Philosophy of "Philosophy of Religion"

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Abstract

"Philosophy of religion" nowadays is one of most prevalent fields of "study of religion". This assay puts "philosophy of religion" as its subject matter discussing its various aspects including background, definition, subject, questions and its nature. Despite of the old-age of philosophical reflections in religious issues, "philosophy of religion" in its exact meaning has begun by Hegel.

The definition of "philosophy of religion" is difficult for three reason: a) the difficulty of defining its components (philosophy and religion), b) multiplicity of its topics and c) diverse concept of the relationship of philosophy with religion. Yet it has been defined in two ways:

1) Philosophical defense of religion, and
2) Philosophical reflection about religious topics.

During this assay, it will be clarified that "philosophy of religion" is a first-order discipline that philosophizes about religious concepts, ideas and deeds. But this philosophizing about religion is not the simple application of rational thinking in the religious issues; rather multiple western philosophical schools are the watering place of "philosophy of religion".

Indead, belonging to a specific philosophical school and possessing particular philosophical ideas, each philosopher begins to study aspects of religion and theorize about it.

There are different sorts of questions discussed in philosophy of religion: some discuss about religion as a whole, others discuss common issues of theistic religions, and three investigate some particular doctrines of some religion.

Finally, we can conclude that it is possible or even necessary to have an Islamic Philosophy of Religion. It would be philosophical scrutiny on religious issues especially Islamic ones, based on Islamic philosophy.

Keywords: Philosophy of religion, Philosophical theology, Analytic philosophy, Apologetics, Islamic Philosophy of Religion.

1. Study of Religion

On a February day in the winter of 1870, a middle-aged German scholar rose to the stage of London´s prestigious Royal Institute to deliver a public lecture. His name was Friedrich Max Müller. He was admired for his knowledge of ancient Hinduism and for his very popular writings on language and mythology. On this occasion, however, he proposed a different subject. He wished to promote something he called the science of religion.

The phrase "science of religion" doubtless struck some in Müller´s audience as puzzling in the extreme. Thinkers had heard so much of science pitted against religion that the phrase "science of religion" fell on the ears as a very curious combination. How could these opposing systems, religion and science, these two apparently mortal enemies, meet together without the one or both to be destroyed? Müller asserted that instead of following the theologians, who wanted only to prove truth of their own religion and false of all others, the time had come to take a less partisan approach, seeking out those elements, patterns, and principles that could be found comonly in the religions of all times and places (Daniel L. Pals, 1996: 3-4)

For Max Müller, due to his interest in positivism, the only way in the study of religion was the empirical method; but after undermining the dominance of positivism, little by little, other research methods in the scope of religion emerged.

There are indeed many ways of studying the complex reality of religion, giving rise to numerous academic disciplines that take

religion as their subject matter. These disciplines are: Philosophy of Religion, Theology, Religious Epistemology, Psychology of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Anthropology of Religion, History of Religions, Comparative Study of Religions, Phenomenology of Religion, Mythology of Religion, Religious Literature and Comparative Theology. (Peterson, 1991: 6)

These disciplines can be divided in two kinds:

1) The disciplines concerning the reasonability and truth of religions as such: philosophy of religion, theology, religious epistemology .In this category, the researcher of religion pursuits to find out which religion is truthful, from among numerous religions existing in the world. All religions claim to be truthful, but we need to investigate which one is truthful and which one is untruthful.

2) The disciplines do not concern about the truth of religious assertions as such: psychology of religion, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, and others.

Disciplines of "Study of Religion" in this category discuss about the effects and necessities of religions, and are trying to find out that what the individual and social effects of the religion are, in the time that someone follows and practices a religion. In another word, what psychological, sociological, historical and cultural effects could be considered for religion? This group falls into two categories:

1- Sciences which examine a specific part of religion from a particular perspective, which are as follows: Sociology of Religion, Psychology of Religion, Anthropology of Religion, Mythology of Religion, Religious Art and Literature.

2- Sciences that are not looking at a specific part of religion, rather research on religion entirely and wholly. These disciplines research on the whole religion as a research subject matter with historical and phenomenological methods. Historical method is the origin for the emergence of religions history and comparative study of religion; and phenomenological method led to form the phenomenology of religion. (see: Khosropanah, 1381 (sc): 19; Kashefi, 1375 (sc): 256- 258)

However, without doubt, it is a priority or even a necessity, for all Islamic scholars, to precede all different disciplines of "the study of Religion". But from among these categories, the first group, which deals with the truthfulness and untruthfulness of religious beliefs, has the absolute necessity.

In the other hand, there is no doubt that, now a day, "Philosophy of Religion" is the most frequent field of "Philosophy-Theology" in the realm of religious thought and faith, especially when religious epistemology is part of it.

Therefore, it seems that ,this branch is the most important field of comparative studies for Islamic philosophers who concern in to both Islam and philosophy.

But it is clear that, theorization in this field and responding to the questions, raised by the contemporary philosophers of religion, needs enough recognition of the nature of this scientific discipline.

providing a true conception of "philosophy of Religion" in the mind, Islamic philosophers could investigate on the issues raised in this field, With help of the rich legacy of Islamic philosophy. Otherwise, their efforts in facing the problems of "philosophy of Religion" would seem to be immature and far from the main issue. The point here is that some of our thinkers has equated this field of study with other similar fields, like "Modern Theology" or "Philosophical Theology" (See (Persian books): Suroush 1382, p.79; Isfandiari 1374, p. 214; Ayatullahi 1381, p. 26)

Hence, I believe, the first step in the way to achieve "Islamic Philosophy of Religion" is presenting a vivid picture of aspects of "Philosophy of Religion" discipline, a definition for "Philosophy of Religion" and understanding its history, nature, method, problems and principles; which briefly we can call it "depicting epistemic geometry" of it.

This assay intends to give a distinct image of the various aspects of "philosophy of religion" as a most prevalent field of study of religion, concerning the truth of religious asserts. Therefore, it puts "philosophy of religion" as its subject matter discussing its definition, background, subject, questions and its nature.

2. History of "Philosophy of Religion"

Philosophical reflection on religious issues is as old as the philosophy itself. The age-old concern of humankind with religious questions, many of which antedated the earliest beginnings of philosophy, has led various thinkers to inquire into the meaning of the claims made by different religions, the evidence upon which these claims are based, the standards that can be employed in evaluating their merits, and

whether these claims can be made part of a general theory about the nature of the universe. (Richard Popkin and Avrum Stroll, 2007: 176)

The interaction between religion and philosophy is found in the thought of Clement (150-215) and Origen (185-254), usually known as the Christian Platonists of Alexandria; because their school was located in that ancient center of Hellenistic culture. As this appellation implies, they were engaged in interpreting the basic beliefs of Christianity concerning God, Christ, man, and the world in terms of the insights of the Neo-Platonic philosophy current in their time. More than a century earlier, the Jewish philosopher ,Philo Judaeus (45-50) carried out much the same enterprise for the Hebraic tradition, drawing chiefly on the thought of the Greek philosopher Plato (c.429-347BCE), and the Pythagorean and Stoic schools. This type of interpreting—or dialogue, if you prefer—involving the use of the Greco-Roman philosophical systems for formulating the ideas and elucidating the religious insights of the biblical tradition, continued throughout the Middle Ages and lasted until the end of the Renaissance. (Smith, 1993: 295) The term 'philosophy of religion' is a relative newcomer, dating only from the late eighteenth century. It became widespread under the influence of Hegel, whose system of philosophy featured various "philosophy of" components —history, mind, art, as well as religion. (Alston, 1998: 239)

G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) was the first to use the term philosophy of religion. (Cain, 1993: 66) Hegel complains bitterly about the prevailing assumption that we do not know God, which, therefore, "permits us to speak merely of our relation to Him, to speak of religion and not of God Himself." The result is that "we at least hear much talk … about religion, and therefore all the less about God Himself."

He calls our attention to what amounts to a sea change in modern philosophy, the transition from philosophical theology to philosophy of religion in the narrower sense of philosophizing about religion. In light of his intended resistance to this feature of post-Kantian modernity, it is ironic that we owe to him more than to anyone else the notion that there is a subdivision of philosophy called the philosophy of religion, that he develops this in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. (Westphal, 2000: 111)

Though what is assembled under the heading "philosophy of religion" has a long and culturally diverse history, the phrase itself did

not gain widespread acceptance in the western academic setting until the latter half of twentieth century. (Eshleman, 2008: 5)

3. Definition of "Philosophy of Religion"

Despite the extensive development in the discussions of philosophy of religion among philosophers, yet no consensus exists over the definition of this new discipline. Unfortunately, *ambiguity* and difference in the definition of "philosophy of religion", as well as the overlapping of some of its problems with other disciplines, led to the fact that some scholars assume this discipline as the same as the other disciplines. Therefore it seems that to define "philosophy of Religion" is the first step in entering this scope of study of religion.

On the other hand, from a logical point of view, the first question arises on this branch of "study of religion" is its definition. But indeed definition of "Philosophy of Religion" is so difficult and problematic. This difficulty, if we do not call it impossibility, is due to at least three causes:

a) The difficulty of defining its components (philosophy and religion)

To define "philosophy of religion", the consequent of its component's definition, that is Philosophy and Religion, must be considered. But, with a quick glance at philosophy, in order to investigate the immense diversity of the issues under the name of philosophy, make us needless to refer to the definitions presented for philosophy. A quick glance at the history of philosophy and the works of the philosophers makes it clear that what it is known as philosophy has an ample scope, which has different or even incoherent systems inside itself, inasmuch as sometimes in a one philosophical system, like "Philosophies of Existence", hardly can claim the oneness.

In this regard, the situation for the word "religion" is more complicated, because, in the case of philosophy, although it is not possible to present a unique definition which encompass all the philosophies, but, at least, the instances of philosophy is clear; and there is no differences in their opinions that whether it is true to call a "thought system" as philosophy or not. While in the case of religion, we can see the opposite. That is, not only there is a wide difference in the definitions of religion, even it is one of the problems in "philosophy of religion", but also in some cases, there are differences

between scholars in assuming faith and practice systems, e.g. Marxism, as religion. Hence, since the definition of philosophy of religion is dependant to the definition of philosophy and religion, so the ambiguities in these two definitions lead to pose problems in the definition of "philosophy of religion". It is difficult to say what the philosophy of religion is. One might define it as "philosophizing about religion". But people disagree about the nature of philosophy and religion, so this definition has its drawbacks. (Davies, 1993: ix)

Proudfoot said:

"Philosophy of religion is the philosophical scrutiny of religion, but the meaning of those terms and the proper method and content of the field are subject to considerable dispute." (Proudfoot, 1993: 305)

b) Multiplicity of the topics of "philosophy of religion"

The second difficulty of defining the philosophy of religion is that the philosophers of religion have discussed many diverse problems in which we cannot find any distinct unifying character.

As Alston said:

"If one surveys the various things philosophers have done in thinking about religion, it is difficult to find any unifying thread other than the fact that they all spring from reflection on religion." (Alston, 1972: 285)

c) Diverse concepts of the relationship of philosophy and Religion

Another problem, which arise ambiguity in the definition of philosophy of religion, is the type of correlation between the components of "philosophy of religion". In addition to the definitions for the components of philosophy of religion, religion and philosophy, the definition of philosophy of religion is dependent on our conception of the relation between the components. The reality is that, the discrepancy in the state of this relation is not less than the discrepancy in the definition of philosophy and religion.

The relation between philosophy and religion has diverse and even controvert picture between scholars; in one instance, Søren Kierkegaard holds that philosophy and reason is an obstacle in the religious path; and holds that not only the faith doesn't need reason and philosophy, but also by entering the reasoning into the field of faith and by using reason in the sacred realm of religion, the faith

could be eradicated. For him and his folowers, the realm of faith begins where the influence of reason ends.

Schools like "Logical Positivism" hold that intellectual knowledge fall into disuse, and believe in meaninglessness of philosophical propositions. Therefore, they reject discussion about reasoning and philosophizing on religious issues. A philosopher like Kant divides realms of intellect and philosophy as well, and holds that theoretical intellect is unable in the field of religion.

In contrast to this negative attitude towards the relation between reason and religion, rationalist philosophers appeal to the reason in explaining and proving faith affairs.

This diversity in approaches and attitudes on the relation between philosophy and religion is another cause for posing challenge in the definition of "philosophy of religion".

Considering the problems in the way of the definition of "philosophy of religion", some thinkers believe that "philosophy of religion" is not definable. Some of these thinkers believe that, "the phrase Philosophy of Religion is too ambiguous that there is no comprehensive definition for that, it seems that no one could propose a comprehensive and precise definition for "philosophy of religion". While there is no clear definition for philosophy, how could we offer a clear definition for philosophy of religion? (Otingen, 1375: 24)

According to the aforementioned problems, it seems that it is not possible to offer a comprehensive and withholding definition for this discipline of the study of religion, But considering the possibility of offering definition for it also is not unjustified. That is, the impossibility of offering a definition which: 1) Indead all existing considerations on philosophy and religion as well including all raised problems under the name of philosophy of religion, 2) exclude the problems of the other disciplines in the study of religion. We should not block the way for providing any kind of definition. Because, according to some general characteristics of the issues in philosophy of religion, it could be possible to provide a definition, which distinguish this discipline from other disciplines of the study of religion, and this amount is sufficient for the definition. As such, it could be limited by expressing the characteristics of philosophy and the intended religion, in the use of its genitive case. And in this way, it would provide a more limited definition; as the authors of the book *Reason and religious belief* did in the same way; that is, they give

their intended definition by expressing descriptions on philosophy and religion and then, they opine that:

Obviously, all such studies putting a wholly subject under consideration (like philosophy of art, philosophy of science and so on) suffer from a double ambiguity in that both the nature of philosophy and the discipline under study can be conceived in a variety of ways. (Peterson, 1991: 8)

Accordingly, now we review the definitions offered by the thinkers. A brief look at the existing definitions on the philosophy of religion, clarifies that the philosophers of religion defined this discipline in two different ways. These two groups of definitions are as follows:

1) Rational defense of religion
Some thinkers have defined the philosophy of religion as the rational defense of religion. John Hick says:

It was at one time generally understood to mean religious philosophizing in the sense of the philosophical defense of religious convictions. It was seen as continuing the work of "natural," distinguished from "revealed," theology. Its program was to demonstrate rationally the existence of God, thus preparing the way for the claims of revelation. But it seems better to call this endeavor "natural theology," and to term the wider philosophical defense of religious beliefs "apologetics." (Hick, 1990: 1)

b) John Hospers says that philosopher of religion is concerned, as philosophy always is, with the justification of belief. By what arguments, if any, can religious belief be defended or attacked? (Hospers, 1997: 201)

c) Wayne Proudfoot divides the current works in the field in two types. The second is description and analysis of religious language practice, and belief, whereas the first is "assessment of the rationality of religious beliefs, with attention to their coherence and to the cogency of arguments for their justification". (Proudfoot, 1993: 305) He also mentioned that both types of philosophy of religion are present in the contemporary literature. After a desultory period, there is renewed interest in philosophical theism. (Ibid: 311)

d) D. S. Adam:

"Philosophy of religion   . . . is the highest stage or form of theology". (Adam, 2003: 299)

2) Philosophical reflection on Religious Issues

According to many definitions, philosophy of religion is like other types of "philosophy of"; the philosophical scrutiny about some subject matter and here the religion. Therefore, philosophy of religion is the philosophical scrutiny on religious doctrines, beliefs, rituals and so on.

Many philosophers of religion have defined it as such:

a)   John Hick:

"The name "philosophy of religion" for what (by analogy with philosophy of science, philosophy of art, etc.) is its proper meaning, namely, philosophical thinking about religion." (Hick, 1990: 1)

b)   Michael Peterson:

"Philosophy of religion is the attempt to analyze and critically evaluate religious beliefs." (Peterson, 1991: 8)

c)   Alston:

"The philosophy of religion, conceived of as an attempt to carry out a rational scrutiny of the claims made by a given religion." (Alston, 1972: 287)

d)   Mitchell, Basil:

"The philosophy of religion stands in the same relationship to religion as the philosophy of history to history, or the philosophy of science to science. In each case, the philosopher is concerned to examine the arguments and clarify the concepts, which are used within the discipline he is studying. He is not himself, *qua* philosopher . . . a theologian, a historian or a scientist, but he needs to have enough experience of their work and enough imaginative sympathy with it to understand what it is they are doing or trying to do. (Mitchell, 1971: 1)

e)   Paul Copan and Chad Meister have had defined it as "Philosophical reflection on religious ideas." They described two components of the definition as blew:

"Philosophical reflection" in this context includes the careful analyses of terms, positions, reasons, and evidences for claims and hypotheses. These analyses themselves involve fundamental issues about the nature of what is real (metaphysics) and how we can know about things (epistemology). (Paul Copan and Chad Meister, 2008: 1)

"Religious ideas" in this context involve the primary issues that have been discussed and debated within the religious traditions

throughout the centuries- issues regarding encounters with the divine, the relation between science and religion, conflicting truth claims among the different religious traditions, the nature and existence of God or Ultimate Reality, and the meaning of human existence, among other topics. These are not ethereal concepts merely debated among philosophers. To the contrary, they are fundamental issues in the life and thought of living traditions. (Paul Copan and Chad Meister, 2008: 2)

There are many other philosophers of religion defining this field of study as mentioned above.

Accordingly, philosophy of religion has considered in two ways by philosophers of religion. In the former, philosophy of religion is the continuum of philosophical theology, but in the latter, philosophy of religion is one of approaches in study of religion as philosophical scrutiny. And like other approaches in study of religion studies religion from outside.

As mentioned, the dominant view of the thinkers on the philosophy of religion complies with the second definition. The following discussion in this article clarifies that this view on philosophy of religion, not the first one, is right. So that, philosophy of religion could be defined as:

Philosophy of religion is the very philosophical study of religion, that is, philosophical contemplation on religion.

4. The subject matter of "Philosophy of Religion"

As mentioned above, the subject matter of philosophy of religion is religion; but, since religion has some aspects like beliefs, rituals, and symbols and so on, this question raises that: Does the philosophy of religion concern all epistemic and ritual and other aspects of religion, or just examine some aspects of religion? In the latter case, also, it must be considered that which aspect or aspects of religion must be investigated by philosophy of religion.

Some scholars have asserted that philosophy of religion is not equally concerned with every aspect of religion. The primary, though not exclusive, focus of reflection in philosophy of religion is on what might be called "cognitive" component of religion that concerns belief. The philosopher of religion is concerned to understand what is

believed by the religious person and to assess the grounds for their thinking that a those beliefs are true or false. (Eshleman, 2008: 5)

But many others believe in a broader scope for philosophy of religion. John Hick held that it studies the concepts and propositions of theology and the reasoning's of theologians, as well as the prior phenomena of religious experience and the activities of worship upon which theology ultimately rests and out of which it has arisen. (Hick, 1990: 1)

According to this view, philosophy of religion has three religious sources for philosophical reflection:

1)   Religious claims: for example, that God exists, about which it can be asked what it means, whether it is true or whether it is reasonable to accept;

2)   Religious concepts: for example, omniscience or immutability, about which it may be asked how they are to be analyzed or whether they are compatible with each other;

3)   Religious practices: for example, prayer, about which it may be asked whether it is sensible to express a thought or desire that God already knows one to have. (Wierenega, 2003: 429)

Therefore philosophical reflections on these religious issues, claims, concepts and practices, gives rise to philosophy of religion.

5. The characteristics of "philosophy of religion:
By looking carefully and deeply into the aforementioned definition of "philosophy of religion", some points are obtained as follows:

1)   "Philosophy of religion" is a kind of "philosophy of".

As we know, philosophy has two applications: "pure philosophy" and "applied philosophy". Applied philosophy could be the "described philosophy" like Islamic Philosophy, Christian philosophy, scientific philosophy or it could be "philosophy of".

Philosophy of religion is among "philosophy of; but it must be considered that the philosophy of case falls into two categories:

a) Philosophy of and disciplines like philosophy of science, philosophy of ethics, philosophy of politics, philosophy of education, philosophy of mysticism and so on…

b) Philosophy of realities, like philosophy of the existence (ontology), philosophy of God, philosophy of the truth, philosophy of

history, philosophy of mind, philosophy of life, philosophy of technology and so on…

Philosophy of and disciplines is called "second-order knowledge", because they discuss about another discipline,. But philosophy of and realities are "first order knowledge", because the subject matter of these discipline is actual realities or related realities.

In another word, we cannot consider these philosophies among the second order knowledge because they are not standing another discipline. In this way, "philosophies of" are like first-order disciplines; as the physics that study the matter, and Astronomy that study celestial objects, and mathematics that study numbers. Indeed, to construe philosophy in "philosophies of when it is possessed by the noun truths" it is more likely refer to the method of discussion on the noun being owner in genitive construct. As an example, philosophy of self (mind) in contrast with the empirical psychology, deals with the research on the human self with the philosophical methods.

Accordingly, despite philosophy of religion is among the "philosophies of", but it is a first order knowledge and considering it as a second order knowledge, as some scholars hold (Gharamaleki, 1375: 57), is unjustified.

2) Philosophy of religion is different from philosophical theology, because philosophical theology is a part of theology, coordinate religious beliefs by the use of reason; but philosophy of religion is a branch of philosophy.

3) In the beginning of the discussion, I said that using different methods of research for the investigation on the phenomenon of religion led to the emergence of different disciplines in the study of religion. In this regard, philosophy of religion is using single method; among different methods of research -empirical, narrative, intuitive, and intellectual- it only uses the intellectual method.

4) Philosophy of religion is not an organ of religious teaching. Philosophy of religion is a second-order activity, standing at distance from its subject matter (religion). It is not itself a part of the religious realm but is related to it. (Hick, 1990: 1-2) But it is a biased view and from outside to religion; in another word we can say: philosopher of religion is as player in philosophy and as observer in religion. (Fanaii, 1375: 78) It means that when a philosopher philosophize on religion, contemplate on religion with a biased view. That is, if a Christian philosopher investigates on the incarnation doctrine, we count his

work as philosophy of religion when his beliefs don't have any role in his philosophizing, and exactly investigate as a Muslim or pagan philosopher does, or if a theist philosopher reviews the proofs for God's existence it must be exactly as a pagan or agnostic encounter the problem. Therefore, it is not necessary to look at philosophy of religion from a religious perspective:

"The atheist, the agnostic, and the man of faith all can and do philosophize about religion." (Hick, 1990: 1)

According to this consideration, philosophy of religion is a free discussion. And every philosopher, only with having the ability in philosophical contemplation, can philosophize on religion. But some thinkers in the field of religion are not in harmony with this consideration, and hold that the philosopher who wants to speak about religion must be a religious person, because, no one could become capable of understanding religion by the intellectual reflection and philosophical thinking, except in the case that the person have the distinct personal experience of religion, so this group hold that philosophy of religion must be based on religious experience. (Nut Sherma, 1373: 1)

Some thinkers are trying to combine these two views and hold that we can combine these two perspective, in the way that, philosopher of religion can be successful in the analysis and assessment of the elements of a religion, when he have a personal experience of these elements. But this case is not incompatible with not believing in the reviewed element, because, as mentioned about phenomenology of religion, one of the main conditions for this method is that the phenomenologist must consider himself as a faithful to that religion in his effort to comprehend religious phenomenon. This means that, the phenomenologist must form his mind as the believer of that faith, which in that case he acquire a proper perception and true understanding of that religious element; the goal of the researcher is not to be the obligator and follower of that thought system. (Kashifi, 1375: 267)

But it seems that, this combination is not satisfying the first group, because in contrary with their claims, their purpose of having a distinct religious experience is not merely that the philosopher of religion put himself in the position of a faithful so that he can have a realistic perception of a religious affair. For instance, to philosophize on the doctrine of Christian incarnation, one considers himself as a

faithful Christian and investigates this teaching from his perspective, but the purpose of the first group is a higher issue. Because -as mentioned before- they believe that: "philosophy of religion must be reviewed based on religious experience". A philosopher only can have a religious experience when he believes the specified teaching.

This problem will be more clarified when we note the problem of religious experience in Christian theology. As we know the concept of religious experience has introduced by Friedrich Schleiermacher against the problems introduces by Hume and critical philosophy of Kant. He changed the basis of faith from rational knowledge into personal feeling, in order to close the way for the rational objections to the scope of religious teaching. It seems that the perspective of the first group in this regard has been introduced in this sphere. Accordingly, philosophical contemplations must deal with the interpretation of intuitional data and inner feelings of a believer, but not prepare the ground for the principle of faith. (Legenhausen, 1383: 422-424)

It needs a more broad opportunity to review this perspective on the relation between reason and religion and it is one of the issues in philosophy of religion. But briefly I can say: the plan of religious experience, as a source for faith and cleaning the scope of religious beliefs from philosophical and intellectual contemplations, is an astray which the anti-rationalist Christian teachings like trinity and incarnation put before the way of Friedrich Schleiermacher and his colleagues. Indeed because this group was empty handed in presenting rational justifications and logical interpretation for some of their teachings, and when they were unable to solve the problem, they have simply removed the very problem and claiming that the scope of faith is only the scope of personal inner experience and feeling, not the scope of rationality and logical thinking. It is clear that this consideration is not acceptable for Muslim thinkers. Islamic thinkers especially philosophers believe in the efficiency of intellect in the field of main beliefs of religion, and believe that there is no anti-rational teaching in divine religion.

The result is that the claim of the first group is invalid, and the valid perspective is the view of the second group that believes that intellectual investigation on the religious teachings is not dependent to believing these teachings. Especially we believe that the faithfulness is conditioned on the knowledge, and the level of knowledge is prior to

the faith; first, the reality should be known and then the known reality might be believed.

A glance on many types about philosophy of religion is the religion confirms this assertion because for some philosophers, the philosophy of religion has involved an attempt to find a rational justification or explanation of their religions, for some it has been an attempt to justify or explain the grounds or basis of their disbelief. And for others merely an attempt to examine neutrally another area of human interest and experience. (Richard Popkin and Avrum Stroll, 2007: 176)

Therefore, it is enough for a philosopher of religion to have a sympathetically understanding of religious issues, although he is atheist or agnostic.

Notification the differences between philosophy of religion and some other branches of study of religion can help to the clarifying the definition of philosophy of religion. According to some assertions, there are two differences between philosophy of religion and history of religion aside the comparative religion:

The first is the difference in the scope of reflection. Philosophy of religion focuses primarily on cognitive aspect of religion –that which concerns religious beliefs. Scholars engaged in other academic studies of religion do not ignore this component, but their interests are not limited to this component. In these other approaches, all aspects of religion and their interconnections are objects of study. This broader work is proving to be increasingly valuable to Philosophers of religion as they seek a better understanding of the context within which religious belief function.

A second and more important difference between philosophy of religion and other academic studies of religion is that scholars engaged in the latter often hold that an aspiration to objectivity in the study of religion requires not only that one seek a standpoint of reflection outside that of religion, but also that one not entertain questions about the truth or falsity of the claims made by religious persons. For example, from this standpoint of inquiry, one is more interested in understanding *how* belief in God structures the life of individual or community rather than in the question of whether God exists. In this respect, for the philosopher of religion the question that whether a particular religious belief is true is of fundamental importance. (Eshleman, 2008: 8; Peterson, 1991: 6)

Therefore philosophy of religion has an epistemological approach in its study of religion for it examines the cognitive aspect of religion which is carried by beliefs, but the other academic disciplines of the study of religion are not engaged in the reasonability and the truth of religious assertions.

6. The scope "philosophy of religion":

The problems proposed in philosophy of religion are divided into two categories:

A. Outside-religion problems:

These are the problems, which provide the default of accepting a religion and following up the study of religion, and followers of a specified religion cannot find anything about these problems in their sacred texts. Therefore one should position and think about these issues before accepting a specified religion or despite of it. These problems, as the basis, influence on the way of our consideration of religion, and philosopher of religion must clarify his idea in this regard for the analysis of the religious elements.

Some of these problems are as follows: definition of religion, the origin of religion, human's need in religion or human expectations from religion, reason and revelation, relation between science and religion, ethics and religion, art and religion, religion and culture, spirituality and religion, religious language, the essential and accidental in religion, the scope of religion, verifiability of religion, religious pluralism, transcendent unity of religion.

B. Inside-religion problems:

These are the problems that followers of religions face by referencing to the sacred religious texts. These problems are in two groups.

1) The problems which are common between different religions, like the definition of God, proofs against or for the existence of God, attributes of God, problems related to the God's act (miracle), the problem of evil, moral system of the world, the method of understanding basic concepts of religion before believing, redemption and salvation, mysticism, religious experience, immorality of the soul, the essence of the soul, creation of the creatures from nothing to the being and …

2) Dedicated problems of a specified religion like the teachings of: trinity, original sin, incarnation in Christianity; believing in universalism and eternity of Islam; Karma and reincarnation in Hinduism and Jainism; and Nirvana in Buddhism and … (Kashifi, 1375: 274-277; Fanaii, 1375: 78-79)

Although some believe that philosophy of religion only deals with the general problems; and the specified problems are the responsibility of the theology of that religion (Fanaii, 1375: 79), but the reality is that philosophers of religion according to their interest in a specified religious tradition, in their philosophy of religion have investigated on some specified problems of that religion.

Philosophers writing in English in the twentieth century have focused their attention primarily on philosophical issues raised by theism, no doubt because Christianity was the religion with which the majority were most familiar. (Wierenega, 2003: 429) Rather some work in philosophy of religion today focuses on only a single religion, and there are certainly advantages in doing so. (Taliaferro, 1998: 24)

Accordingly we, like some Islamic scholars, can name the philosophizing on common religious issues, as "Common Philosophy of Religion" and the considering philosophically about issues belonging to some particular religion, as "Particular Philosophy of Religion". (Rabbani Golpaiegani, 1378: 97-98)

It should be noted that, the problems discussed in philosophy of religion, were not the source of concern in the same level for the philosophers of religion. But rather during the history of the philosophy of religion, some of the problems, have bring out more increasing concerns and possessed a more wide scope of the issues.

William Hasker divides the history of philosophy of religion into three phases, characterized by differences in the subject matter most actively discussed. In the first phase, lasting until about 1965, the overwhelming preoccupation was with religious language, especially with the cognitive meaningfulness of such language. In the second phase, lasting through the early 1980s, much effort was focused on what may be termed the "philosophy of theism." In the most recent period there has been a notable diversification, and the field now embraces a greater variety of topics than at any previous time. (Hasker, 2006: 421)

At the close of the twentieth century, two trends appeared to emerge in the philosophy of religion. One was an expansion of the field to include or at least border on any philosophical work that takes an explicitly theistic perspective. For example, the divine-command theory of ethics, a meta-ethical theory which holds that God's commands determine the moral status of actions, came to be treated in the textbook anthologies of philosophy of religion.

A second trend was for philosophers of religion to direct their attention, often sympathetically, to explicitly theological topics, especially to the doctrines of Christian theism. For example, in *The Logic of God Incarnate* Thomas Morris used the tools of analytic philosophy to defend the doctrine of the incarnation. Other topics to attract attention were the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and atonement. (Wierenega, 2003: 442) Recently Philosophy of religion has focused on a range of issues regarding God: semantic (concerning the meaning of the term God), metaphysical (concerning the reality and attributes of God), epistemological (concerning justified belief and knowledge regarding God's reality), and ethical (concerning the bearing of God on personal and social morality and the meaning of life). (Moser, 2006: 483)

In the other hand, the current philosophy of religion, mainly refer to the dominant religion in the west- Christianity; although some of its problems are common between the majorities of the religions, and although some of it deals with the problems which are special to some other religion. Anyway, the problems involved in the philosophy of religion in the west, ignore the Islamic teachings. Basically "western thinkers ignore generally the third world's developments in the knowledge. Islamic theology in the west, as a subsided issue, is in margin, and only the ones who are interested in the Islamic studies, study this discipline. (Legenhausen, 1383: 396)

7. The nature of "philosophy of religion:

Although we came into the result that philosophy of religion is the intellectual contemplations and philosophical scrutiny on the religious ideas, but it doesn't seem that the essence of the propositions of philosophy of religion has been clarified enough.

Philosophy of religion is the philosophical scrutiny of religion, but naturally, "the particular approach we take to philosophy of religion

depends on precisely how we conceive of the philosophical task in general." The *traditional* conception of philosophy, which was dominant throughout the history of Western thought, was that philosophy can investigate the content of our beliefs, including the truth or falsity of theological beliefs. The name *natural theology* came to be used as a label for the enterprise that presumed that belief in the existence of God and other religious beliefs could, and indeed should, be established by philosophical argument. Yet for most of the twentieth century, the principal philosophical approach among English-speaking philosophers has been *analytic*. (Michael Peterson, 1991: 8) Philosophers like William Alston, Alvin Plantinga, John Hick, Richard Swinburne and many others belong to the analytic tradition, so their philosophy of religion is the "Analytic Philosophy of Religion." The present study is analytic in its style.

The distinction philosophy of religion from two other disciplines can clarify the nature of philosophy of religion. It differs from *dogmatic* (or *confessional) theology,* which begins from the assumption that a certain religious tradition is authoritative, or that a specific creed is in fact true. A dogmatic theologian seeks to provide ways of elucidating and systematizing accepted doctrines, but does not challenge them. Philosophy of religion is also distinct from *apologetics,* which is concerned to defend a given religious position from intellectual objections. Apologetics often has a very practical side, lending itself readily to the practical activity of persuasion. While philosophical awareness and logical skill are relevant to the enterprises of dogmatic theology and apologetics, these activities are not philosophical in the fundamental sense of beginning from a position of relative openness to alternative views and willingness to critique their own most basic commitments. (Peterson, 1991: 9)

The questions proposed in philosophy of religion, apparently are the same questions, which the theologians were close with them. But the reality is that "when we get familiar with these questions, we find out that the philosophy of religion is not as the innocent as it appears... For years, philosophy were utilized by the sciences; and its slavery for the sciences is bounded to the uncountable compatibility with humanism, materialism, naturalism and other ideologies which are enemies of religion; and when philosophy proposes his questions for the theologians, it has the reasoning of all these ideologies against any probable reactions. If theologian wants to react against these

questions with the existing and registered explanations in the classic texts, whether Christian or Islamic, will be accused to be ignorant and misrelated to the problems important in this age.   Philosophy of religion is not merely another name for intellectual theology with its traditional meaning, because the very intellectual criterions, which are used in the theological problems, are changed." Nowadays, the dialogue between philosophy and theology is not merely an issue in the questioner mind of philosopher and piety soul of the theologian. Every question is accompanied with the unmentioned expectations about the kind of response, which is possible to seem plausible. Every research needs a criterion for explanation. The expectations and defaults, which form philosophy of religion, have the method of the new thought of the west. We must consider that these struggles occur in the bed of expectations, rules of reasoning and defaults which most of them are totally stranger to what we find in Islamic studies. Before Islamic scholar want to review questions the current philosophy of religion proposes for theology, must consider the aforementioned points. (Legenhausen, 1383: 414-415)

8. Conclusion and Advice

According to what was mentioned, philosophy of religion is one of the philosophy of. Philosopher of religion with the tendency to a special philosophical school, philosophizes on the concepts, claims and religious practices, although most of the problems in philosophy of religion is refer to the epistemic aspects and beliefs of religious traditions.

In the other hand, philosophizing of the philosophers on the aspects of religion has not a unique and one approach, instead the philosophy of religion in the west is deeply under the influence of current philosophical schools like positivism, analytical philosophy, existentialism and so on. It means that every philosopher of religion come up with idea on the problems of philosophy of religion, in accordance with the special tendency in epistemology and metaphysics and being interested in a special philosophical school. As Quinn says:

"Many philosophers approached religion from within well-established traditions of thought such as pragmatism, process philosophy, phenomenology, and Thomism." (Quinn, 2006: 497)

Moreover, exactly for this matter we can see the same wide diversity and even contradictory between pure philosophy schools in philosophy of religion. And the only reason is that the philosophy of religion belonging to a philosopher as a "philosophy of" is the result of his pure philosophy. That is why the differences and paradoxes of different schools like existentialism and analytical philosophies go toward philosophy of religion. Base on this, finding the depth of the problems proposed by philosopher of religion is bounded to having enough knowledge about the philosophical tendency and paying attention to their philosophical principle in pure philosophy. In another word, until we do not know the pure philosophy towards which the philosopher has tendency, and we are not aware of the epistemic and metaphysical principals and its influences, our knowledge about his philosophy of religion is imprecise and with errors.

The recommendation is that "if it is supposed that Islam is the way of salvation for all humans in the world, including western people, we must consider seriously the proposed problems of the western philosophy of religion in Islamic theology. (Legenhausen, 1383: 401) In the second step, with a priori approach and with a logical perspective, we must pursuit to define a discipline entitled "Islamic Philosophy of Religion", which is raised from Islamic philosophy and Islam. It means that the chosen philosophical school for philosophizing on religious teachings is Islamic philosophy and the its possessed noun is Islam.

In this case, with the use of the powerful Islamic philosophy - especially Mulla Sadra's Theosophy- we can establish "Islamic philosophy of religion, and do intellectual investigations on the basic beliefs in Islam.

I believe that, the result of these two basic and necessary steps - having enough knowledge about the realized philosophy of religion in the west and philosophizing on the teachings of Islam specially with regarding the problems proposed in philosophy of religion- is presenting a reasonable image of the Islamic teachings and preparing the ground for effective defense of these beliefs against the attacks of the opponent thoughts.

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