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<sup>1</sup> Assistant professor of IHCS  
E-mail: Drshhs44@gmail.com

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Defining Religion: Methodology

Sayyed Hossein Hosseini<sup>1</sup> 

**Abstract:** One of the most challenging issues raised in the theology and philosophy of religion is to define the concept of religion and its main components. This study aims to criticize and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of a definition of religion presented in "*Reason and Religious Belief*". The results show that the main strength of this definition is that it considers "beliefs", "actions", and "emotions", which are among the existential needs and abilities of humans. However, some weaknesses of this definition are as follows: 1- Difficulty in achieving common points between religions, 2- Ambiguous explanation of the main elements of the definition, 3- Inclusion beyond the definition, and 4- Inattention to specific and individual features in the definition of religion. It is noteworthy that one of the main challenges in defining the concept of religion is the necessity of a systemic approach. In addition, such an approach should be viewed based on methodological conditions.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of Religion; Concept of Religion; Methodology; Religious Study; Systemic Approach.

## Problem Statement

Is it possible to achieve a comprehensive definition of religion? Is it possible to rely on the common points of religions to achieve such a definition? What criteria should be considered for defining religion? Is it possible to discuss this issue only in the realm of theology, especially the philosophy of religion? Is it necessary to establish linguistic rules and principles to get rid of confusion and conceptual ambiguity in various and contradictory definitions?

However, this challenge is not only restricted to the concept of religion, but defining other general concepts faces such challenges. It can be stated that the story is the same regarding many important concepts in humanities. In other words, "conceptual games" play a major role in what and why humanities are in this field.

One of the most important pillars in this regard is that defining and analyzing humanities concepts should be based on specific rules and criteria, especially when we face multidimensional concepts that are linked with many other concepts (e.g. the concept of religion).

What is the reason? This is probably due to the inclusion of the concept of religion in various dimensions and aspects of human life,

as religion has many to do with different areas of human life.

In response to the question "what is religion?", John Hick, in the introduction of his book "Philosophy of Religion", reviews the phenomenological, psychological, sociological, and naturalistic definitions of religion, all of which describe and interpret this term, as he states, and then refers to the general and wide domain of religion and says, "... but all these definitions are "constructed"; i.e. they first consider what this term should mean and then they present the same meaning as a definition. It may be more realistic to consider that the term "religion" does not have a single meaning accepted by everyone, but many phenomena are gathered under the umbrella of religion and are related to each other. This is referred to as "family similarity" by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Instead of seeking a special feature among various phenomena to be called religion, it is better to focus on a series of family similarities" (Hick, 1997: 16). The main purpose of this study is to identify the main components and criteria of the concept of religion.

Lexical or terminological definitions and also static or mechanical definitions of the concept of religion do not work because the scope of religion cannot be restricted to one or

more specific dimensions. As a result, it is better to propose systematic definitions, the main characteristic of which, when compared to fixed and closed definitions, is that they determine the most important components and criteria affecting the conceptual analysis of religion. We cannot find a single word, concept, or meaning in humanities conceptualization, but we have a network of different and interrelated concepts; understating the meaning of each concept in this network requires understating the meaning of other related concepts. Therefore, in simple language, it is not possible to define the concept of religion without considering concepts such as man, God, world, existence, ultimate, origin, ethics, and society. Nevertheless, there is a need for establishing a systematic network of meanings between them while considering complex conceptual games.

"Religion refers to a set of beliefs, actions, and emotions (individual and collective) related to the concept of ultimate truth" (Peterson *et al.*, 1998: 20).

This is the definition of religion presented by the authors of "*Reason and Religious Belief*" in the first chapter of this book. However, they acknowledge that it is complicated to propose a precise definition of religion and reach a consensus about it.

Elsewhere in this book, they say, "These general citations indicate that it is difficult to define religion. In addition, when we discuss religion in general, we may be exposed to carelessness and vagueness and even distort the important and complicated subtleties of existing religions ...." (Ibid, 19). This study aims to show that the authors of this book have been also trapped by such vagueness!

In his book "*The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*", Malcolm Hamilton states, "is not simple to define religion because competent authorities have provided various definitions about religion, each of which is clearly inconsistent with others" (Hamilton, 2008: 26).

The analysis of the concept of religion and its dimensions has always been among the most challenging topics of religious studies, especially the philosophy of religion. This can be attributed to the complicated components of religion, the frequent and diverse applications of this concept, its ultimate, divine, and ideal aspects, and its relation with the human existential domains (Hosseini, 1993: 52).

The approach that the book "*Reason and Religious Belief*" has taken to defining religion is "finding the common points"; i.e. the authors reviewed different religions to find their common and similar common characteristics. In this regard, they say, "Considering the

general features that the structure of all religions seems to share, it is possible to provide a functional definition of religion" (Peterson *et al.*, 1998: 20).

While analyzing the similarities and differences between the religious worldview and the philosophical worldview, Wilhelm Dilthey, the author of "*The Essence of Philosophy*", discusses the difficulties of defining religion and then emphasizes the approach of "finding the common points". He says, "Defining the concept of religion faces the same difficulties as in the case of philosophy. The scope of religious facts should be determined based on naming and interconnections in order to deduct the essence of religion from the facts included in this scope. However, there is no effective methodology for this purpose; but there are ways and methods to analyze the religious worldview (Dilthey, 2002: 148).

### Review and Analysis

A major strength of the definition of religion presented in "*Reason and Religious Belief*" is that it considers three domains of "beliefs", "actions", and "emotions", indicating the great attention religions pay to human existential needs, abilities, and powers. The separation between these three domains reveals the three parts of human existence: 1- intellectual and

rational power, 2- behavioral power, and 3- inner and emotional power. Since religions cannot be oblivious to the dimensions of human existence, the attention of this definition to these three domains indicates the authors' meticulousness as well as the dependence of religion on human needs and abilities. In fact, any definition of religion cannot ignore the identity and nature of man. Nevertheless, some of the weaknesses of this definition are as follows:

1- The first weakness of this definition is related to the methodology the authors have employed. After discussing the difficulty of defining religion due to the complexity of finding minimum common points and talking about the details of religion, the authors of "*Reason and Religious Belief*" state that focusing on only a specific religion may understate some very general characteristics of religions. In terms of their methodology, they say, "..... however, it is an inescapable fact that if we do not find common features between all religions, we can answer the question "what characteristic(s) can make for a specific religion?" (Peterson *et al.*, 1998: 20).

First, such a definition, which is based on common points between religions, cannot be explained by logical criteria and rational justifications. That is to say, there is no rational reason or logical proof that the concept of

religion can be defined correctly based on such a basis. If there is a dispute on the meaning of a word with many uses, is it possible to make sure that we can find the true meaning of that word by simply referring to common points and similarities?

Second, any definition of religion based on common points between all religions necessarily traps us in generalization and ambiguity, because we have to overlook the unique and specific characteristics of each religion to achieve a minimum of common points in general. This methodology faces exactly the same trap of vagueness and generalization that the authors themselves tried to avoid it (Ibid, 19).

Third, defining the concept of religion based on common points of religions ultimately faces the problem of "vicious circle", because the basic principle of such definitions is to review the existing religions and remove their unique and specific features in order to reach a list of their common points. In fact, they try to find common points among the existing facts of religions. This methodology, which itself aims to find a definition of religion requires us to already review many religions based on a specific definition of religion and then seek to find their common points! In other words, we have already defined religion to be a basis for

reviewing the existing religions and finding their common points. This can be referred to as nothing but "vicious circle". Additionally, a fundamental question here is how we can make sure that what we have listed as a religion is really a religion. Some of the items that we have listed as a religion would not be taken as a religion.

Therefore, the main ambiguous point of this methodology for defining the concept of religion is that it evaluates the existing facts based on a preconceived assumption of religion to achieve a list of current religions and then look for common points between them.

If there is a definition of religion, what is the point in searing for common points? Or if there is no definition of religion, what are the criteria for finding the real examples of religions?

Fourth, since it is not possible to count all religions, there will no definitive list of common points between religions. Moreover, considering the overly general definition of religion proposed by the authors of the above-mentioned book, it is not an exaggeration to say that we will have as many religions as there are humans. If so, how can we achieve such a limited list of common points between religions?

2- Although the authors of "*Reason and Religious Belief*" warn of the danger of vagueness and generalization in defining the concept of religion before presenting their own definition of this concept, they have been trapped by the same things when they are trying to define religion because their definition is not less ambiguous than the three quoted definitions:

- Tiele, C. P.: Religion is a state of mind or a pure and respectful state called *khashiat* (conscious fear of God along with a sense of respect).
- F. H. Bradley: More than anything else, religion is an attempt to reveal the complete truth of good in all aspects of our existence.
- James Martineau: Religion means believing in an ever-living God; i.e. the divine will and mind that rules the world and is morally related to mankind.

However, the definition presented in "*Reason and Religious Belief*" does not clearly specify the differences between and the boundaries of beliefs, actions, and emotions. In fact, the scope of their inclusion has been considered to be very broad. In addition, the meaning of "ultimate truth" has not been precisely clarified. In their definition, the concept of "ultimate truth" involves a wide

range from divine ultimate to communist materialism. In other words, the concept of "ultimate truth" in this definition is taken as a kind of idealism and convenience. This is so vague and general that it includes both secular humanism and ideals of monotheistic religions, while these two completely oppose each other.

3- The most important weakness of this definition is its excessive inclusiveness or, in other words, non-obstructiveness. This definition involves all human religions and schools, intellectual and social trends, and even human theories. In fact, the scope of this definition misses no cultural phenomenon. The authors state, "If we come up with a set of actions, emotions, and beliefs subjected to ultimate truth, which sufficiently suits our definition, we are allowed to call it an example of religion" (Ibid, 21). They reiterate that monotheistic religions, Buddhism, secular humanism, and communism are prime examples of this definition, and feminist movements, liberal schools of thought, and so on can be also categorized as religion (Ibid, 21).

Therefore, the scope of the concept of religion in this definition is so wide that considers no boundaries. This is not consistent with the rules of a definition because the philosophy of defining a concept is to

distinguish concepts and words from objective realities in order to separate different areas from each other and achieve a correct understanding of their relationship and participation. According to the principle of differentiation, when we aim to define a concept or word, it is necessary to separate the desired characteristics of that word or concept from its other characteristics. "The definition of a word determines the features (characteristics, qualities, and properties) something should possess to be called by that word" (Hospers, 2000: 49). If we define a concept or word based on very general components in a way that overlaps with many other words, what is then the philosophy of defining words and concepts? Nevertheless, the story is the same in the definition of many concepts of humanities as the ambiguity and brevity of a word or concept can lead to the interference of many borders, such as the definition of concepts such as culture, society, and politics. In fact, such concepts are defined so generally that it will not be easy to clarify differences between the intended concept and other ones due to the inclusion of many other things in the scope of the definition. For example, Raymond Williams defines culture as follows: "culture is a special way of life". This definition is so general that we can cauterize many affairs under "a special way of life". As

a result, this definition includes individual life, collective life, politics, economy, ethics, religion, art, industry, sports, habits, etc., but the differences between the concept of culture and the above-mentioned ones cannot be clearly specified. Therefore, we have actually found no definition of culture because this definition does not exclude other affairs or concepts.

Malcolm Hamilton similarly criticizes functional definitions (inclusive definitions) when compared to intrinsic definitions. Considering the definition of religion proposed by Durkheim and Yinger, he says, "..... if religion is defined as something that increases social unity or cohesion, anything that plays such a role should be called a religion." This inclusiveness is usually added to definitions intentionally. Functionalist definitions usually originate from a theoretical perspective that aims to define religion based on a fundamental role. Such theorists often categorize systems values and beliefs such as communism, fascism, and nationalism as a religion because they argue that such systems serve the same function. Yinger provides an example of an inclusive definition of religion; he states, "Religion is a system of beliefs and practices that people use to deal with the ultimate issues of human life" (Hamilton, 2008; 36). Hamilton goes on to say, "The main problem with such

definitions is their excessive generalization. It is very surprising that such definitions even involve systems of beliefs and ideologies, such as communism, which are obviously in conflict with religion..." (Hamilton, 2008: 36).

4-The authors of the book said that they are rational after mentioning the definitions of religion and the fact that each definition has a certain set of features. Because religions are so multifaceted, it is illogical to see any one feature of them as a comprehensive description (of religion) (Peterson et al., 1998: 19).

This statement appears logical up to a point, but there is no need to characterize each religion in terms of its unique qualities. Instead, one should continue on a path that considers the basic framework and structure of religions. No need to give it a precise definition. If we are unsuccessful, we will either have our own definition for each religion or we will at least have a very basic comprehension of the notion of religion.

The emphasis on this viewpoint is because, in theory, it is impossible to rationally distinguish between the basic principles of religions and their specifics; as a result, any broad definition traps us in a circle of ambiguity and abstraction. For instance, according to the book's definition, when it comes to beliefs, deeds, or the ultimate truth;

Or should we be content with the overall meaning and concept of these words and give up on the various and numerous examples of these elements in religions, or should we inquire as to which beliefs? What kind of emotions? This religious tradition belongs to which group? Or the ultimate reality of what one wants from ritual and religion? and inquiries of the kind.

The collection of acts, emotions, and perceptions is also the ultimate truth since beliefs in their generic sense do not exist in the actual world because they are either specific to Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or other faiths, each of which has its own unique and distinctive shape and quality. Therefore, it is merely an imagined and mental picture that will not solve a problem to simply separate a conceptual general abstraction from its external realities (which cannot describe its different and many and sometimes contradicting and objective instances).

Therefore, it may be preferable to define each religion in terms of both its characteristics and its objective and specific characteristics. In any case, the book's authors haven't given a good reason why personal and individual characteristics should not be taken into account when defining a religion. In the examination of the fundamentals of religion, "Ninian Smart" also brought up this problem and referred to it



as the "organic" aspect of religions. He claims: "In reality, religion is a unique system, or collection of systems, that combines institutions, doctrines, myths, rituals, emotions, and other comparable aspects. As a result, in order to comprehend a belief that occurs in such a system, it is important to consider its unique context, which includes other systemic beliefs, rituals, and other elements. When considering the earliest Christian church's Lordship of Christ, for instance, one must also take into account its belief in the Creator and the religious practices of its citizens. Although Hendrik Kraemer, a Dutch theologian of the 20th century, referred to this systematic aspect of religion as dictatorial, it seems that the term "organism" is more appropriate. In this instance, the question of whether the action or belief put in one organ system may be accurately contrasted with the identical scenario in another organ system emerges. In other words, every religion has distinctive features of its own, and attempting to compare faiths may obscure these distinctive features." (Smart, 1973: 14).

Another point must be considered that because religion does not have essences (genus and species), can it be logically given a substantive and conceptual definition of it? If a definition aims to achieve the truth of religion in the world of things, it must be

ignored, because the actual definition of religion means providing the truth of its essence to sum up all its logical elements is not feasible, but to follow the route of the logical principles of definition to follow the minimum meaning of a concept and word for usual understanding, hence, it is feasible, even though that word does not have logical essence, because many other things do not have a logical genus and species, but it can be provided a conceptual understanding of them and made the same conceptual definition the basis of scientific and general conversation, like the conceptual image of God, soul, history, etc.; although sometimes they do not have a conceptual instance and although it is not feasible to obtain a substantive definition of them, a conceptual understanding can be gained.

5-The absence of a systematic approach to the definition of religion and its components is one of the methodological issues with the aforementioned definition. Because a complete definition and barrier must have two elements.

Start by focusing on all the key parts of the desired term or notion, that is, all the features or variables that help you visualize it well becoming too one-dimensional. In order to describe the multifaceted character of religion, which encompasses all of these types of human

activity, Peter Alston identified a remote viewpoint as one of the problems with definitions of religion and confining religion to belief, sentiment, ceremonial, or moral conduct. He is lacking in knowledge. (Salari Far, 2005: 106). Of course, failing to adhere to this criterion is regarded as one of the most significant definitional mistakes and conceptual slippages, in which case a sketchy, one-dimensional representation of the topic suffices, with various levels and dimensions. We won't receive a whole picture since the many phenomena in the humanities sector (particularly) aren't taken into consideration, leading to a one-dimensional perspective and failing to perceive alternative perspectives.

Second, a systematic definition should allow for the creation of a unique relationship and order between the components that have been chosen. If the components are just randomly combined, there may be chaos and confusion as a result, and we end up with an internally incoherent definition.

What are the features of a systemic view? The most significant characteristics of systems methodology as a type of general attitude to the world and a type of general worldview are:

1- Holistic view (against divisive or elementalistic thinking) and paying attention to the concept of totality (wholism); In this

viewpoint, the world is a single whole and comprises the related parts.

2- Paying attention to the principle of relation and connection and coordination among system components. From this viewpoint, every part of the world is a part of a total system and the interaction among the parts is one of the basic properties of a system.

3- Paying attention to the concept of structure and organization and the world is a set of multiple systems which are related to each other.

4- The principle of purpose and aim orientation in a system.

Due to the noted points, the issues which are not regarded in the definition of the authors of the book about the concept of "religion" are as follows:

First: the requirement of observing the principle of harmony among the elements and proportionality of the components of religion.

Second: Substituting the group of "thought system", "value system" and "educational system" instead of beliefs, actions, and emotions.

Third: The attention to the realm of the individual, social, and historical aspects of religion.

Fourth: the requirement of connection with the realm of divinity (the divine origin of religions).

Fifth: The role of religion in the divine guardianship of human beings.

Sixth: The requirement to pay attention to the aim and ultimate application of religion for humans.

The six aspects mentioned above are unquestionably all drawn from the systematic approach's guiding concepts and features, and it can be anticipated that each of them will convey a particular philosophy or set of ideas on the subject of religion.

The first point: To define religion, one must consider this significant principle which religion is a system and a systematic group, and the idea that religion comprises isolated parts and elements without a meaningful and coordinated systematic connection (as the definition of the book is taken), it will mean accepting components which cannot be combined and without overall compatibility, and at last, we will encounter the challenge of not achieving a single and usual result, that is, a type of possibility of summing up elements which are contradictory and at least contradictory with each other, which does not seem logical.

The second point: Each of the components and pillars of religion has its own unique structure, as well as certain guidelines and boundaries. Different from the description of religion as a group resulting from the united

unity of "intellectual system," "value system," and "educational system" is the definition of religion as a set of beliefs, acts, and emotions that are ultimately personal or communal. That is the distinction between a personal, monolithic perspective of religion and a systematic understanding of its constituent parts. Divine religions provide a "belief system" as opposed to merely individual "beliefs," as well as a system and operating system as well as a unique moral education system, which is, of course, at the core of such systems. Individual views, acts, and emotions are addressed in great detail. When a "system" is discussed, it signifies, for instance, that monotheistic faiths (particularly Islam) have a large collection of diverse, linked, and coordinated viewpoints and theoretical concepts, each of which comprises components and subcomponents. These additional components, individual, group, societal, and historical dimensions, are also present in value (moral) and educational (practical) systems. These three systems naturally result from the three parts and requirements of human life, namely the rational, emotional, and practical. According to this perspective, man is a three-dimensional entity with the capacity for insight and reason, action and conduct, as well as psychic and mystical abilities. Moreover, in order to

address and control the required demands, religion also created three coordinated systems. This significant point is precisely derived from the systemic approach to analyzing the concept of religion, and in reality, two issues are emphasized in this matter:

1. Focusing on the system and systemic aspect of the components that comprise religion as opposed to considering these components to be non-systematic and 2. Being aware that each component of the subgroup of systems that make up religion has a purpose and will occupy a particular place and role within its own group and within the entirety of its unique systematic structure. Each component of the subgroup of systems that make up religion also has a specific system and structure. In this way, if the "belief system" of the Islamic religion is one of its systems, then "monotheism" as a core tenet of the sub-group of the belief system is also referred to as a subsystem and makes up a system in and of itself. Furthermore, in this instance, the "Principle of Monotheism" in the "Islamic Belief System" group will find its authentic meaning in the context and position of the whole system, as well as in the history and position of the group as a whole. If we don't, we will experience some kind of partiality; according to "Murren," a partial perspective

(mutilated mind) that even goes beyond this assertion is a disease of modern human thought. (2000) (Murren, 21).

The third point: All religions, particularly monotheistic ones, assert that by having such systems, they not only address the concerns of the individual, the group, and society, but also take into consideration the scope of human history. This statement indicates that religion is not only established to address the needs of individuals or to focus on their unique characteristics, as is sometimes the case with schools and elementary schools that were created by humans, nor is it only established to address social and collective crises. Instead, religion operates within the context of trans-individual and trans-collective, or historical control. Therefore, its laws and systems are designed in such a way as to make the man grow along his historical path, and in reality, this is the real line between monotheistic religions and humanistic schools. However, if what the theories and human schools bring to humanity, the religions move in the same horizon and to the same extent, there is no longer any difference between the capacities of religions and the level of human power, and the absence of religion in the history of humanity does not mean that there has not been religion.

It emphasizes that religion is not only due to the individuality of humans which it has

spoken about individual requirements (in the form of spiritual, emotional, rational, and practical requirements of humans); moreover, it not only relates to collective and social requirements (in the scope of human social relationships and the limits of human society); therefore, the concern about the relation between religion is not only confined which depends on the private life of the individual and the public life of the society, but beyond these two realms, the religion responds to human historical requirements. Hence, in such a viewpoint, we will pass the horizon of thinkers like Hegel, who have discussed the concern of relation between religion and the general life of society (Planet, 2016: 29-30), and we will follow the horizon of the historical role of religion, or from viewpoint what Stace said about the relation between religion and the way of life in the world (Stace, 2010: 268) or like the viewpoints which investigated the religion only from the angle of social attitude and regarded its performance as a type of connection (which is the finding of the social connection of people) (Dilthey, 2004: 147-148); we have gone more and regarded this relation both in the affairs of individual and collective life, but also in the context of human life via human history.

In the sociological approaches mentioned above, religion's impacts and social

repercussions are not always considered; in fact, one of the many social purposes of religions, or the character of religion, has been defined with several attempts and considerations. While it has been assumed that collective activities and social structure are equivalent, the effects of religions are not only dependent on the instruments and characteristics of society. According to these definitions, "religion" is referred to as a "social institution" that reflects society and its societal structures, much like other phenomena. (R.K., Hosseini, 1997: 51)

Mukhtar thus believes that the sphere, dimensions, and roles of religion extend far beyond the person and society, (Sociological methods), but rather to the change and development of human destiny throughout human history (from the past to the present and the future). it will be found The divine religion ensures the guidance of people at the levels of individual communication (man's relationship with God, with himself, and with fellow species and other beings), at the level of social communication (interaction and interaction of humans with each other within the bounds of civil society), as well as on the level of historical communication. That is to say, human evolution has various scopes according to the rational needs in individual, social, and historical contexts. In this sense, the subject of

guidance is not restricted to a single person or culture but rather continues throughout history, and its laws and regulations are understood and justified in light of a philosophical perspective on how history has developed (Hosseini, 1997: 51).

The fourth point: Contrary to the opinions of certain sociologists of religion, the link between religion and God has been overlooked in the definition of this book. This is also a crucial dividing line between religion and non-religion since, in general, any phenomenon that lacks a supernatural origin or This statement of the book's authors, who instead of restricting religion to the divine world mentioned the extremely general concept of ultimate truth, has no logical justification because if something is not connected to the transcendental world in some way, it cannot be considered within the concept of religion. Of course, there is no reason for us to assume that the scope of religion must include all aspirations and purposes, from the realm of divinity to even the world of matter, and there is also no need that the reach of religion to be restricted to instances with a divine origin. A greater distinction and delineation will result from such a point of view, which will get us one step closer to the purpose and philosophy of defining the concept of religion.

The fifth and sixth points: The two concerns of religion and man's connection, as well as the question of the purposes and objectives of religion, are left out of the writers' description of their work. The question of why such a collection of ideas, behaviors, and emotions were created based on the (vague and general) concept of the ultimate truth should be put to the book's writers. What is the relationship between man and his existential philosophy in this collection? What benefits does this collection provide people? And lastly, based on such a desired ultimate truth, what goals does this collection want to accomplish? Is there no stated goal?

These are the questions that the aforementioned definition does not address, and the reasons behind this are twofold: first, it ignores the important role that religion plays in the instruction, evolution, and guardianship of humans; and second, it omits to mention the ultimate purposes and uses of religion as well as the crucial objective of human guardianship. However, from another angle, religion is shown to lead and direct man, eventually enabling him to experience overall growth and development. As a result, "for religion" is still undefined, and "why religion" is not addressed in the book's definition; in addition, the subject of "how religion" has not been adequately examined.

Finally, it will be more logical to make a basic difference between the concept of "religion" and the concept of "humanistic schools". It may not be irrelevant to include the definition of the author of the article "Religion in the context of views" to study and survey; In the above article, after quoting theological, sociological and theoretical, intuitive, and psychological viewpoints on the concept of religion and their brief criticism, he mentions, "Intellectual systems (beliefs and teachings), value system (laws and decrees), and education system (ethical and social orders) that are in the realm of the individual, social and historical dimensions from God and for the guardianship and guidance of humans on the route which all-round growth and perfection are sent by God." (Hosseini, 1997: 52). In some routes, the mentioned definition has differences by defining the text of the book, and in reality, six points from a systemic viewpoint were regarded.

Regarding these principles will explain the differences between this definition and the definition of the book:

- 1- Inclusion of religion on three elements: intellectual system (insight), emotional system (value), and action system (action).
- 2- The principle of harmony among the elements and structural components of religion.

- 3- Regarding the concept of systematicity the three elements of religion (identifying the place and role of each sub-system in the system).

- 4- The topic of religion as a collection of objective facts (and not just a collection of subjective propositions).

- 5- Considering three realms of religion including individual, society, and history.

- 6- The divine origin of religion.

- 7- The final purpose of religion.

- 8- The function of religion in the guardianship and guidance of man.

### Conclusion

An accurate definition of religion is one of the most important issues in the philosophy of religion. There are many complex definitions of religion quoted from experts and thinkers of various intellectual groups in books on the theology and philosophy of religion. It can be actually stated that every human can propose a different definition of religion. The solution to overcome this challenge is not to discover the common features of religions, but it is to break the circle of ambiguity and general definitions in order to distinguish the domain of words. In fact, it is better to define this concept based on a systematic and methodological view and explain the principles and rules of regular definitions. Outlining the criteria for the

systematic method of defining religion based on such an approach can help us achieve more comprehensive definitions of religion. The result of such a process is not logically providing a fixed and close-ended definition, but it provides us with a "system of definitions" that both produce a comprehensive definition and serves as a basis for proposing more complete definitions over time. Therefore, we can here notice differences between "systematic approaches" and monopolistic methods. It can be hence concluded that the first prerequisite for achieving a

comprehensive definition of the concept of definition is to consider the rules and regulations of defining a multifaceted scientific term. All definitions of religion proposed in this field have considered one or more principles of such rules and regulations and, as a result, focused on some aspects of this concept and overlooked others. Therefore, discussing the philosophy of defining concepts and words and establishing logical and rational principles and rules of definitions are among the ways to overcome this crisis of "confusion of definition" in the field of humanities.

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## روش تعریف دین



سیدحسین حسینی<sup>۱</sup> 

<sup>۱</sup> استادیار فلسفه و روش‌شناسی  
پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات  
فرهنگی

E-mail: drshhs44@gmail.com

### چکیده:

یکی از چالش‌برانگیزترین مسایل مطرح در حوزه مطالعات دین‌شناسی و فلسفه دین، تعریف مفهوم دین و کشف و تحلیل مؤلفه‌های اصلی آن است. این مقاله پس از ارائه تعریفی از دین برآمده از کتاب «عقل و اعتقاد دینی»، به نقد و تحلیل آن پرداخته و نقاط قوت و ضعف آن را بررسی می‌کند. توجه به سه حوزه اعتقادات، اعمال، و احساسات در میان نیازها و توانایی‌های وجودی انسان، از امتیازات تعریف پیش‌یاد است؛ اما این تعریف، کاستی‌هایی نیز دارد مانند: ۱- مشکل دستیابی به مشترکات بین ادیان، ۲- ابهام در تبیین عناصر اصلی تعریف، ۳- شمولیت بیش از حد تعریف و ۴- عدم احتساب ویژگی‌های اختصاصی و منفرد در تعریف دین. مقاله در نهایت نتیجه می‌گیرد که ضرورت نگاه سیستمی در تعریف دین از مشکلات و چالش‌های این امر است و هم‌اینکه باید با در نظر داشتن شرایط متدیک تعریف سیستمی به این مسأله نگرست.

واژه‌های کلیدی: دین، روش‌شناسی، رویکرد سیستمی، نقد، فلسفه دین.

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