - early and later - is akin to that discerned in the work of Wittgenstein. In the case of the latter, the distinction has found wide acceptance in the historiography of Western Philosophy and is based on his two different perspectives on 'meaning'. In his early phase, he was struck by the similarity between two sets of relations - that of a statement to facts, and of a picture to the scene it depicted. In other words, the meaning of a sentence was to be understood in terms of its correspondence (picturing) with reality. Wittgenstein's later phase is characterised by the view between language and reality can be understood in terms of the theory of meaning as use, even as we understand a tool in terms of the function it perform-
The meaning of a sentence was now construed in terms of the 'use' (functioning) it served. But we shall maintain that these distinct theories of meaning, however, do not warrant the division of Wittgenstein's work into two different phases but only point at a shift in emphasis.

Likewise, Hick, who in his early writings was pessimistic regarding the notion of a life hereafter (especially in relation to resurrection), as also about the idea of eternity, in his later phase makes a drastic change of emphasis and affirms life-hereafter as a necessary component of every religion. By virtue of the said shift of emphasis, Hick disengages himself from the western tradition and effects an alignment with Indian tradition.

Nevertheless, this does not suggest two different Hicks but, rather, a perspectival shift. So it must be borne in mind that we use the distinction between the 'early Hick' and the Mater Hick' only as a convenient.
albeit inaccurate, way of referring to the change in emphasis mentioned above.

I A. EARLY HICK:

The early Hick belonged to the Christian tradition and made this clear by identifying Christianity is the frame of reference for his philosophical outlook:

"We shall concentrate upon the kind of religion that has moulded our western culture and which still constitutes the most lively option for most participants in this culture, namely, the Judiac Christian tradition". 5

Within this constellation Hick reiterates the distinction between Judaism and Christianity and affirms the theological superiority of the latter. It is for this reason, he says, that most of his material is taken from Christianity. As he himself
puts it.

"... because Christianity is a more theologically articulated religion than Judaism, most of our material will be taken from this source."

He then emphasises the centrality of the concept of God to the Christian tradition and says that all other concepts revolve around it:

"... All other elements of the tradition are dependent upon this concept, which will, accordingly, provide ample material for philosophical analysis and discussion."

Though within the purview our discussion it does not warrant a detailed discussion of the concept of God, a brief consideration would be in order; given the role Hick accords it in his overall framework. We shall therefore, even if only in passing, examine various characteristics of God, such as His being self-
existent, personal, loving, good, holy and the Creator.

The attribution of creation to God forms the springboard to our discussion, since man as the created is ever dependent on God not only for his existence but for his destiny (life-hereafter) as well. This, then, is the relevance of the concept of God to our discussion.

CONCEPT OF GOD:

Hick, drawing upon both the Old and New Testaments, articulates the monotheistic conception of God. For instance, he quotes the following passage:

"Hear O Israel: The Lord, our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your might."

He refers to the message of the Old Testament prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, who taught that God was not only the God of the Hebrews but also
that of all people and all history. He refers to the monotheistic faith, as expressed in the teachings of the Bible, which further reveals that God is infinite and unlimited. Hick also points out that this infinite God has various divine attributes or characteristics, namely is self-existent, eternal, personal, loving and good, is holy and is the Creator.

1. **Self-Existence**: God is not dependent either for his existence or for his attributes, upon any reality other than himself. He has not been created by any higher being. In short, God has absolute ontological independence.

2. **Eternal**: It follows from the "self-existent" nature of God, that He is eternal, or without a beginning or an end. If he were to have a beginning, it would imply a prior reality bringing him into existence, and if he were to have an end, it would require another reality to terminate his existence.
3. **Personal;** Hick points out the personal nature of God, as evinced in the Old and New Testaments. He refers to the statement:

"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Issac and the God of Jacob."¹⁰

The personal nature of God is brought out by the instances of Jesus referring to the fatherhood of God. Also, significantly, it is reflected in the choice of the pronoun "He," rather than "It," to refer to God, who is addressed as a transcendent "Thou" and not considered an object.

4. **Loving and Good:** Hick refers to goodness, love and grace and points out that love is the most outstanding character of God, although, the three are virtually synonymous.

He discussed, at length, the concept love and points out the distinction between eros and agape, two different Greek words used in the New Testament for "love".
Eros, is love evoked by desirable qualities or, the love that depends on the lovableness of the object. Agape, is a giving love and is unconditional and universal in nature. This is exemplified in the New Testament by God's love for mankind:

"for God so loved the world..."

5. Holy: Hick cites 'holiness' as yet another attributes of God, and refers, in this regard, to various passages in "Isaiah", in the Old Testament:

God is "... the high and softly one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy".\(^{12}\)

"All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags".\(^{13}\)

"To whom then will you compare me that I should be like him?" says the Holy One.".\(^{14}\)
6. **Creator:** Hick describes the Christian notion of God as the Creator, rather than the infinite, self-existent creator of everything that exists, other than himself. To articulate the concept clearly, he speaks of *creatio ex nihilo*, i.e. the creation out of nothing. This notion of creation entails the distinction between creator and created, or between God and creature. That which has been created will eternally remain the created, and the Creator will eternally remain the Creator. The idea of man becoming God is absolutely ruled out in the Christian tradition.

The creature, or the created, is absolutely dependent on God, for his existence and for his destiny, and this relationship is expressed in man's prayers to God. This leads us to a consideration of another important theme in John Hick's work—human destiny.
I B. HUMAN DESTINY:

Hick's conception of human destiny bears upon the problem of resurrection and is therefore of obvious concern to our discussion. The statements he made while spelling out his position, serve as the basis for our critique of the early Hick.

Hick points out that in contrast to the infinite nature of God, man is a finite being created by God and endowed with a certain destiny.

In order to understand the nature of human destiny, Hick begins by examining the body-mind dichotomy that Plato's *phaedo* draws attention to. This, Hick points out, is the "first attempt" to prove the immortality or the soul.

He then refers to Plato's description of the soul, as simple and, therefore, imperishable as opposed to all material bodies which are composite in nature and, therefore, suffer destruction. To destroy something
is to disintegrate it into its constituent parts. Further, the soul is that which exists forever therefore, it cannot disappear.

From a consideration of this Platonic view of the soul, Hick passes on to a discussion of the Judaic Christian view of human destiny, viz., resurrection.

Death, according to Hick, is fearful because, in the hour of death, one has to depend upon God for the divine act of re-creation and for an existence beyond the grave.

He also discusses the Pauline perspective on the idea of "the resurrection of the dead." According to Hick, on the Pauline view, resurrection is "the re-creation or re-constitution of the human psycho-physical individual, not as the organism died, but as a soma - oneumatikon, a "spiritual-body" inhabiting a spiritual world as a physical-body inhabits our present physical world."
In outlining the problems involved in the Pauline view, Hick, comes up with an argument crucial to our discussion when he says:

that "a major problem confronting any-such doctrine is that of providing criteria of personal identity to link the earthly life and the resurrection life".

He then continues to focus on the theme of human destiny, examining in relation to "heaven" and "hell". He describes heaven as a state of infinite good which outweighs all the pains and sorrows that have been endured on the way to it. "Hell", which is a place of torment, balances the idea of heaven in the Christian tradition. But Hick argues that

"it is by no means clear that the doctrine of eternal punishment can claim a secure New Testament basis".

The explication of these two arguments will, as we
shall see, forms a considerable part of our undertaking.

The first of Hick's arguments gives rise to the problem of identity between the pre-mortem body and the resurrected body, and this also brings out another related issue, namely, disembodied survival.

Hick's second argument is based on his recourse to "aeon" or "age" as a substitute for "eternal", and this substitution has consequences, as we shall see, for the related issue of immortality.

Let us defer a detailed investigation of these problems to a later chapter, "Critique of the early Hick", and turn, for the moment, to an outline of Hick's later writings.
I C. LATER HICK:

Kick, as we have mentioned earlier, registers a dramatic change in his position on resurrection and life hereafter (afterline). Critical, in his earlier phase of the ideas of resurrection and eternal life, he now accepts life-hereafter as a necessary component of every religion.

In fact, Hick is very critical of those who deny life after death. He cites Wolfhart Pannenberg and Gordon Kaufman as representing a vast number of theologians who hold that

"the end of the body is the end of

, 21"

This trend, says Hick, has it that when a man dies he passes into nothingness, is absolutely annihilated. On this view, further, when a man ceases to be, there is no conscious existence. Consequently they do not offer because they do not exist.
Determined to oppose the above mentioned trend, Kick sets out on his endeavour by posing the question, "what is man?"

He answers this question by employing the fundamental distinction between the physical and the non-physical. By physical he means the body, and the non-physical is intended to refer to entities like mind, soul, self, I, person, spirit, ego, and also, in the Indian context, jiva (jivatman) and atman.

In setting forth his views, he refers to the Christian concept of soul and the advaitist view of the atman.

In accordance with the Christian concept, Hick maintains the soul,

"undoubtedly is the conscious self, which earns rewards and deserves penalties, which becomes or fails to become aware of God by faith, and which is to enjoy hereafter the
blissful life or heaven or to suffer loss of heaven."\textsuperscript{22}

For Hick, the 'conscious self' refers to the spiritual element in man, i.e., the soul. The Biblical definition of the soul is found in the Genesis, where we read:

"He (God) breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."\textsuperscript{23}

This is the spiritual element, an immaterial one unlike the body. It is this spiritual element, that makes the body live and move. On account of this, man is referred to as a 'living soul'. The life of man is based on the spirit that God breathed into his body. The body then is not alive by itself, but only by means of the soul.

In short, the soul (self) is the one to be judged and to be rewarded or punished in the life hereafter, on the basis of the choices and decisions it has made
in this life.

Referring to the vedantic view, Hick talks about the 'atman', the ideal state of human consciousness, awaiting realisation through the negation of the individual ego. (more on page 90).

Continuing the quest for an answer to his query, "what is man?", Hick appraises the beliefs of primitive man, which were rife with the idea of continued existence after death, as evinced in the burial of the dead along with ornaments, weapons, food and articles of daily use.

He also examines views on death in 20th century philosophy, as exemplified in the writings of Heidegger, Sartre and others. Summing up Heidegger's views, Hick observes that

"death constitutes a fundamental threat to us, engendering anxiety at the realization of our own finitude, surrounded as we are by limitless nothingness; but
... if we can deliberately confront and accept our own coming death we shall preserve our personal integrity in the face of it."\textsuperscript{24}

Commenting on Sartre's view, Hick writes;

"Death ... for Sartre, deprives life of meaning by making it a matter of chance – instead of being a completion which gives retrospective meaning to the whole of a life, death cuts arbitrarily and unpredictably across the line of life, denying it any meaning".\textsuperscript{25}
ID. BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF (LIFE-HEREAFTER) REBIRTH:

Persisting with his theme, "what is man?". Hick also draws attention to the Buddhist concept of life hereafter.

According to the Buddhist tradition. Hick says, man is essentially a temporal creature. At death the psycho-physical individual ceases to exist. He does not survive death. But a certain aspect of him does continue, though not eternally. This aspect is referred to as a "re-linking consciousness." This re-linking consciousness, is the first thought in a 'new-life-stream', which is the immediate successor to the last thought of a dying individual. The new life-stream is what we call re-becoming or rebirth.

Re-becoming is not necessarily into this world but may be into any of the 'many worlds'. Rebirth, is a special case of re-becoming, when a person comes back to earth-life.26
IE. CHRISTIAN VIEW OF AFTERLIFE (THE NEW TESTAMENT):

We have seen that whereas the early Hick argued against the notion of resurrection, the later Hick accepts the idea of afterlife in Christian thought, and in other religious systems as well. While retaining certain arguments against resurrection, he recounts the Gospel narratives of the resurrection of Christ, and the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. He also refers to the following statement in the Book of Acts:

"God has raised Jesus, giving him power and authority, and that Jesus is alive".

He is of the opinion that Jesus' resurrection, while not the sole ground for belief in life after death, does, of course, suppose and confirm the belief in the continuity of man's life beyond his physical death.

Further, he recounts the teachings of Jesus about
afterlife and resurrection, as in the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus, and various other scriptural passages.

Kick also refers to the teachings of the apostle Paul such as in I Corinthians, chapter 15:

"what you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for fish. There are celestial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, is raised is
imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body."

Hick comprehensively surveys the teachings of the New Testament on afterlife and resurrection, but nevertheless observes that "resurrection should not be considered from the standpoint of Christian faith as centrally important."  

It follows from all that we have seen thus far that hick's new position unequivocally affirms life after death. 

He goes on to say:  

"... the individual's next life, will, like the present life, be bounded, span with own beginning and end. In other
... a single life is not enough. And this, surely, is realistic. In western and Christian terms, if we understand divine purpose for human beings as their realization of the human potential, their full humanization, it is clear that this does not usually occur within the space of a single earthly life. Within this one life, some men advance a long way towards the fulfilment of the human potential. Most advance a little, but many hardly advance at all, and some, on the contrary, regress. The general picture is certainly not one in which the human potential is normally, or even often, fulfilled in the course of this present life."
In other words, man in this life has not lived a humanly successful life and hence cannot attain perfection instantaneously at the moment of death. He, therefore,

"must continue beyond this life ... a further temporal process in which further moral and spiritual growth is possible."\(^{33}\)

Although the later Hick affirms the immortality of the soul, he says that if the anticipated immortality were to be considered a personal immortality, such a conception of immortality would be irreligious. As opposed to the notion of personal immortality, he emphasises 'self-transcendence' or transcending ego-boundaries in a perfect community, many-in-one, one-in-many, a corporate life.\(^{34}\)

Our enquiry thus reveals that with respect to his conception of ego-boundaries and his construal of immortality, Hick's position approximates a certain stand in Indian thought, the Vedantic. In fact, it may be said.
that Hick has made a quantum leap from Western to Indian Philosophy. This, however, does not suggest that Hick has moved away from the Christian tradition. On the contrary, he justifies his notion of transcending ego-boundaries, in terms of Christ's teaching.

The main thrust of our enquiry is to show that this position of Hick's is untenable and inconsistent. We shall, in the next chapter, commence our attempt at doing so.