

Is It Necessary to Redefine the Human and the Concept of Being Human?

Why Is It Necessary to Redefine the Human and the Concept of Being Human?

Is Our Current Definition of These Terms Accurate?

If we want to provide a complete and comprehensive definition of a phenomenon, we must consider all its aspects and characteristics in our definition. Ignoring the main dimensions of a phenomenon leads to a false definition, which will have different consequences. That is why it is of great importance to redefine the human and the concept of being human.

The human being is one of the concepts that has many definitions. A simple online search for this word would yield millions of results in a second. Each of these definitions addresses a dimension of our existence in a general or partial way or focuses on a particular group, and based on these, different schools of thought have emerged. However, how accurate and precise are these results and definitions?

Why, after thousands of years of human existence on earth, has there still not been a single definition of our existence?

How complex is our existence that we still cannot fully discover it and agree on a common definition of ourselves?

Why are each of the definitions presented only applicable to a certain group or individuals and have many exceptions?

To what extent does the knowledge of human existential dimensions affect the accuracy and truthfulness of these definitions?

Is there a definition that can be applied to all people of different races, cultures, religions, languages, geographic locations, and times?

Why is it necessary to redefine the human and the concept of being human, and how will redefining them affect our lives?

The human being has five existential dimensions. If we want to have a complete definition of ourselves, we must consider each dimension according to its importance, and the main dimension must play the most significant role in our definition.

In this article, we will explore different definitions and perspectives about the human being. We will also redefine the human and the concept of being human, considering different schools of thought. We will explain why many of these definitions are not universally applicable. We will also try to establish criteria for selecting a true definition and school of thought, based on which we can identify the best and most comprehensive definition and school of thought. This helps us to save ourselves from the confusion of thousands of definitions available about the human being.

Existing Definitions of the Human Being

Scientists have studied the human being for a long time and from different aspects. The result of extensive research and years of effort has led to the creation of

different schools of thought and fields of knowledge, including empirical, mystical, philosophical, cultural, and religious humanology.

Each of these fields of knowledge and schools of thought offers a specific definition of the human being, so the first step to redefine the human being is a close examination of these definitions. When looking up this term, we are likely to encounter the following definitions in different books, articles, and online resources:

- The human is a rational animal.
- Man to man is wolf.
- The human is a tool-making animal.
- The human is a being that shapes civilization.
- The human being is an evolved animal.
- The human is an upright, flat-nailed being.
- The human is an ever-living and God-seeking being with divine insight and inclinations.

The definitions above give us insights into the perspectives of their proponents, and make it clear why it is necessary to redefine the human and the concept of being human. If we accept that humans are speaking animals, then the only thing that separates us from animals is our ability to speak. Does this mean that people who cannot speak and are mute are not considered human? According to this criterion, how do we differentiate between a wicked person and a righteous one in terms of their being human, while both of them can speak? Do we consider people

who exhibit wolf-like behavior and harm others for their own benefit as human? If not, then what does the definition that says “Man is wolf to man” signify?

The above questions and answers demonstrate the need to redefine the human and the concept of being human in order to achieve a complete and universally applicable definition. Most of the proposed definitions have many counterexamples, making them inapplicable to all individuals and societies.

The Necessity of Choosing the Right School of Thought to Know the Human Being

In previous lessons, we discussed the necessity of self-knowledge in life. It is crucial to know and interpret our own existence because it is the foundation for all other fields of knowledge. It also plays an important role in choosing our lifestyle and even the laws that govern societies. Self-knowledge means knowing our potential talents, abilities, and inherent qualities, as well as the paths to actualize these potential qualities. But how do we gain this knowledge?

Usually, to learn about a topic, we either conduct our own research or consult the research of others, trust their findings, and base our work on them. The same applies to the topic at hand, which is to redefine the human and the concept of being human. When we choose to refer to the research of others, we find a multitude of branches and topics to study. These studies have given rise to various schools of thought. As it was stated, “Anyone who has founded a school of thought for humanity has a theory about human perfection and the perfect human being.”¹ But which definition is true, reliable, comprehensive, and complete?

¹. Murtadha Mutahhari, *Perfect Man*, trans. Aladdin Pazargadi. Foreign Department of Boyad Be'that, p.24.

We can divide existing schools and fields of knowledge into two main categories:

- Materialist and naturalist schools that base their studies on material aspects and outer nature. Empirical anthropology is an example of this approach.
- Spiritual and transcendental schools that include the spiritual dimension in their research. Mystical and religious humanology are examples of this approach.

We have already discussed the different approaches to humanology, and their strengths and weaknesses. One of the shortcomings of materialist schools is the belief that humans can only be known through the intellect and science. This leads to a superficial knowledge of the human being² because the intellect and science are limited. They can only provide a partial knowledge of the human being, focusing on the physical and outward dimensions.

A society that only focuses on the physical and material aspects of its members will prioritize the growth and development of these dimensions in its planning. But are we just physical beings, or is there something beyond the physical body? Scientists who only recognize the physical dimension and hold a biological view about the human being even consider the soul as a material phenomenon. In their definition, the soul or psyche refers to the brain, spinal cord, and nervous system. But can we only define being human from a biological perspective or by examining biological characteristics? In fact, to comprehensively define ourselves, which dimension of our five-dimensional existence should we examine?

². Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*. Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works (International Affairs Department) 2008, p. 377.

Which Inherent Qualities Make Us a Complete Being as a Human?

We have different dimensions of existence with different characteristics and inherent qualities. We have already discussed the five dimensions of existence: inanimate, vegetative, animal, intellective, and supra-rational, and outlined their specific qualities. We stated that none of the lower four dimensions and their perfections make us a true human being. As long as we are in love with inanimate, vegetative, animal, and intellective perfections, we will not be a human. In other words, outwardly we may be a human, but we have not acquired the inward state for which we have been created. All these perfections are valuable, but they are not human perfections. They are only a prerequisite to acquiring human perfections.

One of the signs of perfection is balance and harmony in the dimensions of existence. We must pay attention to each dimension of our being in proportion to its importance. If one dimension grows more than others, we will become unbalanced. Of course, we must not forget that balance does not mean equality. To understand imbalance, imagine a child whose one or more limbs have grown more than the others, creating an ugly and disproportionate appearance.

Humanological schools provide varying definitions of the human being based on their intellectual and research foundation. Each school emphasizes a specific dimension of human existence, valuing the attainment of perfection in that particular dimension. For example, in empirical anthropology, what is most important about the human being is attention to his observable dimensions. Focusing on these dimensions leads to a neglect of our intentions, emotions, faith,

and other intangible aspects of our being. This neglect affects the knowledge and definition that are ultimately presented by this school about the human being.

According to Immanuel Kant, an empirical anthropologist, consciousness and the senses must define who we are as human beings.³ Does this definition, focused on the physical body and senses, leave room for the concept of the soul? What level of awareness and sensory accuracy is required to accept this proposed definition of the human being? Do all humans have identical senses and awareness levels? This definition cannot be applied to all individuals and is therefore incomplete.

In the definition of the human being from a philosophical and mystical perspective, such issues also arise. Philosophy relies on the intellect, and sometimes, on empirical findings. This approach ignores the supernatural and immaterial characteristics of the human being. As for mystical thought, it is a personal path that cannot be prescribed to everyone and cannot encompass an entire society.

A review of these schools of thought and their definitions reveals that they fail to provide a comprehensive and complete definition. This is because they do not consider all aspects of human existence in their studies. Their definitions only encompass a part of the multi-dimensional human being.

We urgently need to redefine the human and the concept of being human. Only then can we save ourselves from the harms caused by incomplete and inaccurate definitions. When we base our actions, lifestyles, and laws on these incomplete definitions, we become beings who, at best, only focus on and develop only one or a few dimensions of our existence. This results in a human being resembling the

³. Patrick R. Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology in Kant's Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.33.

child with the disproportionate physical body we previously discussed. In an attempt to redefine the human and the concept of being human, a perfect human being is one in whom all dimensions of existence and values, including the intellect, love, affection, justice, service to others, worship, and freedom, are harmonized and developed to the highest degree.

Characteristic of the Best School of Thought to Know the Human Being

Different schools of thought, especially materialist ones, have offered inconsistent and incompatible definitions and theories about the human being. While some definitions elevate the human to the highest level of worthiness, others portray it as deeply flawed and dishonorable. One of the main reasons materialist schools cannot provide a comprehensive and complete definition of the human is that they ignore the most fundamental dimension of human existence, i.e., the supra-rational one. This dimension is what distinguishes the human from other beings and makes him worthy to be called “human.” In each of the other dimensions, we share similarities with some of God's other creations.

A false definition of the human is not just a theoretical issue limited to a few words and sentences in books. A distorted definition of the human being results in creating challenges for humanity in the realms of ethics, family, education, relationship, marriage, economy, career choice, and business activities. This is why it is essential to redefine the human and the concept of being human.

In this article we discussed the different schools of thought in humanology and how this diversity of ideas makes it necessary to redefine the human and the concept of being human. This is because each of these schools offers a specific definition of

the human being. Some define the human being only from a materialistic perspective, relying on the senses and experience. Others involve the intellect in this definition, while still others incorporate the perspective of the human being's Creator in their definition.

We explored several prominent definitions of the human being, but ultimately found them lacking in comprehensiveness and applicability to all individuals. We also emphasized the need to choose a school of thought that can offer a comprehensive and complete definition of the human and being human. We argued that to redefine the human and the concept of being human, we must first understand the different dimensions of human being and identify the most fundamental dimension of his existence. Finally, we pointed out that false definitions of the human being have many negative consequences, affecting ethics, relationships, lifestyle, and all activities of individuals and societies.

What definitions have you read or heard about the human being? Can you accept these definitions by reflecting on your own inner self, or are there any exceptions that make it challenging for you to fully accept them? Do you think it is necessary to redefine the human and the concept of being human?

We would be glad to hear your thoughts.