

The phrase 'Real *an sich*' was introduced into the pluralism debate by Hick. Essentially it means 'the Real in itself' in contrast to 'the Real as it is variously conceptualized by human minds'. Putting the distinction into Kantian terms, one could say that the Real *an sich* is the noumenon - and, as such, it is not *directly* experiencable by us. Don't confuse the Real *an sich* with God or Brahman. According to Hick, the latter are phenomenal objects, not noumenal. In a sense, they are the product of human attempts to conceptualize the Real *an sich*.

Hick's understanding of the distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal, and his understanding of the Real *an sich*, is explained in his book *An Interpretation of Religion*. Here's a typical quote from that book:

the divine noumenon is a necessary postulate of the pluralistic religious life of humanity. For within each tradition we regard as real the objects of our worship or contemplation. If...it is also proper to regard as real the objects of worship within the other traditions, we are led to postulate the Real *an sich* [in itself] as the presupposition of the veridical character of this range of forms of religious experience. Without this postulate we should be left with a plurality of *personae* and *impersonae* each of which is claimed to be the Ultimate, but no one of which can be. We should have either to regard all the reported experiences as illusory or else return to the confessional position in which we affirm the authenticity of our own stream of religious experience whilst dismissing as illusory those occurring within other traditions. But for those to whom neither of these options seems realistic the pluralistic affirmation becomes inevitable, and with it the postulation of the Real *an sich*, which is variously experienced and thought as the range of divine phenomena described by the history of religion.(Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 249.)