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Analysis of the Unity of Religions and the Plurality of Religions within the Horizon of Traditionalist and Post-modernist Knowledge of Religion based on the Thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Peter Byrne

Alireza nahri 

M.A. in Comparative Religions and Mysticism, Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran.
alirezanahri@ut.ac.ir

Jafar Shahnazari  *

Associate Professor, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Ahl al-Bayt Faculty of Theology and Education, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran.
j.shanazari@ltr.ui.ac.ir

Abstract

This research examines the unity and multiplicity of religions within traditionalist knowledge of religion and post-modernist cognitive of religion based on the Thoughts of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Peter Byrne. This comparison approaches the issue through an analysis of religion, pluralism, and religion's unity. Byrne's pluralistic perspective, grounded in realism and reference, suggests a path toward religion's unity. Nasr's traditionalist perspective on the transcendent Unity of Religions is predicated on the shared true essence of religions—based on Sophia Perennis—a single truth underlying them. He approaches the study of religions through mystical and philosophical foundations. A comparative analysis reveals potential convergences and commonalities between these perspectives. Traditionalism posits the transcendent Unity of Religions, and pluralism acknowledges a shared transcendent reality underlying religions. However, differences exist. Nasr's thought originates from a mystical perspective, where unity is based on Sophia Perennis and the emanation of truth from unity to plurality. Peter Byrne, in contrast, appears to be transitioning from non-realism to cognitive realism within the epistemic framework of modern thought. As a result, in this study, the position of postmodernist cognitive of religion and traditional knowledge regarding religion has been clarified in the perspective of these two thinkers, and through this, a pathway for thinking about the status of religion in the future world is opened.

Keywords: Pluralism, Religion's Unity, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Peter Byrne, Realism, Reference.

پرتال جامع علوم انسانی

*Corresponding author

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Introduction

This study compares two approaches¹: Peter Byrne's referential realism (as a philosopher of religion and professor of philosophy at King's College London) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr's transcendent religion's unity based on Sophia Perennis (as an Iranian traditionalist philosopher and professor of philosophy at George Washington University, USA). This study analytically and critically evaluates these views based on their foundational principles, ultimately critiquing and examining the similarities and differences between them.

The necessity of conducting this study stems from the importance of addressing religion's unity and fostering interreligious dialogue in the contemporary world. Furthermore, this study's significance is highlighted by the subjectivity inherent in modern religious studies, which often leads to a non-realist perspective on the sacred and its associated nihilism. Peter Byrne's viewpoint represents a step toward the emergence and presentation of realism in religious and theological studies, grounded in the acceptance of the sacred as a supernatural reality. This offers a potential avenue for the re-emergence of the sacred in the postmodern era. Similarly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perspective, based on attentiveness to and re-evaluation of tradition beyond subjective viewpoints, proposes a direct relationship between religion and the sacred in the postmodern period, where their connection has been disrupted.

In examining similar prior research on this topic, from the perspectives of these two philosophers, only a limited number of books and articles can be referenced. The article *Linguistic Preparations for Religious Pluralism Based on the Narratives of John Hick and Peter Byrne* (Akhavan, 2008) states that Byrne considers the language of religions to be meaningful and representational, believing that religious propositions, despite their differences, can refer to a transcendent truth. The book *Religious Pluralism: The Ways of Heaven* (Aslan, 2013) also addresses the thoughts of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr on the plurality of religions, examining the role of sacred and non-sacred knowledge in human connection with the ultimate reality. He emphasizes the need for a pluralistic approach and explores the rationality of believing in a transcendent reality while respecting the diverse norms of religions. Another article, titled *Analysis and Critique of Pluralism as Narrated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Mohammadrezai & Karimzadeh, 2010), elucidates Nasr's foundations, such as "a single origin for all religions" and "the distinction between the exoteric and esoteric", and analyzes the issues related to his approach. It is worth noting that the distinction between these studies and publications and the present study lies in the fact that, while the possibility of the unity of religions from the perspective of Byrne's referential realism has not been addressed, a comparative analysis between the two pluralistic perspectives of Byrne and Nasr's pluralism has also not been conducted.

Explaining Peter Byrne's post-modernist Viewpoint

To understand Peter Byrne's view on religion and the possibility of religion's unity within his pluralistic framework, this analysis will first explain his concept of the nature of religion. This understanding is crucial for grasping the nature

of pluralism in his view. To elucidate this pluralism, two key characteristics—reference and realism—will be examined. Finally, based on these principles, the possibility of religion's unity will be explored and explained.

Definition of Religion in Byrne's Post-modernist View

Byrne argues that the necessity of defining religion arises from the need to address religion's unity (Byrne, 1993, pp. 3-4). He identifies two primary definitions of religion: essentialist definition and operational definition. The operational definition emphasizes the social and psychological functions and effects of religion, judging its value based on its effectiveness in achieving specific goals (Byrne, 1993, p. 17). In contrast, the essentialist definition focuses on the underlying nature that exists behind religious beliefs, customs, and ethics. Byrne appears to favor the essentialist definition, citing its advantages: first, it provides a more accurate description of the nature of religion; and second, by considering the essence of religion, it allows for a description of the principles and basis for religious coherence, unity, and characteristics (Byrne, 1993, p. 17).

Byrne posits that religion, in a sense, originates from the sacred and encompasses human efforts to understand, relate to, and orient themselves toward it. He suggests that pluralism complements religion by addressing its shortcomings, representing a movement toward transcendence inherent in human nature, cognitive and epistemological functions, and ethics (Byrne, 1995, p. 195). The assertion that religion has inherent deficiencies appears to be rooted in a theological approach and within the framework of modern thought. Although Byrne attempts to transcend this framework, vestiges of modern thought remain evident in his perspective. As he notes in his definition of religion, it possesses two distinct aspects. He views the transcendent origin of religions and their orientation as steps toward a proper relationship with the transcendent, leading religions back to a transcendent and sacred reality. Simultaneously, he acknowledges that religion is influenced by historical-cultural conditions, manifesting forms of life and experience in relation to culture for cognitive engagement with transcendent reality (Byrne, 1995, pp. 195-196).

Given Byrne's preference for a definition based on the essence of religions over one based on their function, his approach appears to ground the essence of religion in its cultural-historical context. This approach addresses the origin of religion while also acknowledging the sacred and transcendent. However, the definition and explanation of religion are ultimately situated within the historical life of humanity, based on biocultural experiences and, at times, specific functions, thereby acquiring the name and symbol of religion.

Byrne suggests that religion can be considered a modern concept originating in the Enlightenment of modern European culture. He argues that the critique of religion was a central aspect of Enlightenment thought (Byrne, 2013, p. 11). Thus, it can be argued that Byrne, in presenting some of the aforementioned definitions of religion, focuses not on the inherent truth of religion but on its modern concept in the post-

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the Islamic World' and 'The Scientific Journal of New Research in Humanities in the World'. This version is being published in English after coordination, with an upgraded text of the research and completion of the research results.

Renaissance era. Byrne views Kant's thought as a key articulation of the divide between modern and traditional religion, arguing that Kant believed the concept of God is constructed by us, not by reality, and is inherently subjective. Consequently, Byrne distinguishes Kant's philosophical system from traditional philosophy and differentiates the theology that arises from them (Byrne, 2007, p. 172).

Furthermore, in explaining the relationship between liberal theology and religion in modern philosophy with traditional theology and religion, Byrne highlights the complex relationship between theology and philosophy and the alignment of theology with the criteria of modern rationality (Byrne & Houlden, 1995, p. 338).

Byrne finds this philosophical foundation of Kant's thought extending into the philosophy of religion. He believes that, in light of Kant's transcendental idealism and subjective understanding, certain universal truths can be known based on their phenomenal appearance in relation to the subject's sensory experience, rather than as they exist in themselves (noumena), which lie beyond the limits of subjective cognition. In other words, the traditional pre-Renaissance problem of knowing God has been superseded by a framework in which knowledge of God is based on *a priori* categories in transcendental knowledge (Byrne, 1991).

Byrne's view of religion can also be examined in relation to the idea of historical evolution, a central tenet of modern thought. From a historical perspective, religion undergoes an evolutionary process, mirroring humanity's tendency toward transcendence and cognitive and moral development based on cultural development. The accumulation of human experiences, insights, and connections, characteristic of human history, contributes to the formation and evolution of religious traditions. For example, the transition from pre-Axial societies and religions to the post-Axial stage demonstrates key developments in moral and cognitive evolution (Byrne, 1995, pp. 195-196). However, Byrne appears hesitant to fully embrace the idea of historical evolution in relation to religions, without entirely rejecting it.

The Nature of Pluralism in Definition of Religion in Byrne's Post-modernist View

Throughout human spiritual history, various religious traditions have emerged, each claiming to provide veridical accounts of encounters with transcendent reality, paths to salvation, truth, religious experience, liberation from evil, and so forth. Religious pluralism represents one significant response to this diversity. By acknowledging the differences between religions, this approach seeks to provide an intellectual framework for understanding the reality of religious diversity (Byrne, 1995, p. vii).

In Byrne's view, pluralism does not entail denying the distinctions between pluralistic religions (Byrne, 1995, p. 130). Rather, religious pluralism addresses the problem of religious diversity by accepting the existence of differences between religious traditions, rejecting religious absolutism, and suggesting a form of equality among religions (Byrne, 1995, p. 5).

Byrne identifies three basic characteristics of pluralism: a fundamental realist commitment among religions to the existence of a transcendent and sacred reality; basic cognitive equality between religions in facilitating human contact with this reality, implying that different religions equally enable humans to connect with the sacred, negating exclusive claims to religious knowledge and truth; and agnosticism regarding the characteristics of any confessional interpretation of

religion (Byrne, 1995, p. 6), ensuring that no interpretation is considered absolute within religious traditions.

Ultimately, while Peter Byrne acknowledges the cognitive contact of religions with common sacred reality, he argues that referential realism, rather than inherent truth or all-encompassing compatibility with transcendent reality, guarantees this contact. In other words, realism and reference are key components of Byrne's explanation of pluralism, as discussed below. The first component, Peter Byrne's religious realism, includes a fundamental commitment to the existence of a transcendent and sacred reality (Byrne, 1995, p. 6). This view posits that extra-mental concepts of theism are accompanied by an attempt to refer to a sacred, transcendent reality (Byrne, 2003, p. 12). Byrne argues that the truth of God can only be understood if God is not conceived as an object among other objects of human cognition and if the ways of knowing God are distinguished from the ways of knowing finite things (Byrne, 1980). According to Byrne's view of pluralism, all the world's religions, despite their considerable diversity, refer to an extra-mental and transcendent reality that they articulate through religious concepts. Accordingly, Byrne asserts that pluralism necessitates a realist view of religion (Byrne, 1995, p. 167). Thus, the realist pluralist approach does not seek to impose the categories of understanding of the subject but rather seeks to refer to the sacred and transcendent. One characteristic of the realist pluralistic view is that the resulting knowledge may be somewhat inaccurate but still maintains appropriate links with reality (Byrne, 1995, pp. 173-175).

Byrne acknowledges the possibility of achieving incomplete knowledge based on a realist interpretation of truth, favoring this approach over an epistemology derived from absolute correspondence with reality. He proposes the necessity of adopting a fallibilist epistemology and a stage of belief to interpret certain claims within religious traditions (Byrne, 1995, p. 175). In other words, Byrne believes that claims about religious and sacred texts should be approached critically, avoiding dogmatism and that human knowledge and epistemological systems develop gradually and in stages.

Another key foundation of Peter Byrne's pluralism is the concept of reference. Byrne's pluralism embraces a specific type of realism he terms referential realism (Byrne, 1995, p. 55). Referential realism encompasses the insights of different religious traditions and facilitates their coexistence. Furthermore, unlike traditional realism, referential realism posits that different religious traditions refer to the sacred in diverse ways, a claim supported by Byrne's thought. It appears that Byrne bridges the gap between subject and object through reference, thereby enabling religious knowledge about the transcendent and sacred reality. In essence, reference serves as a form of cognitive contact between subject and object (Byrne, 1995, p. 12), ensuring that the object is not dissolved into the subject.

In Byrne's view, the central focus of pluralism is understanding religious traditions as orientations toward the sacred and transcendent, although this effort may be limited by the cultural-historical basis of human understanding (Byrne, 1995, p. 13).

Byrne also presents his view on referentialism as a critique of perspectives such as exclusivism, inclusivism, and relativism. He critiques the monopolization of truth by any single religion, while also maintaining that referential success does not permit a complete description of the sacred that would allow for assertively favoring one religious tradition over another (Byrne, 1995, p. 53).

In his essay on referencing, Peter Byrne critiques and reconstructs descriptive and causal theories of reference, subsequently establishing his own theory on the subject. According to the descriptive theory of reference, derived from Frege's philosophical thought, a name refers to a referent in relation to the descriptions associated with it (Byrne, 1995, p. 35). This theory incorporates the truth realism's point of view, which Byrne critiques in his pluralistic theory.

Byrne also addresses the causal theory of reference. According to this theory, a concept refers to its referent through its historical-causal link, and successful referencing creates a cognitive link between the subject and the object (Byrne, 1995, p. 50). In other words, successful referencing occurs when language and symbols effectively identify objects, leading to a shared and mutual understanding.

In his critique and reconstruction of referencing, Byrne argues that the nature of referencing involves an invitation to accept a single referent as the end goal of religious traditions. However, he acknowledges that designing a single referent may diminish the diversity and distinctiveness of different religious traditions. Furthermore, the theory of referential must accommodate descriptions of the transcendent in religious traditions that may not be compatible with ultimate reality. Therefore, their truth, and consequently their compatibility with each other, must be to establish a referent for the concepts considered within the discourse and epistemological horizon of religions (Byrne, 1995, p. 52). In other words, pluralism requires a common religious reference or context that can create a link between the followers of religions through the common concepts discussed within the epistemological horizon of religions.

The Religion's Unity in Definition of Religion in Byrne's Post-modernist View

Based on the foundations of Peter Byrne's thought in defining religion and pluralism, particularly his emphasis on realism and reference, we can examine and deduce his view on religion's unity. Byrne argues that most religions share a common concern: making something transcendent accessible to human thought, experience, and action (Byrne, 1995, p. 70).

Indeed, one of the central concerns of pluralism is the belief in a common referent for religions, which Byrne refers to not as God, but as the sacred and transcendent (Byrne, 1995, p. 9). This is the highest good and the ultimate reality in the world.

In this regard, Byrne believes that pluralism seeks to portray a common context among religions, based on which doctrines such as salvation and a referential relationship with the sacred can be established, thereby creating unity between different religions while acknowledging their differences (Byrne, 1995, p. 71).

Byrne uses a symbolic expression to describe the religion's unity, likening it to a common source of light viewed through different lenses. In this analogy, individuals perceive light in different colors due to the different mediators (lenses), but they all perceive light because of their connection to a common source (Byrne, 1995, p. 39). In other words, different religions offer varying interpretations of the same sacred reality.

According to Byrne, all major religious traditions are similar in their reference to a transcendent and sacred reality, their provision of arrangements for human salvation, and their accounts of the sacred (Byrne, 1995, p. 12). He also postulates the existence of intellectual, moral, and spiritual super traditions in which different traditions are components (Byrne, 1995, p. 34).

Based on the principles of Byrne's thought, it is possible to posit that all religions ultimately return to a transcendent and holy principle. While they may present different details in the path toward reaching the truth, a unity underlies the plurality of these paths, which is the transcendent and sacred reality itself, as well as the principle of reference and the return of religions and traditions to it.

Byrne believes that pluralism involves overlap between religions, as in all religions, it has a similar and structured concern in order to harmonize with the reality of the sacred (Byrne, 1995, p. 83), but this means that religions have the same report of ultimate reality, redemption, salvation, etc. Or even a way of life that is not redeemed, but as if religions share a common means of communication with the sacred (Byrne, 1995, pp. 84-85).

According to Byrne, differences cannot and should not be ignored in light of the esoteric teachings of the sacred shared by all religions (Byrne, 1995, pp. 33-34). Furthermore, since all religions and traditions are grounded in an ultimate reality, truth and reality cannot be considered the monopoly of any single religion (Byrne, 1995, p. 53).

Ultimately, Peter Byrne's view on interfaith dialogue is that the pluralism presented in his work is not synonymous with the project of interfaith dialogue. While he discusses and critiques pluralism, he expresses no particular interest in interfaith dialogue (Byrne, 1995, p. 16). This suggests that a deeper study of the meaning of interfaith dialogue and its relationship to the principles of his thought is warranted.

Explanation of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Monotheistic Viewpoint

To understand Seyyed Hossein Nasr's perspective on religion and the potential for The Unity of Religions within his traditionalist framework, this analysis will first explain his understanding of the nature of religion. Building upon this foundation, the nature of pluralism, as he conceives it, will be examined. Finally, based on these principles, Nasr's view on The Unity of Religions will be analyzed.

Definition of Religion in Nasr's Monotheistic View

In Seyyed Hossein Nasr's traditionalist perspective, the meaning of religion encompasses a broad scope, including fundamental and historical forms, as well as semantic schools and Hindu, mythical, and abstract religions (Nasr, 2013, p. 55). The scope of this semantic domain extends to the realm of human life, encompassing the foundation and core of all human existence. For instance, the closest equivalent to "Religion" in Arabic is "din", which can cover meanings such as obeying, surrendering to God, and humility in His presence. Within its semantic breadth, 'din' serves as a sacred standard and basis upon which the rules of life are structured. Religion is a way of life, revealed by God in the form of teachings and commandments (Nasr, 2013, p. 91).

Nasr's most significant view of religion concerns its origins. According to Nasr, the origin of religion can only be the divine essence. This is why he emphasizes the use of the adjective "heavenly" in relation to religions with a divine origin, asserting that the origin of religion is the divine essence and its recipient is the immutable nature of humanity (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/83). Furthermore, he believes that religion, in its original and fundamental sense, encompasses principles and rules revealed from the divine realm, designed to align human nature with its source (Nasr, 2009b, p. 58).

Another notable feature of religion in Nasr's view is its hierarchical structure. In his thought, religion embodies the truth of the divine foundation. Religion's first pattern exists in the universal and divine intellect, and in relation to the universe and its levels, it encompasses all levels of meaning and truth (Nasr, 2013, p. 53). Consequently, religion is not merely reduced to practices and rituals; its outward form is a manifestation of a level of this transcendent truth. The outer form of religion regulates the formal aspects of human affairs and life, while its inner dimension is proportionally related to the human being, bestowing a divine order and enabling the achievement of a transcendent identity in life (Nasr, 2013, p. 56). This hierarchical truth, extending from the innermost to the outermost levels of religions, exists in all religions and can connect all levels of human identity to the truth. Nasr believes that the truth of religion and the eternal essence must be found in its inner dimension for humanity to reach the truth of the whole, beyond all appearances (Nasr, 2010, p. 48).

According to these principles, the attainment of human happiness and perfection is possible only through religion and through the process of existence at its various levels. In Nasr's view, there is no spirituality without religion, and there is no way to reach the world of meaning without accepting the path that God Almighty has chosen and expressed for humanity – i.e. religion (Nasr, 2013, pp. 62-63). This process constitutes the real life of human beings and can be understood from a traditional point of view; the beliefs, rituals, and transactions of religions possess meanings that transcend time, history, and space (Nasr, 2013, p. 53).

Another important feature of religion, according to Nasr, is its permanent and eternal survival, which, in a way, has divine levels stemming from the conditions of the origin of truth, ensuring that religion cannot be reduced to material embodiment. Even if religions have no adherents, the truth of religions will not disappear or be destroyed (Nasr, 2013, p. 54). Furthermore, Nasr believes that religion never dies because the Sophia Perennis, as the essence of religion, never disappears, and the heavenly religions that are still alive offer the possibility of salvation to their followers (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/169).

Definition of the Plurality of Religions in Nasr's Monotheistic View

Nasr, a prominent scholar in religious studies, considers the plurality of religions to be a significant challenge of the modern era, emphasizing the need for deep reflection on this issue. This section will explore his views on the existence and necessity of diversity in religions and his interpretation of this issue.

Referring to Qur'anic verses that explicitly discuss the plurality of prophets and divine laws, Nasr argues that Islam acknowledges the existence of multiple religions and does not limit religion to a single manifestation. He notes that the Qur'an refers to and emphasizes the plurality of religions more than other sacred texts. As stated in Surah Yunus, verse 47: "And for every nation is a messenger." And in Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 48: "To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way". Thus, accepting the plurality of religions and the fact that God has revealed revelation multiple times is a fundamental aspect of Islamic revelation (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/160). He also interprets the innumerable ways to reach God as evidence of the multiplicity of divine laws, further supporting the existence of multiple religions (Nasr, 1392, p. 120).

In Nasr's view, one possible interpretation of the plurality of religions, based on the existential levels of human beings and the various manifestations of the truth, can be considered and examined through divine levels. Nasr believes that Revelation has always been revealed in the language of the people addressed, as stated in the Qur'an, Surah Ibrahim, verse 4. Therefore, the plurality of religions throughout history and in the pluralistic world of humanity is a real and undeniable phenomenon. Human beings and societies are able to understand and receive the divine message on their existential level (Nasr, 2009b, p. 154).

Furthermore, Nasr, drawing upon mystical and Qur'anic insights, considers the plurality of religions as a requirement for God's unity, ultimately concluding that the plurality of religions is a necessity dictated by the richness of the divine nature and the will and providence of God (Nasr, 2013, p. 91). He argues that, from an Islamic perspective, God's unity has effects, one of which is the plurality of prophets and prophethoods. Because God is infinite, He has created a pluralistic world, which includes the human realm (Nasr, 2013, p. 90).

In his view, God created all human beings from a single soul and then divided them into multiple races. Nasr believes that this human reality necessitates the diversity of revelation, as God mentions in the Qur'an the plurality of prophets and divine laws. Although God could have made them all one tribe, this diversity is for the testing and growth of human beings (Nasr, 2013, p. 90).

According to Nasr, speaking of a single religion in the context of a plurality of religions is due to the fact that, despite the appearance of the truth in its entirety at the beginning, manifestations of the truth have appeared according to the existential circumstances of each historical period. The more human existence is realized throughout history, the more prosperous the manifestations of the single truth become, as if religions are in an evolutionary continuum. This evolutionary sequence does not align with the idea of modern historical evolution but is instead understood through the levels and dimensions of the world of existence from the perspective of Islamic mysticism and philosophy, standing in complete opposition to the modern viewpoint. All kinds of divine manifestations are based on the universal and divine intellect and are eternal, appearing in the levels of the universe. Islam, as the seal of religion, represents the spiritual perfection of the period, culminating with the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/165). Based on his traditional view, Nasr does not believe in the rejection, denial, or invalidity of other religions, nor does he advocate for the homogeneity of religions. He believes that, despite the spread of Islam in the current world, other religions are not invalid. Religions are united in the status of truth and differ in the status of revelation (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/173).

In a symbolic statement, he likens heterogeneous religions to different paths to climb to the top of a mountain. Despite the different paths, they eventually reach the same point. Similarly, the main words and messages of the great religions are not contradictory, and all interpretations of God's unity are simply different ways to reach it (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/170).

The Unity of Religions in Nasr's Monotheistic View

Regarding the Unity of Religions, Nasr believes that theological and jurisprudential debates aimed at finding common ground among the world's religions are ultimately inconclusive. However, he finds the interactions between mystics and Sufis in this regard to be remarkable, as they

engage with the truth of religions directly. Muslim mystics have historically been able to communicate with mystics from other religions, discussing the underlying truth that unites them (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/174).

Nasr views Sufism and the tradition of Islamic mysticism as paths toward God's unity, understanding Sufism as a way to access the inner realm of religion. Mysticism, in this context, deals with the truth of religion beyond its diverse manifestations (Nasr, 2015, p. 428).

Accordingly, within the heart of religious pluralism, as Nasr understands it, lies a unitary reality with diverse and pluralistic levels and appearances (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/162). This unitary reality has degrees, reflecting God's unity. The Sophia Perennis 'based on a traditional and epistemological insight, recognizes the origin of thousands of religions in a single truth. This truth is expressed in Islam through the principle of tawhid (God's unity), in the Upanishads as "neti neti" ("neither this nor that"), in Taoism as the "nameless truth", and in the Old Testament as "I am who I am", provided that this truth is understood in its highest meaning. Ancient and simple religions from the early periods of human history have alluded to this fact silently or indirectly (Nasr, 2010, p. 36). Nasr believes that God's unity is unique, meaning that at the highest level, there is only one truth, and all religious traditions share that truth. However, as the divine truth descends into the human world, it takes on characteristics and determinations that appear different (Nasr, 2006, p. 135).

The study of Nasr's view of the Unity of Religions amidst the existence of religious pluralism is possible by moving beyond religious appearances and engaging with the inner workings of reality. Regarding the truth of religion, which is the Infinite Sublime, he believes that the divine system, in which God is considered at the center, is both unconditional and conditional, both knowable and unknowable, both divine and divine. God is both in essence and manifested in names and attributes; Brahman is both Nirguna and Saguna; and is both nameless (which is the beginning and origin of the world of the kingdom) and the possessor of a name (which is the mother of all innumerable creatures). At the same time, in a certain sense, it can be said that what is meant by the word Allah is in fact the divine system. Understanding this fact is one of the most important factors in understanding the religious principle that the origin of the natural system is actually in the divine system (Nasr, 2010, p. 37). In this view, different religions are different manifestations of the same truth, finding their way to the same source despite their differences. Neglecting this point can hinder the study of the Unity of Religions. Only through this approach can doubt be transformed into certainty, and in a world whose appearances are increasingly obscuring religious meaning and truths, the existence of religions can be affirmed. By examining the fundamental principles and religious beliefs among different civilizations, Nasr finds clear proof of a general and universal truth that underlies all spiritual schools (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/46).

He believes that every religion is realized as an appearance of the truth based on certain requirements (Nasr, 2007, vol. 1/44-45). Religions share common principles, foundations, and tenets, although each religion sees the truth through a specific lens and manifests it in its own way. Therefore, the basic evaluation of religions should be based on the unity of their main truth. Each religion considers that truth is equal to talent and manifests the inner nature of its followers. All these paths to the one truth can only be seen by a mystic with esoteric

intuition in the world of abstractions beyond determinations and pluralities (Nasr, 2009a, p. 231).

Examination and Analysis of Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Traditional Perspective and Peter Byrne's Post-modernist Approach to Unity and Pluralism of Religions

A comparative study of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Peter Byrne's views on knowledge and the Unity of Religions reveals both commonalities and differences in their underlying principles. Commonalities between Nasr and Byrne's Thoughts:

1. **Emphasis on the Unity of Religions:** Byrne, as a contemporary philosopher of religion, attempts to address the issue of religious pluralism with an approach distinct from that of the modern period. Regardless of the extent of his success, his focus on the single truth underlying the plurality of religions is a significant point of consideration. Similarly, Nasr, grounded in his traditionalist perspective, posits the existence of a single, shared truth behind the variations and differences in religions, based on the Sophia Perennis as the essence of all religions.

2. **Concepts of Equality and Equivalence in Religions Regarding Salvation, Redemption, etc.:** Both Byrne and Nasr emphasize the presence of concepts such as sacred and transcendent reality, redemption, salvation, and righteousness across different religious traditions. They suggest that these concepts, while differing in some respects, correspond to one another.

3. **Consideration of the Cultural, Historical, and Transcendent Aspects of Religions:** The definitions of religion offered by both philosophers encompass two key aspects: reference to a sacred and transcendent reality, and attention to the cultural and historical dimensions of religions.

4. **Convergence and Divergence of Pluralistic Religions:** Both Byrne and Nasr acknowledge that religions, illuminated by esoteric teachings of the sacred, possess both commonalities and differences that cannot and should not be overlooked.

5. **Rejection of Exclusivism:** In contrast to exclusivist viewpoints, both Byrne and Nasr assert that all religions and traditions are grounded in an ultimate reality and that truth and reality cannot be monopolized by any single religion.

Differences between Nasr and Peter Byrne's Thoughts:

A key distinction between these two perspectives lies in Nasr's traditional, mystical worldview, which permeates his understanding of religions, the issue of religious pluralism, and the religion's unity. His interreligious dialogue is shaped by this foundational viewpoint. Byrne, on the other hand, appears to be in a transitional phase, moving away from modern thought and towards a shift in his epistemological framework. From this evolving perspective, he approaches the study of religions and discusses pluralism, unity, and interreligious dialogue. While he sometimes adopts a theological approach to religions, he also critiques this evolution in his preface, attempting to transcend its limitations. However, it is not clear that he has fully articulated a new framework. Examples of this divergence in viewpoints include:

1. **The Basis of Religion's unity and the Aspect of Plurality:** Nasr, from a mystical and epistemological standpoint, considers the basis of religion's unity and the aspect of their plurality to be a truth that flows from the highest to the lowest levels, a journey from unity to plurality. Byrne, with a philosophical perspective informed by the philosophy of science and language, and within the horizon of modern

thought, locates the basis of religion's unity and its pluralistic aspect in a process from plurality to unity. He begins with the plurality and limitations of human understanding and concludes with a reference to the unity of the transcendent. Nasr uses the analogy of a spring flowing from the top of a mountain to its slopes to explain religion's unity, while Byrne envisions different and pluralistic prisms or lenses through which people view a common source of light. Nasr emphasizes the degree of understanding of human beings and societies, believing that truth is "manifested" in proportion to their level of understanding. Byrne, conversely, views religions as continuous and mixed efforts by human beings to understand and orient themselves towards the sacred, efforts that are limited to a certain extent by the historical-cultural basis of human understanding, although steps towards relating to the transcendent are necessary (Byrne, 1995, p. 195).

In this view, the single truth behind the plurality of religions is considered pluralistic within the limits of human understanding and by applying the categories of subject-knowing understanding to it, just as Byrne also considers aspects of cultural-historical nature for religions. Although Byrne does not completely see religion from a modern point of view. In this regard, he also criticizes John Hick's pluralism, the separation of Noman, and the phenomenon of religion and the absolute lack of access to truth. It seems that his thought is placed in the preamble of epistemological development.

2. The Possibility of Interfaith Dialogue: Byrne does not consider the pluralistic method of interpretation presented in his study to be identical to the project of interfaith dialogue, although he hopes that the followers of religions can have sympathy and coexistence with each other, because he believes that religions' conceptions of salvation are not objectively identical and that a common redemptive success among religious traditions is sufficient for pluralism, whereas it seems that for the dialogue of religions, it is sufficient for the dialogue of religions. In his view, this component is not enough, but the way of knowing and uniting religions in Nasr's view opens a door to dialogue between religions and consensus among their followers because he sees the single essence of religions through the lens of Sophia Perennis and invites the followers of religions to find this single gem. He also considers the mystical perspective a deep aspect of the possibility of opening the gate of consensus.

3. The Basis of Pluralism: The basis of pluralism in Nasr's view is the Sophia Perennis and the single gem hidden behind the plurality of religions, but the basis of pluralism in Byrne's view is realism and reference. Reflection on these foundations reveals the difference between Byrne's pluralistic and pluralistic approaches.

4. Analysis of the Cultural-Historical Aspect of Religion: Both Byrne and Nasr discuss the cultural-historical aspect of religion, but Nasr considers this aspect in terms of the manifestation of truth in relation to the levels of people's perception and understanding in historical periods, while Byrne considers it in terms of religions making possible forms of life and experience and the ability of human beings over the centuries to achieve cognitive contact with transcendent reality, as a linguistic-cultural system. This aspect of Byrne's thought reduces religion to a certain extent within the framework of modern theological understanding, which is based on non-realism, although Byrne tries to get out of this framework by acknowledging the existence of a transcendent reality to which pluralistic religions return.

5. The Thought of Historical Evolution: Nasr explicitly

criticizes the historical evolutionist thought about religions, which is one of the principles of Orientalism and modern cognition, but it seems that Peter Byrne does not reject the idea of historical evolution about religions and at the same time hesitates to accept it.

6. Ontological System: The ontological system on which Nasr emphasizes the possibility of the Unity of Religions is influenced by the tradition of Islamic mysticism. Accordingly, the whole of existence is a single existential flow and the possibilities are the manifestations of this personal truth of existence. Different religions are also different existential manifestations of this truth. However, in Byrne's view, such an ontological system is not on the horizon of his understanding, and Byrne resorts to the foundations and literature of the philosophy of science and language to express his pluralism.

7. Epistemological System: According to Byrne's view, knowledge of the truth is not based on the logic of truth or falsity, but through referencing, and Byrne asserts that there is a certain possibility of inaccuracy in the knowledge that religions give to their followers, while based on Nasr's traditionalist view, religions have different appearances than one. They are the truth, and each of them in his position and rank correctly represents and expresses the truth.

8. Concepts of Equality and Equivalence in Religions Regarding Salvation, Redemption, Righteousness, etc.: According to Byrne and Nasr, concepts are different from different traditions such as sacred and transcendent reality, salvation, salvation, righteousness, etc. It is as if in all religions, they are emphasized and correspond to each other. Although these concepts are not the same in all religions, Nasr interprets their non-uniformity as having hierarchies, but it seems that Byrne does not make a specific judgment about the superiority or shortcomings of these concepts in religions.

9. Analysis of the Literature of Discussion: Byrne and Nasr's systems of thought differ in that it seems that Nasr's literature has a mystical epistemological theme, and Byrne's literature is based on a philosophical theme, philosophy of science, and linguistic philosophy, as he himself has expressed at the beginning of the book «*Prolegomena to religious pluralism*», as he uses terms such as realism, referencing with reference to various theories of referencing, reality, truth, truth, etc. It is beneficial.

10. The existence of aspects of the Based on Religious Studies approach in Byrne's thought and the critique of this approach in Nasr's thought: According to the stated components and as mentioned in detail, Byrne seems to have looked at religions in a theological-research framework, although he tries to get out of the foundations of modern thought. Based on such an approach, it is as if the sacred matter of religion is considered the object of human knowledge and is interpreted by the subject as it is reduced from its transcendent position to the level of human affairs. In fact, it seems that although Byrne, by adopting a realist view of religion and taking into account the transcendent reality of religions and John Hick's critique of the interpretation of religion as a purely socio-cultural matter that arises from the separation of noumenon and Kantian phenomenon, tries to transition from the modern view of religion, but considering the above, it seems that he still understands religion within the framework of modernity, although he tries to transcend it.

Conclusion

Nasr, relying on Sophia Perennis as the essence of religions, has formulated his pluralistic theory by emphasizing two key aspects: realism and the belief in the unity of religions. This

reference to the transcendent and sacred single reality among diverse religions creates a perceptual link among them, opening a horizon for interreligious unity. Furthermore, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, adopting a mystical perspective and emphasizing the esoteric understanding of religion, considers Sophia Perennis as the core of all religions, thereby leading to the unity of religions from this mystical standpoint.

In conclusion, by comparing the views of Peter Byrne and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the important aspects of their intellectual commonalities and differences are clarified. By emphasizing axes such as the Unity of Religions, religious pluralism, dialogue of religions, the approach of religious studies, the thought of historical evolution, the cultural-historical aspect of religion, and the ontological and epistemological systems about these two thoughts, the difference between Nasr's traditional perspective and Byrne's viewpoint is clarified.

Reflecting on these two perspectives, Peter Byrne's thought can be considered on the border of a postmodernist knowledge of religion. By criticizing modern epistemology and the objectification of religion within the context of the absolutism of the principles of modern thought, Byrne has questioned the subjectivity of modern humanity. By adopting a realistic understanding of religion and referring religions to a single, transcendent, and sacred reality, Burn has extricated religions from being objects dissolved within the modern subject's comprehension under the categories of the new human intellect, which have been attributed to the reality of religions. He has revived the reality of religion—which can be like a noumenon beyond the reach of Kantian human cognition—beyond the phenomenal and socio-cultural aspects of religions and then taken a step towards understanding the religion's unity.

Nevertheless, it seems that Peter Byrne stands on the threshold of moving beyond modern thought and towards a transformation in the field of the epistemic system – a transition from non-realism to cognitive realism. He attempts to transcend the modern understanding of religions and criticizes the absolutist and non-realist understanding of religions. By talking about referring religions to as single, transcendent, and sacred reality, he suggests that postmodern humanity has achieved a living reality. This suggests a God who is dead in the modernist understanding as if the end of the modern subject in the postmodernist world is the beginning of the life of the modern dead God.

By referencing religions to a singular, transcendent, and sacred reality, he demonstrates the postmodern human's reaching out to the living reality of God, who was declared dead in the modernist understanding. However, between the critique of God's death and His resurrection lies a world of epistemic transformation. Peter Byrne, as a thinker in the preface of this epistemological transformation and on the border of leaving the modern world and entering another, still understands God and religion within the framework of modernity.

He has not yet found a perspective beyond understanding modernity and finding the current truth in pluralistic religions, as in the issue of referring to the sacred is related to a human being whose subjective aspect is the criterion for understanding the sacred and transcendent. What is interesting in the comparative study of Peter Byrne and Nasr's viewpoint is the finding of this missing link in the transition from the modernist understanding of religions to its postmodernist understanding and the transition from the postmodernist understanding of religions to the knowledge of religions in the

future world from modern nihilistic understanding. It seems that Nasr's esoteric, mystical, and God's unity perspective in understanding religions can unlock the impasses of modern horizons and the limitations of postmodern comprehension, thereby discovering the truth of God, which is the essence of diverse religions, and offering an escape from the nihilistic understanding of modernity.

The world of knowledge and tradition, in which Nasr is based, can perhaps be a reminder to open the way for the future in which the salvation of mankind from the subjugation of the present time will be achieved and with it, a world in which the common context of all religions of history finds and in which the truth of God is alive and flowing.

Resources

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