
Papers Presented at the
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars

Lights of 'Irfán



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Lights of 'Irfán:
Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs
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Volume Twenty-One

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Dedicated to

Dr. Iraj Ayman

Feb. 9, 1928 – Nov. 12, 2025

This is the final volume edited by his hand.

“May the memory of his valued contribution to the field of education in numerous academic and other settings as well as his endeavors in the promotion of Bahá’í Studies be a source of enduring inspiration for present and future generations.”

The Universal House of Justice

November 14, 2025

184. All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.

—Baha'u'llah

Gleanings from the
Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 215

Whoso hath searched the depths of the oceans that lie hid within these exalted words, and fathomed their import, can be said to have discovered a glimmer of the unspeakable glory with which this mighty, this sublime, and most holy Revelation hath been endowed. From the excellence of so great a Revelation the honor with which its faithful followers must needs be invested can be well imagined. By the righteousness of the one true God! The very breath of these souls is in itself richer than all the treasures of the earth. Happy is the man that hath attained thereunto, and woe betide the heedless.

—Baha'u'llah

Gleanings from the
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PREFACE

Since its inception, ‘Irfán Colloquium, has strived to encourage Bahá’ís to immerse themselves in the ocean of His words, that they “may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths”, and in this manner deepen their faith and prepare themselves for sharing its teachings with their communities. We are grateful to our authors for having meticulously shared with us those pearls of wisdom in this collection of articles on topics related to mystical aspects of the Bahá’í writings.

The “Lights of Irfán Book 21” delves into profound explorations of Bahá’í beliefs and their intersections with various philosophical and spiritual discourses. The volume presents an array of scholarly articles aimed at deepening understanding of the Bahá’í Faith’s principal teachings and their applicability to contemporary societal issues. Each article aims to foster a deeper appreciation of the Bahá’í Faith’s rich theological and philosophical heritage, encouraging readers to consider how these insights can be applied to enhance personal growth and societal advancement. The discussions are rooted in a desire to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and philosophies, religious traditions and contemporary challenges, advocating for a world where spiritual principles inform and elevate public discourse and personal conduct.

We hope these articles assist the readers in their journey through mystical dimensions of reality, and to better equip them in meaningful conversations on these important existential topics that are often at the centre of thoughts and beliefs of humanity at large:

Myth or Madness: The (Lost) Joy of Religion **by Shahbaz Fatheazam**

This article, a profoundly mystical and poetic essay, addresses the growing detachment from and scepticism toward religion in modern society, suggesting that this alienation has led to a loss of joy and fulfilment. Fatheazam argues that the rejuvenation of religious sentiment and practice as well as understanding the profound meanings of love

and spirituality can restore a sense of purpose and happiness in individuals' lives. The article discusses the historical roles of religion in society and contrasts these with the present-day marginalization, proposing that rediscovering the joy in religion could counteract the bleakness of modern secular life - religion is not just a relic of the past but an essential part of human understanding, providing meaning beyond empirical knowledge. The reader may also question the tendency of contemporary culture to dismiss religion as obsolete while appreciating the ways in which faith has historically guided human progress.

**A Survey of the Cardinal Maxims
of Islamic Philosophy in the Bahá'í Writings
by Vargha Bolodo-Taefi**

Bolodo-Taefi explores the influence of Islamic thought and intellectual tradition on the Bahá'í Writings and presents thirty-four cardinal maxims of Islamic philosophy that are adopted and expounded in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Each section explains the meaning of a maxim, describes its usage by prominent figures in Islamic intellectual history, and demonstrates its application in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. In doing so, we gain a better understanding of

the integration of some of the most profound Islamic philosophical principles within the Bahá'í teachings, and how these philosophical maxims have been influential in shaping Islamic thought as well as their relevance and reinterpretation in the context of Bahá'í scriptures.

**Understanding Traditional Discourses
by JoAnn Borovicka**

Borovicka investigates the challenges and opportunities in interpreting traditional religious discourses in the modern world. The author examines historical narratives, particularly the allegorical nature of religious

stories. The chapter highlights how Bahá'í interpretations align with modern historical and hermeneutical approaches, suggesting that religious texts should be read with an awareness of their metaphorical and contextual meanings. She emphasizes the need to understand these discourses within their historical contexts and explores how they can be made relevant to contemporary issues. The article advocates for a balanced approach that respects traditional wisdom while adapting its teachings to modern circumstances.

Which World Are You In? **by Ian Kluge**

The article by the late Ian Kluge engages with philosophical inquiries about the nature of reality, questioning the existence of different “worlds” such as the material, spiritual, and metaphysical. He discusses how Bahá'í teachings address these concepts and examine existence of God. Kluge further argues that human perception of reality is shaped by philosophical assumptions, and that the Bahá'í worldview inter alia considers empirical reason and spiritual insight. He also examines postmodern relativism and defends the idea that objective truth exists beyond individual subjectivity. The article may challenge readers to reflect on their perceptions of reality and consider a more integrated worldview that encompasses both physical and spiritual elements when reflecting on God's existence and its implications on our lives.

The Invocation “Is There Any Remover of Difficulties Save God...” **by Muhammad Afnan, translated by Adib Masumian**

The article, which was first published by 'Irfán Colloquium in Persian in 2006, has now been translated in English and explains the origin of this invocation in the Bahá'í Faith, discussing its significance in times of personal and communal hardship. The author examines how this invocation reflects broader theological themes of divine providence and human reliance on God.

**The Potent God and the Attracting God:
Metaphysics and its Social Consequences
by Moojan Momen**

The article examines two conceptual frameworks in relation to God by major Western world religions and by philosophers – attracting God versus Potent God, and their implications on theological thought and on humanities' belief in God and religion, and how it influences their world view and governance. The “Potent God” represents divine authority, justice, and law, whereas the “Attracting God” embodies love, beauty, and personal transformation. Momen argues that societies dominated by a fear-based view of God tend toward authoritarianism, while those embracing a loving God foster inclusivity and moral progress. Understanding the difference between these frameworks also has profound implications on our social relationships based on “power and hierarchy” or “love and mutuality” and on models of governance in our society.

**Tablet of Fitnih (Tribulations) and Its Recipient: Shams-i Jahán
by Foad Seddigh**

Seddigh reviews the story and the poems of Princess Sháms-i Jahán – a grand-daughter of Fáṭḥ-i-‘Alí Sháh and an aunt of Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh, who declared her belief in the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. The article also examines in depth Bahá’u’lláh’s *Tablet of Fitnih*, which prophesies a time of great trials and tests for humanity. The author highlights the esoteric language used in the tablet, discussing its references to cosmic disturbances (e.g., “the heavens of knowledge will be cleft asunder” and “resplendent suns will be darkened”). The chapter explores how Bahá’u’lláh’s warnings about spiritual tests and separations echo earlier religious prophecies, and includes a translation of the Tablet at the end of the article.

The **In Memoriam section** in this volume pays tribute to two of ‘Irfán Colloquium’s closest collaborators and ardent supporters: Dr Manuchehr Derakhshani (1932-2025) who served for nearly 3 decades at the Bahá’í National Centre Persian Affairs Office and was most helpful in reviewing many of the articles that ‘Irfán published over the past 3 decades, and Ian Kluge (1948-2025) who had an uniquely in-depth knowledge of philosophical traditions and the intellectual history of religious thought, and enthusiastically participated and contributed to numerous discussions on these topics over many decades. We shall miss them dearly.

We thank the authors for their diligent research and their patience; and hope the readers will have the opportunity to reflect on the profoundly mystical concepts shared in many of these articles, which may enhance their understanding of the purpose of life as they continue their journey towards drawing closer to that unknowable essence.

All papers published in this book, present the views and understanding of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. Their writing styles and scholarly approaches are, therefore, different.

Rama Ayman

ARTICLES

Myth or Madness: The (Lost) Joy of Religion

Shahbaz Fatheazam

Introduction

Religion has become ever remote from modern sympathy, unattractive and unconvincing. As its light, heat and influence wane its position, once locally central, is now dynamically marginal; its rim farthest from the hub. Religion holds the deadest part of the universe, the lowest storey of the house the point at which all light, heat, and movement descending from a nobler sphere is dying into darkness, coldness and passivity. This makes for a drab age. In its place, Man, the soul of the world, with immense powers, rich like Midas but all he touches goes dead and cold. As the process prolongs itself it ensures that the loss of the old mythical imagination and the prophetic soul of the wide world will continue to be replaced with historians of science and practitioners of philosophy. These modern magicians assert human omnipotence while the venerable sense of human impotence never really leaves us bewailing our plight to feel encompassed. We yearn to awake from our sleeping sense by some *magia divina*. Our instincts continue to tell us that if we and Nature are all one surely there must be some nearer way to this unity, to a high and holy learning, than by quantum mechanics and relativity, some more direct way such as one who commands another who is in his power. A way that teaches us that we can rise above our corporeal and sensitive powers and in that state receive into ourselves the perfection of heaven and of the divine intelligences. Spirits obey perfected souls – an affirmation which even makes the resuscitation of the dead possible! In contemplating religious revival, however, we must be aware, and beware, of schematizing. We must not impose either on old things that have died out nor on the new things coming in a spurious unity. Meaning must be moving and truth must

always be aroma to the Light otherwise religion means as little to us as the atomic structure of water – a barren and profitless look into this other most valuable giver of life. The labor of the quest for God only weds us when chained to the cluster of fragrance, the hyacinth of reunion and the blissful rapture of the Messianic Spirit, enshrined in the beauty of the Rose. Religion must not be seen just to be true, but lofty, edifying and unifying. This is a unique aspect of discernment and the strongest lens with which to comprehend the unrestrained utility of true religion which adorns us with praiseworthy attributes and righteousness. Universal recognition of religion's transformative power, the magnificent cultivation of mind and heart, is apparent to all but the leaden.

The business of religion is to draw nigh unto God - the highest form of contemplation – and to enjoy communion with Him. To bring this unique ideal upon the life and thought of centuries demands the move to self-surrender, borne only by the law of love, via crucis, via lucis, the absolute condition of discipleship. Self-surrender is really a battle term - to give up all rights to a lord conqueror. The more we surrender the more we resemble the Lord. We only shine outside of self - an unassailable prescription of the beloved Master that '[w]e must release the kernel from the husk'. [Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 381]

Conversely, the more we conquer away from divinity, the more we darken liberty and with a sense of doom. In us worldlings, buried deep beneath the deposits of self, there is an instinct we cannot explain, the power of which we may attempt to ignore but which leads us, in spite of ourselves, to a moment of heroic decision - to offer our life as a ransom to others. In its purest and non dogmatic mode, this is self-surrender. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."¹ If Creation is the original act gratuit than self-surrender, we must readily accept, is the only right concession to be made, a sublime form of pre-litigation - settle before judgment day, as it were.

Should love, that systematic truth, ‘the holy hush of ancient sacrifice’², that which **oils the wheels of life, ‘the greatest of all living powers’ [Paris Talks 180], the highest law which allows for all things to mingle and meet in one spirit**, were somehow erased, human life would vanish. Our history is an ongoing meditation on this fact. Oftentimes difficult to follow or understand the mystery that provokes the many forms of love, it remains our most common possession and which gives our existence depth and wonder. Love even makes death wonderful. When Socrates, ‘the most distinguished of all philosophers’ [Tablets 146], told the young men gathered around him before his death, that philosophy is the practice of being dead he had something specific in mind. He was conveying the idea that as long as we judge things according to our senses, we shall never grasp the truth about them. In love’s immortal form the visible and the sensual have only a limited and passing share. To see it, we must die to the world and learn to live as if we were no longer alive. The proper use of meditation is to grasp the timeless order of things. When we think about love we are beyond death and become deathless ourselves. In the old chaos of love, whatever we see is extraordinary, wherever we look things are pretty wonderful. O, joy without end!

Short-lived, physical attraction is love’s pathetic transience but it is not to be scorned. Loving in a transient world is bootied by a twofold misery. The first is the suffering that comes with possessing enduringly that which is inevitably lost. And the second is despair, following closely from the first, the very notion that a future possibility of loss awaits us and any current pleasure is contaminated by fear. The desire to have (*appetitus habendi*) turns into a fear of losing (*metus amittendi*). But, mystifyingly, love’s misery becomes essential to its meaning. Personal relations begin and end, time flows to a final rest, but what becomes of love’s poignancy and passion were such temporal limits to be removed? Love would be demystified to the point of pathological emptiness and shuts the ancient path to contemplative transcendence. Without the additional sense of incommensurability between time and eternity love ceases to be what it is, just as science loses its meaning when we

subtract eternity from the notion of lawfulness that is the ruling principle of all inquiry. (Science is intelligible only if we think of it as moving toward and understanding of the world that rests on laws whose validity is timeless. The very idea of 'law' implies this). The law of love, therefore, is a function of our mortality – a surprising, not to say disappointing conclusion, perhaps, but not hopeless because while death may well bring love's moment to an end yet its pangs and motions have not been pointless.

While we try to understand and live with love in its finitude, it is in a world without limitation where we find its highest expression. All forms of natural ties, companionship, love of family, patriotic love, love of race, political affinity, even love of community, are limited, fraught with inherent interest, and therefore, uncertain.³ The perfect love, we are told, 'needs an unselfish instrument, absolutely freed from fetters of every kind.' [Paris Talks 37] and this **'... can only be achieved by the power of the Divine Spirit. No worldly power can accomplish the universal love.'** [Paris Talks 11] Divine love takes us back to the deeper appreciation of its all-comprehensive role and forward to the better comprehension of our own hearts. While all forms of other love do the things that plainly seem true, divine love again and again has said the thing that does not seem true but is. Divine love is convincing where it is least attractive – in its mystery.

The law of God which commands from the outside binds us to the moral responsibility of living by the law of love which spurs from the inside. Divine love harbors renunciation. All other forms of love are self-preservation, a short, fast moving shimmering embedded in our social and ethical structures.⁴ This does not show that Divine love is untenable but that we are stupid or wicked to have failed to apply this principle for not having passionately desired it. Divine love, simultaneously effulgent and enkindling,⁵ inspired splendid achievements in the past so why cannot it be renewed with ever brighter examples? The conversion of the enslaved human mind and the human spirit from the dehumanizing powers in all culture to this ideal is, as we shall see,

a victory both for the individual as well as for the collective life of the planet.⁶ The theological basis for liberation is the theology of reconciliation and love.

Love, by definition, is not a conservative creed and its radicality, its revolutionary potential, lies as much in the intimate sphere as well as in the outer sphere - dedication to a cause. Love contains both an ideological and a personal component. True love and true revolution are inseparable. On the spiritual plain, most especially, we must be revolutionary. That which comes closest to true stasis is subject to heroic efforts of will and selfless sacrifice.⁷ The panorama of residual love, the love of kin and country, fights to leave things as they are and we beat our wings in vain and in a void to maintain the status quo. This is crude and foolish as we are really leaving these open to a torrent of change.

The idealization of love is preserved on nothing less than change and revolution guided by a love for a cause, the true criterion for conversion to moral action - not conscience (a center haunted by moral ambivalence).⁸ The revolutionary path from truth to action is not just paved by love's ardor, as attested by our early Bahá'í history, its apotheosis, but, more importantly, asphalted upon moral values. If the locus and focus of a cause is moral authority, independent of human rationality, as in the will of God then the validity of moral values comes directly from the ultimate sovereign, our Creator.

The stirring accounts of the early faithful, (as Hannah Arendt would say, to begin at the beginning is an act of memory and gratitude), captured in storytelling genre in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Memorials to the Faithful, are short biographies recounted not to sanctify or to deify nor to enlist men and women in the immortal pantheon.⁹ They are written, not as an exercise in nostalgia or antiquarianism, but that we may cultivate the same religious instinct of our illustrious forbearers - to transform belief into an intercourse of compelling wonder. The champions of the Crimson Age saw what we dimly see today even though we tread their leavened soil, average earth elevated to the plains of heroes. A

community of others grounded not in a pre-existing reality but in a specific possibility – a possibility which is the most radical of all possibilities, a community of faith which demands not just in loving each other but a total response from each.

All this happens by obeying, *sine mora*.¹⁰ The inspiration of the faithful lies not in any array of mundane possibilities but in the untrodden region of unalloyed divine love. They showed an astonished world how to remove mountains by faith wedded to love. They personified the emblem: “He who made you demands the whole you.”¹¹ The greatness of these enraptured lovers of God lies precisely in the description itself – the greatness of what they loved – and it is this frenzy that gives birth to remarkable human powers and achievements which makes the life of these selfless consorts, these most beautiful of mortals, God enfranchised souls, exemplary suppliants, ‘recipients of heavenly grace’, ever more haunting.¹²

These early believers, small in number and dimly islanded, interpenetrated two worlds, one enabling, the other harshly inhibiting – the new, aborning community of the Greatest Name opposed to the fierce rule of an oppressive, unbelieving underworld. The early faithful were trampled, betrayed and faced tyranny from all sides and they had to outgrow these vicissitudes digging ever deeper roots of faith to resist fiercer tempests as the unrelenting ire and hatred of the local population reacted with even greater intensity. A brutal and lashing anomaly understood only by God but accepted by unfailing resignation and unshaken trust by these faithful admirers in the parched dust of battle. All this suggests that there is an alternative way of thinking about history that has a different structure from the idea of history as a stream of causes and effects, structures and events. Here is an account of what people thought and believed in a particular epoch; what they wanted to love; and what social and environmental conditions framed (or suppressed) their choices – illustrated vividly by the conversion of tens of thousands in Persia in the mid-nineteenth century which led to particular states of knowledge, belief, and agency. Is history composed of

objective causal relations that exist among recorded historical events and structures or is history an agglomeration of the actions and mental frameworks of individuals, high and low? One brilliant Christian apologist puts it best: "The greater part of the life actually lived in any century, any week, or any day consists of minute particulars and uncommunicated, even incommunicable, experiences which escape all record." [Lewis, *Literature*, 64]

Divine love is clearly not an idle affair. "To occupy oneself with God... is the one occupation of all occupations"¹³ and the law of love is not an abstract principle nor prone to personified abstractions but a moral force gravitating to a unified whole. Rediscovering our love for God and His creation is itself a preparation for social action and an indispensable stake in the conceptual framework for public discourse.¹⁴ The religion of love is not synonymous with the prodigy of austerity. We do not withdraw from the tents of the world so that angels draw nigh. Communion with God arises as much from ethical concerns as in the cloistered chorus of 'sursum corda, sursum corda' ['lift up your hearts'].¹⁵ This higher law of universal love is not subject-centered but object-centered. Self-surrender is not isolated, penitential abstinence. Our religion does not avoid the society of man to choose to live to God in secret. The audience chamber of God is not solitude but the tested enterprise of fellowship and the well-matured purpose of service. We only save ourselves by bringing ourselves together.

The philosophy of love is simultaneously both out of and engaged in the world and unfolds in a three-fold hierarchy - a reality (the mind of God), a revelation (the revealed Word of God) and *respublica*¹⁶ or commonweal, its finest fruit, collective conduct governed by the noblest rules and its associated social arrangements. In this ideal God commands, angels operate and man obeys. It is not the sad song of Gibbon's 'unhappy exiles from social life', but spiritual joy, God's creed inviting us to drink from the chalice of joy and bliss. (We are surely more ourselves when we bear on our faces somehow or other, a gladness of heaven that comes from no human source.). Truth impels us to joy.

A compulsive invitation to enormous sorrows and delights, the implications of universal love bear a philosophical stance and as such cannot be regarded as innocent.¹⁷ We each are a neighbor to the other and when the other is no longer a matter for moral concern, a barren world emerges where the impoverishment of one is the impoverishment of the other. Love is fulfilling of the law.¹⁸ By affirming the worth of our neighbor we are simultaneously affirming the value of ourselves.¹⁹ When I suffer it is misery, but when I suffer with another it is compassion.

There exists the challenge of how to behave so as to align our world of finite existence – our need to fend for ourselves and to satisfy our basic needs – with our status as spiritual beings. Unless I am happy I am unable to exercise my godlike power to love on anything like a significant scale. A life obsessed or preoccupied to the satisfaction of basic needs leaves little room for either science or morality. It follows that we should do what we can to improve the material circumstances of human life, so that there may be room for both desires – self satisfaction and self fulfillment.

The neighbor who is poor, hungry, dispossessed, and oppressed, hurts us and is a sufficient criterion for responsible action.²⁰ Our efforts are not guided by prevalent growth-based notions of insurance and risk-reduction. The evils of poverty and subjugation, these are not the hidden cause of quarrel but are bred in settings of civic conflict eliminated only by the diverse manifestations of universal love: harmony, social mediation and the building of a necessary and new identity of the oneness of humanity, ‘the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve’ and which ‘has its indirect manifestations in the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society.’ [World Order 45].

In contemplating the idea of love, we are not only endorsing value-based approaches to the promise of peace but to the importance of human agency and emotional linkages in spiritual culture as a whole

to overcome the upheavals of modern society and to secure its emancipation from impending and recurring calamities.²¹ A case in point is Amartya Sen's welfare economics, where the governing rule should be that of moral sentiments assuming the vanguard of shaping economics and not profit maximization. "Economy is the basis of society. When the economy is stable, society develops. The ideal economy combines the spiritual and material, and the best commodities to trade in are sincerity and love."²²

In the physical (and social) sciences there reaches a point where the initial stage of wishing must be succeeded by a stage of hard and ruthless analysis. The problem here is that religion of love is always seen as never being able to emancipate itself from utopianism.²³ We face a fundamental antithesis - the antithesis of utopia and reality - but, the question arises: is not utopia rooted in reality? Mature thought combines utopia or an ideal purpose with observation and analysis. This is the impact of thinking upon wishing. But both must have their place. We cannot ignore what was and what is in contemplation of what should be nor may we scorn to deduce what should be from what was and what is so as to avoid despair and bewilderment in appreciating the transitions before us. The social issues referred to above is a function of thinking and to address them is to study a sequence of events which we are not powerless to influence or to alter and there comes a stage where realism is the necessary corrective to the exuberance of utopia and wishful thinking. "Wherever [we] find truth or reality, [we] must hold to it, forsaking, discarding all else; for outside of reality there is naught but superstition and imagination."²⁴ [Promulgation, 62].

When reality refuses to conform to utopian prescriptions a problem of diagnosis emerges. We have either been too lazy to understand the vision or too self-centered to pursue it. Such incompetence is both intellectual and moral. We are not only ill-disposed to act but suffer from muddled thinking (our need for self-assertion interferes in belief-formation). It checks our ability to lose or transcend ourselves in order to learn something from minds different from our own. "The

essence of religion', we are told, 'is to testify unto that which the Lord hath revealed, and follow that which He hath ordained in His mighty Book.' [Tablets, 155]. To translate this affirmation into action, to make operative the Divine Word we need to understand the Word and this brings us to an ancient problem: the problem of human fallibility in the act of decoding and understanding thoughts and conclusions reached in the text which is infallible. To cite a seventeenth century Oxford academic and one of the earliest defenders of modern empiricism: "Though everything said in the Text be infallibly true, yet the reader may be, nay cannot choose but be very fallible in the understanding of it."²⁵ The quality of transmission and reception is determined by our rational faculty but it is the destiny if not doom of the brightest and highest philosophers and prophets to be endlessly reinterpreted no matter how correct or simple their doctrines and still be blamed for the misuse made of their meaning by the reasoning of their followers. Maybe it is because their supporters are ambitious young men in a hurry eager to launch their own careers of scholarship and will ever rarely be Platonic readers, that is, capable of detaching themselves from all their desires and emotions and animated solely by the desire for truth. (The political process, too unfortunately, works as a powerful filter of ideas). Our human bias becomes accentuated in the presence of the Holy Text because it itself is not neutral implicitly assuming a particular conception of truth and demanding a particular approach of investigation coupled with servitude.²⁶ The holy dispensations, present and past, chart a plan outside the sphere of our personal motives, interests and talents. This already shakes us punished as we are by inchoate and unfulfilled human goals. The veil of ignorance is heavy and constitutes a distinct, nonfoundational, option. We need something else to fully comprehend a 'divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God...' [Gleanings, 163] We must be conscious and accepting of the limitation of our human capacity to know the pinnacle of understanding. A confession of helplessness is required on our part, in itself the acme of human understanding and the fruit of mature contemplation. The emotive, loving and believing aspect of learning, that is, placing faith

in authority before, but not excluding, rational understanding precedes all other phases of learning and ensures that what is taught is assimilated, guarded and cherished, akin to the ancient Greek concept, *nous*, whereby we seek truth while attracted and guided by mysticism, a capacity that is the basis of reason.²⁷ The highest service of the teacher is to acquaint the seeker with his or her true feelings which are so easily put away in our need to manipulate our workaday world. Before translating God's love into social reality, or, to put it in another way, for devotional verse to be written convincingly in discursive prose, we must do as we want to feel rather than how we should feel.

"Only when the lamp of search, of earnest striving, of longing desire, of passionate devotion, of fervid love, of rapture, and ecstasy, is kindled within the seeker's heart, and the breeze of His loving-kindness is wafted upon his soul, will the darkness of error be dispelled, the mists of doubts and misgivings be dissipated, and the lights of knowledge and certitude envelop his being." [Gleanings 268]. In this Dispensation we are blessed in that Providence has favored mankind in such a way so as to assure us that if we reason rightly we shall also act rightly. Such reassurance is based on an incontrovertible promise: "We who have been enlightened by the new Revelation have the sacred Word to assure us, a Divine Plan to guide us, a history of valor to encourage us. Let us therefore take heart not only from the Word we treasure, but also from the deeds of heroism and sacrifice which even today shine resplendent..." [Ridván Message 153]

Our love affair with God cannot be an affair just of reasoning, but of experience. Communicating divine truth to people who have scarcely felt the grace of a devoted life is akin to attempting to explain the nature and beauty of colors to a blind man. And more: how are we to cope with the omnipresent lures of reason's language, its transitory and deceptive character already made difficult by the fact that the process of belief-formation is itself subject to powerful sub-rational undercurrents? But "...if we be loiterers, if we fail to play our part

surely others will be called upon to take up our task as ministers to the crying needs of this afflicted world.”²⁸

Intellectual Sturm und Drang

‘God’s greatest gift to man is that of intellect’ [Paris Talks 42], and the ‘rational faculty’ is a ‘sign’ of the ‘sovereign Lord’ (Gleanings 164). ‘To promote knowledge is...an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God.’ [Selections 97] ‘Quick-witted and keen of intellect are the faithful’, is how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá depicts us. [Selections 315] What knowledge does to us as individuals is the personal ideal of knowledge, what it does to civilization that is the social ideal of knowledge, but in either case, independently of scope and importance, knowledge brings human meaning and sets us free ‘to promote the unity and tranquility of mankind, to give enlightenment and civilization to the people, to produce love in all.... and to bring about the universal peace.’ [Paris Talks 43] But we cannot bend the world to our intelligence and risk defying the injunctions of love. We are all aware of how the power of intellect has been used both for the advancement of civilization as much as its demise and such an awareness seems to congregate in anxieties over the lives and works of scholars and leaders of thought.²⁹ A leader of thought must be the moral conscience of his society, a role occupied through the deployment of individual knowledge to the benefit of society. This is the classic engagement which early thinkers of the Enlightenment even encouraged and venerated.³⁰

Our Bahá’í World may reflect some of the features of the culture and socio-political organization of the day but the rich intellectual tradition that it has inherited cannot be stiffened by excessive systematization. Our Writings are of such a wide intellectual range, thematic grandeur and breadth of vision that any tincture of wills and passions can easily generate false dichotomies and systems for man always believes more readily that which he prefers. “For the mind of man is far from the nature of a clear and equal glass, wherein the beams of things should reflect

according to their true incidence; nay, it is rather like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture..."³¹ We are pushed to the art of rhetoric for its sake alone and not conceiving it as it should be conceived, namely, as *ars disserandi* or arts of discourse."The duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will."³² In today's world, our minds are practically formed by rule and line. Complexity everywhere is presented in statistics, metric modeling and the tabular form. Imagination, which sees eternity in men and women, seems out of place from the curious mind submissive to the norm of rationality which only sees men and women as data and dots, having learned of their existence only as abstract statistics.

Any decorative literary language is anathema, subversive, the enemy of political economy and science.³³

But scientific writing can never be at the exclusion of the emotional and spiritual colouring of the events otherwise our emotionless approach makes our space airless. As observers we survey, scrutinize but also relive it. The best histories are those that are works of imaginative insight in art as well as of science. We may be fascinated by the subtleties of society's progress and the flexibility with which these adjust to strategy but we should not be overwhelmed by such discoveries as we tend to magnify the experience out of its real proportion and to the exclusion of everything else. We must view any social scene not just with human data but with the detachment of one who stands **au delà de la mêlée** - to venture into the arena but remain aloof from its internal bickering, provide inquiry with understanding and a unique search for facts and trends, the trees and the wood as it were.

Our ancestors, in revival's climate and charged emotional atmosphere of Persia and its mass enthusiasms were seen to behave as **revolutionaries**.³⁴ **Today, however, the hallowed ground of building readied by heroic and spontaneous sacrifice depends now on order and stewardship to succeed. Our conduct must be seen to be as that of reformer. We cannot be imbued sufficiently with raison**

d'être when we overly emphasize the ethos of **raison d'état**. Our new Bahá'í culture carries its own self-justification and, yet, the accumulated habits and traditions of decades, formed and consolidated in the course of over a century and a half, persist and continue to color the thought even of the fairest student of the process. Our mind oscillates to discover the faultless balance between the factors making for the continuity and the discontinuity of methods.³⁵

Mathematization of the world and its empirical attributes can never be a substitute for love. Appealing to simple arithmetic to solve our problems erases the complex mysteries of human motivation. Our desires and preferences are not exogenous, simply given, but shaped by social arrangements and varying deprived circumstances. Without love, complexity is deformed and life becomes its own tomb, not just as a burial ground for all that we hold precious, but in perpetuating a perverse lifelessness. So soon as the power of love dies, 'man becomes the living sepulcher of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.' [Shelley, *Essay on Love*]. Without love, we lose the capacity to worship. Adoration's space is assailed by the consequences of a loveless world – suffering, injustice and oppression, not unchangeable but socially contingent upon kindness and benevolence. Without love there is no imagination, that sacrament which opens life to the sweetest spells, providing graced occasions of encounter between humanity and God. What endures imagination provides, the discovery of a life sufficiently heroic, both worldly ('weltlich') and of the spirit ('geistlich'). "We shall understand our present, and perhaps even our future, the better if we can succeed, by an effort of historical imagination, in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which.... love...was a natural mode of expression."³⁶ Excessive definition in religion destroys the imaginative wonder of belief, that fierce pleasure in things being themselves and which sets us free. Love does not share life's suspicion of deathliness. The state of loving is not the same as the state of living. What we call life may scarcely be worth the living; what we call love is always fulfilling. While the former includes having one's limb full of movement and seeing the light of the sun, love helps

us while even being in the dark and motionless. The lovelorn (‘áshiq’) sitting still is preferable to the agitated shrill of the sagacious (‘áqil’). (A timid attempt by the author to translate provisionally a line from one of Bahá’u’lláh’s prayer in Persian ‘áshiq-eh neshasteh beh as áqil-eh moteharek’). It is this multitudinous character of love which means that encapsulating figures for it is extraordinarily hard to do. Life, contrary to love, needs a theoretical framework to assimilate experience and phenomena, some reasoned system; love in itself is conclusive. Life is being, love is becoming. Love is the organizing principle of all human striving and gives all movements shape and direction. Life without love transforms itself into chaos, but with selfless love it is cosmos, a world that is ordered and intelligible and wholly suffused with the real presence of the eternal and the divine, what Weber calls an ‘enchanted garden’. The gifts of life are motivated by exchange, acting horizontally, while real gifts are acts of love, man’s vertical gratitude toward God. Life pulls us downward, love cannot resist the gravitational upward pull to salvation. Life is full of crosses preventing the homecoming, love is the comforting cross we share to look forward to a homecoming. We try in nihilistic despair to redivinize the world through the extended wings of science, art and politics. Love is the more plausible theology for such a project to succeed possessing a resilience which makes it immune to external argument.

Without the free play of the soul, mental creativity and license, things become ‘grotesque, eccentric, fail of their full returns’, as Whitman said.³⁷ If there be an anthem to resonate in the ‘vale of soul-making’, that internalization of a personal authority and a dictum to guide us through and beyond it, then surely it must carry something special to make the word God and everything associated with it meaningful, motivating and life giving. Just as we are born into authority and community, we are also born into myth and may, if blessed, become a part of it. In our societies, we are surrounded by the worried well who are guided solely by relentless ambition, aching envy and despairing disappointment. Words like soul and love are nothing to us if they do not represent a resigned and conscious acquiescence. We are all tethered to

the deformities of our individual points of view but by desiring what is perfectly good even though we don't quite know what it is and are unable to do what we would, we are part of the Divine power against evil, 'widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower' – timeless words from English novelist George Eliot set in a fictitious Midlands town in 1872. To succeed in this crusade we need a cosmic backdrop, a religious worldview, a grand narrative of meaning to give our life meaning as well. Alongside our 'administrative machinery' [Directives 2], we are also always in need of a freedom to experience the full impact of life and unfold our full potential in harmony with the Unknowable Essence and in submission to the reality of the universe as it is. In this Dispensation, sacred myths are freed to be donned as necessary in our collective and individual spiritual development and to nourish our awe as to the inner silent landscapes of the heart as well as to the outer vistas that roar on the other side of silence.

Myth has been variously referred to as 'public dreams'³⁸, 'the collective unconscious'³⁹, 'translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal'⁴⁰ and which has a profound deathless influence on our lives, us who live out its symbols and clothe them in meaning through our experiences. Is there any other way to explain the crusade which galvanized our Heroic Age and the miraculous, unprecedented story events which surrounded our dawn-breakers so explosively charged with archetypal and generic significance that their enduring consequences and abiding influence show us to this day how the new will to rid the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us is alive and may be retold and authored anew? These myths do not belong just to us but to be shared so that society as a whole may survive and conserved in subsequent cultures. Not projections of infantile or regressive fantasies, nor cemeteries of moribund metaphors and lost connections, much less the hinterland of allusion, myths are a timeless spring for action. Not limited just to the novelistic or dramaturgical disclosure of secret episodes located in the past, myth is the internalized blueprint, the skeletal or structural armature around which our community is molded. The charge of the indomitable Mullá Husayn

at Shaykh Tabarsí is not a piece of archaic, primitive, outrageous disease of glorified dissimulated language but an essential part of the inherited code of our culture showing how the literary redeployment and reassertion of a mythical figure in the past may yet endow us with the supernatural powers we have lost and use such inspiration, in our current period of unprecedented torrential change, to slip the surly bonds of earth on wings of our own manufacture and match the valiant acts of our epic hero in his quest-journey for unrevealed knowledge. While the world exists, so does the great past. It is not what Mullá Husayn accomplished as a martyr which makes him great but because of faith and courage manifested in such a deed. It is an ancient myth the importance of knowing names because it becomes possible to partake of the power and the qualities of such names.

By being called the ‘spiritual descendents of the dawn-breakers’ [Advent 7], we consciously or subconsciously partake of their power and drama. As such, myth is not a ‘mistress of fancy’ but, a summoner of powerful emotions, at once discomfiting as intriguing.⁴¹ True myth has the power to revive us, to serve as an anamnesis (ἀνάμνησις), that is, to return to right reason.⁴² We cannot succeed if we half believe myth best able to attend to trembling hearts rather than to aspiring bones.

Storytelling and literary imagining are not opposed to rational argument but can provide essential ingredients which are missing in public discourse. I emphasize the term ingredient because the empathetic imaginative power of making should never substitute rule-governed moral reasoning. We need institutions to protect the insights of compassionate imagination and which can free us to discuss compassion and mercy, the role of love and emotions in public discourse, what is involved in imagining the situation of someone different from oneself alone and to expand our conception of ourselves so as not to lose the relationship between the literary imagination and utilitarian reasoning with its indispensable technical investigations.⁴³ The philosophy of wonder standing on its own is not only inadequate, but can lead into senseless mysticism; imagination alone does not reach us to divine

reality but sends us into the depths of paganism. We must, however, retain (rediscover) faith in imagination to continue to shape us, keep us, create us – for good or ill. Service and the free play of the imagination are the one and same thing. To quote British author Doris Lessing in her acceptance speech of the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature: “It is our stories that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is... the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, that represents us at our best, and at our most creative.”⁴⁴ As builders gazing at a new world order, we have the obligation to construct a humanistic and multivalued conception of public rationality and public reasoning in general and not be allowed to be overwhelmed of standard economic and scientific paradigms to define our spiritual destiny which seem so reductive and lacking in human complexity. Life is painting a picture not doing a sum and we sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things to it.

The conviction of this truth is not to punish with a foreign code to conscience but to emancipate the holders of conscience. It must not be defiled by *politeia* (πολιτεία) and its in-built tendency to accept custom and to encourage uninspired contentment with things as they are.⁴⁵ The sons of Zion should not battle with the sons of Olympus.⁴⁶ When we embrace religion we are not immune to tormenting it with unannounced slumps of agitation and compromise. This is the exhausted past with no element of life within it. An exodus of despair sets in when the basis of union is no longer myth, that story which starts with an empty cosmos, but externalities, positive or negative, which soundlessly operate on our substance as instruments of pragmatism disallowing a freedom of ‘everything that is’.⁴⁷ This causes religion to become lightweight, alienable, and too uncertainly alive. To prevent this from happening, the structure of the interaction between the text and its imagined readers should be such so as to invite the seeker to see how the mutable features of society and circumstance bear on the realization of shared hopes and desires. The appreciation of myth and assessing what we read becomes ethically viable only in the sense that constructed in this way the act of deepening our understanding of the tenets of a

new Dispensation demands both critical immersion and conducting ‘meaningful and distinctive conversations’⁴⁸, comparing what one has read both with one’s own unfolding experience and with the response and arguments of other readers. Reading in this way, combining one’s own absorbed imagining with periods of more detached (and interactive) critical scrutiny, and not particularized vision, we begin to see why we might find in it an activity well-suited to public discourse.⁴⁹ The mental world of wonder, mystery, and humor should always govern us and permeate our beings – an antidote to prevailing materialism and misguided idealism and the bed of sanity in a mad world. The difficulty is to imagine in all its bareness this mental world that existed before our coming to wipe out all that makes for unhealthy food for both modern sentimentality and modern cynicism.

Conclusion

We cannot comprehend religion in advance of its living and skepticism, an omnipresent dangerous modernist idea, erodes our attempts at living. We, quite simply, vanish. Modernism and its process of secularization – testing religion for its reasonableness – beginning with the Renaissance and continuing through the Industrial Revolution, is problematic. While we may use rational resources and utilitarian philosophy to defend our vision of what civilization might be and society ought to be, joy and gaiety of spirit in experiencing our finite beings progressing towards an ever more complete embrace of the world eternal and re-enchantment, is lost, a blight for which we were not born for.⁵⁰ Joy in and of itself is a boon with “[g]aiety transfiguring all that dread.” [Yeats, *Lapis Lazuli*]. Augmenting the importance of the scientific method to recover our sense of belonging actually encourages a sense of homelessness. The tradition of belief becomes estranged and replaced by an awkward process of initiation into a new culture. Alienation grows, not to be seen as a token of intellectual’s serene majesty but its own self-annihilation because while it touches us, religion cannot be touched. Its relation with itself is central to our understanding

of it. Religion only flourishes on that which we are and feel and this makes its terms, in essence, difficult to define. Only religion reveals the fundamental issues of human existence, the deep significance of life, the universe of human experience. This makes religion everything. To think in more precise or scientific terms, to shape out new philosophies or to perfect the old by experiment is fraught with danger.⁵¹ The danger in mutation is that we lose all apprehension, perceptory or intellectual, and this makes for religion's appeal to end.⁵² Religion becomes a haven for casual niceties and oddities, enacting satisfying little dramas, supplying transcripts for momentary bliss and flashes of insight, now reduced ignobly and falsely to liturgical nurgatory, however beguiling. But the solution is not abandoning religion – ‘...by no political alchemy is it possible to make a golden society out of leaden individuals.’ [Esslemont 43] - nor is it to be found in the debate of spirit versus form, or in the strength of the immaterial as opposed to radicalized materialist philosophy, or testing scientific thinking with poetic practice, but in how to perpetuate religion's vitality both as life-giver behind the dynamic production of life from moment to moment as well as protector and shield from ‘the gay livery of the world’ [Gleanings XCVI]. The purpose of religion is not just to narrate but aesthetically to enact the world. This does not mean that we should disengage from science altogether. On the contrary, the same conception of God that holds the key to a correct understanding of human happiness is essential to the advancement of science. The knowledge that science strives to secure is the essence of the happiness we seek. We are instigated to “[s]tudy the sciences, acquire more and more knowledge.” [Paris Talks, 11] as ‘[t]he man of science is perceiving and endowed with vision... attentive, alive.’ [Promulgation, 50] A right theology is crucial to both pursuits. There can be no sharp distinction between the two overarching knowledge systems. Our power and activity increase with our understanding of the world and both science and religion, surely, constitute the highway to happiness, if not happiness itself, the joyful movement from a lower level of reality to a higher one, an inherently spiritual and ethical enterprise. This articulates both science and religion as a more nuanced version of each other, both mutually disclosing, ‘indissolubly welded

and joined in reality' [Promulgation 175]. While every natural science has its nomothetic side, it also has another half of a very different kind. Scientific knowledge has not lessened the need for mythical frameworks in life, nor has it robbed us of a cosmology that inspires awe and reverence. This is not to evade definition but to show how perception should be and where the basis for true understanding really lies, as captured in the cryptic phrase, 'the school of God'.⁵³ There is no gap between God and the world. This paradoxical notion of simultaneous separateness and unity, myth and method, science and religion, is true and real, best captured by the words of St. Paul 'Utraque unum' ('Both and One') - that which differentiates us also affirms our oneness — our materiality is our spirituality.

The divinity of the world is its intelligibility. Our understanding of the world will not stop at any particular point, but must go on increasing forever, which is the equivalent to saying the world is intelligible, not merely in certain ways, or within certain limits, but infinitely so, however little of it we understand at any given moment. Modern science also refuses to acknowledge that there are any limits to our understanding of the world. It demands that every explanation be probed and tested until a better one is found that explains its predecessor's limits and by doing so transcends them, a process without end.

Utopia is synonymous with a mental state of desperation, always recovering for lost time, and a feverish pursuit of routes. This easily makes us intolerant of each other because the high flights and hopes of some are confronted by deep depressions of disillusionment of others and this obstructs understanding. Reality is the contrary – it does not antagonize with exact obedience but unifies around agonizing choices of how to proceed and interpret correctly guidance from a central authority. To worship a single agenda really makes us unproductive because the mind that does not change cannot make change. It also makes us inconsistent with the principle of unity in diversity which evokes everyone's admiration because it facilitates us to build communities and not overthrow them.

“The heaven of true understanding shineth resplendent with the light of two luminaries: tolerance and righteousness.”[Tablets 170]

Far from declaring a greater renaissance – ‘the revolt of the soul against the intellect’ (to borrow from Yeats) - our observations here should not be seen as mocking the task of adducing proofs, but to be interpreted to mean that there is no perspective to life outside of religion and its promised fruit, nascent spirituality. Any understanding of reality proffered by physics, at once certain and unfathomable, can only be provisional and subjected to circumscribed, experimental, objective scrutiny central to scientific investigation.⁵⁴ Religion assists science to conquer the material investigation of the world and bring it into subjection to the spirit and not subjugation. Religion can never be relegated to the inferior position to become the enemy when science exploits it by the tyranny of exactitude and imposes subservience to the smothering demands of linearity, cause and effect. Ironically, the cognitive deficit we suffer by losing religion and forfeiting wonder is also abhorrent to science, almost by definition.⁵⁵ Religion is a comprehensive body of doctrine, science has yet to unite its miscellaneous systems but this does not turn these two stainless mirrors of forms and images of existing things into deadly rivals. Religion is not a purveyor of ancient prophecy nor is science the sole commentator of current events. The genuine social importance of each means that none can outlive the other and the limitless intelligibility of the universe shall forever depend on the net of laws of both science and religion to capture its unique formulation: the whole of the world at any given moment is the cause of the world at the next.⁵⁶ Mystery is to be respected, scientism (and not science) to be rejected, and the importance of play and wonder heightened.

Myth and method are uncuttable, guiding us to touch religion without touching, a fluent medium (method) binding us to an elusive object (myth). These ultimate congruent species of value – the one aesthetic and the other instrumental – must be shown to be apparent in all fields of service. We live in the tensions of the divine and the human, the temporal and the eternal, in a permanent state of in-between or

metaxy.⁵⁷ We must learn to walk in such pairs to experience the religious objective not as object whose vanishing is the price of their visibility but as an invisible present and motivating force in our lives. We rejoice precisely because the unresolved ambivalence between myth's subject and method's object sustains wonder. But we must also live in a reality that harmonizes the human quality of adventurousness and expansion with humility, resignation and yes, even loss of liberty: a higher trust threatening free will, a central authority to discipline spontaneous emotion, an order regulating modern freedom. This anomalous and suspicious pair will assuredly assist us to regain higher ground, stanch our tears, halt our fall into indeterminacy or negation and recover us from the entanglement that began from the moment of its disavowal.⁵⁸

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NOTES

- 1 Gospel of Matthew 16:24 [KJV]
- 2 From the poem Sunday Morning, by Wallace Stevens, in his book of poetry Harmonium published in 1923.
- 3 Refer to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk in Paris, October 24th, 1911.
- 4 No other word in our vocabulary has created so many striking and globally itinerant conventions, etched so many compelling plotlines, provided such limitless imaginative space in which to articulate and contemplate the myriad forms of human emotions of affection, passion, and idealism as love. A sickness unto death or an exhilarating rebirth of the soul, such is its pre-eminence in human thought and feeling across historical, geographic, and linguistic contexts that there is no limit to love's many possible meanings in our own lives and those of others. With so many strains in its meaning and construction across so many traditions it is not surprising to find valiant efforts to write the definitive narrative. Refer, for example, to Irving Singer's monumental three volume series published between 1984 and 1987, entitled 'The Nature of Love', 1,300 pages exploring the vast expressions and theories of love from ancient times to the present. He especially saw love as a 'saving remnant, a viable and realistic conception of what is humanly possible'. It is wise to dismiss the confusing, diversely assorted modern notions of love as these without exception lean towards ambiguity and disagreement. It is in the Bible and Greek philosophy, however, where we see stem the dominant themes of love, one divine and the rest, shades of the residual. For example, what we call (a) affection, is both *storgē* (στοργή) and a giving, loyal, reciprocal love of others, kin or friend or *philia* (φιλία); (b) there is a side to love which is passion or attraction, *éros* (ἔρως), the possessive, all-consuming love of beauty, and (c) the love of compassion, *agapē* (ἀγάπη), the **transcendental, all-embracing, selfless love, the closest to unconditional love. The limitations of these residual loves is that all - familiar, conjugal, or brotherly love (a-c), are natural loves, and, therefore, volatile and not self-sufficient. They bestow great importance to an object to ensure a good life but they are not the highest object. They also need external assistance for expression, reduced to human bondage and prone to self-preservation or self-aggrandizement or both. Universal love, God's infinite love, is unnatural in this sense. God is not just the highest object, making for human plenitude and the more complete life, but is (a) absent of intention i.e. 'unselfish' and (b) not limited to material ties. "... perfect love... can only be achieved by the power of the Divine Spirit. No worldly power can accomplish the universal love."** [Paris Talks, 11]

- 5 'Effulgent' is used here to communicate the love that flows from God to man, and 'enkindling' to refer to the love that flows from man to God, adapted from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's four way typology of love. Refer to Paris Talks, UK Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972, page 180.
- 6 Conversion here has none of its modern evangelical significance but connotes simultaneously the uncontaminated ideal of renunciation to the world as it does reception into a world renewed.
- 7 Self has been created for one purpose only - to be abdicated and self-sacrifice is synonymous with human development, meaningfulness and security. Psychologists tell us that "...sacrifice... serves far more effectively than short-term impulsive pleasure at keeping suffering at bay." Jordan B. Peterson, clinical psychologist, in his book, *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*, Random House, Canada, 2018, p. 174. But how does one answer the question that sacrifices of the highest quality are not rewarded? Isn't God happy? It makes empty and futile the debate of how good might the best possible future be if the highest sacrifice could be made effective. What is the greatest possible sacrifice for the greatest possible good? The lamentation from Calvary continues to echo through the ages: "...Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? [Gospel of Matthew 27:46 KJV] God requires not just sacrifice but the sacrifice of precisely what is loved best because God conferred upon man the 'gift of guidance, and in thankfulness for this great gift certain deeds must emanate from him' [Promulgation, 236]. We must make universal love the ground of morality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá many times reminds us that when we sacrifice self we break away from imperfection and this opens the way to ideal union and happy relationships.
- 8 The apostle Paul forewarned against the working of the law in conscience or rational agents alone: "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;" Romans 2:15 (KJV). The scholar John Rawls, on the other hand, contends the view that moral truth cannot be metaphysical. It could only be political. Our need for objectivity is practical, that is, it arises in contexts in which people disagree about what to value and need to reach an agreement about what to do. This, of course, gives rise to a host of problems and strongly implies the need for general terms or universals to act as a referee. To reason about and among individuals depends not only on abstractive (as distinct from intuitive) cognition, the deferential apprehension of an antecedent and independent order of some kind, (are our thoughts really faithful representations of the extramental world they depict?) but on the priority of will over reason. Kant's heroic attempt to establish the authority of human reason by transcendental means still relies on the inventive power in

the human soul whose very spontaneity makes it as mysterious and hence as unintelligible as God's creation of the world.

- 9 For an inspiring incursion into this unique piece of Bahá'í literature, refer to the very original article 'Emblems of Faithfulness: Pluralism in Meaning and Beauty in the Ordinary', by Helen Cheng and Catherine Nash published in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 25.3, 2015. Moojan Momen provides an additional descent into the highly innovative aspect of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's book in a paper entitled *Memorials of the Faithful: The Democratization of Saint-hood*, published in *Lights of Irfan* 17, 2016. In the same publication we find *Memorials of the Faithful: The Virtues of Inner and Outer Transformation*, by Marlene Koswan, who shows how the protagonists of the book exemplified character, manners and conduct. The *Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, USBPT, 1932 edition, one of Shoghi Effendi's earliest translations 'which deserves to be counted as a classic among epic narratives in the English tongue' [Rabbani, Pearl] surely stands alone as a historical masterpiece which chronicles in over 600 pages a 'rehearsing [of] the beginnings of the Baha'i Revelation and of preserving the remembrance of the deeds of its early champions.' The *Chronicle of Nabil*, the original manuscript of the author Muhammad-i-Zarandi (1831–1892), titled *Nabil-i-Azam*, stands unique in historiography in that the door of contemporary information on the early adherents of the Babi and Bahá'í Faiths having been forever closed making the careful collection of witness accounts of the heroic disciples up to and until 1892 priceless. We are informed by the *Guardian* that "...parts of the manuscript were reviewed and approved, some by Bahá'u'lláh, others by 'Abdu'l-Bahá", hence its invaluable authenticity.
- 10 'It is much safer to obey than to govern', said wisely once by a German theologian of the late Medieval period, Thomas à Kempis, and probable author of *Imitatio Christi* (*Imitation of Christ*), a devotional book that, with the exception of the Bible, has been considered the most influential work in Christian literature. Cited in Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, London, 1912, p.69. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses obedience as a measuring-rod with which to measure the love of His followers, quoted in *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, first written or published in 1947.
- 11 St. Augustine, quoted in *Love and Saint Augustine* by Hannah Arendt, reprint University of Chicago, Chicago, 1996, page 99.
- 12 A modern account of the constancy of the Bahá'ís in Iran and their unquenchable unconquerable spirit of resilience can be found in the edited transcript of Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri's address at the 42nd Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies "Constructive Resilience", published in *JBS*, Vol:28 N°4 Winter 2018.

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- 13 Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the 12th Century French abbot and a major leader in the reform of Benedictine monasticism, quoted in Herbert B. Workman, *The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal*, London, 1912, p.345
 - 14 The “framework for action” is a term that has been applied repeatedly during the past two decades (1996–2018) of plans conceived and implemented by the Universal House of Justice and refers to our effort to be conscious of the concepts, methods, practices, and instruments required to undertake an organic process capable of responding to an organic objective. But we can only understand the components of the framework of action if, by an effort of the historical imagination, we succeed in reconstructing that long-lost state of mind for which love, unity, and fellowship become a natural mode of expression. “O ye friends! Fellowship, fellowship! Love, love! Unity, unity!—so that the power of the Bahá’í Cause may appear and become manifest in the world of existence.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, p.54
 - 15 The response to this refrain is ‘Habemos ad dominum’
[We have to the Lord’]
 - 16 Latinate or Greek terminology is used deliberately to direct the reader away from the conventional connotations of equivalent English words contaminated by modern discourse.
 - 17 We are not suggesting here a political or ethical interpretation to the philosophy of love by inferring for example, that nonviolence is a plausible method for transforming conflict and building societies of peace. After all, at the core of nonviolence is the recognition that we all have a shared human identity and that life is valuable in and of itself. Although nonviolent approaches are several, they can never be espoused as an alternative course of action for two crucial aspects, both contrary to the Bahá’í principle of non-interference in political affairs: (a) their ability to defy authority to reverse the effect of repression, and (b) their ability to undermine and sever the source of support and power of the opponent. Both of these characteristics - defiance and overt power struggle – are shunned in the Bahá’í Faith. The principle of political non-involvement categorically means ‘to sacrifice...political pursuits and affiliations’. Equally relevant is the idea that we cannot change faulty systems by being involved in them; ‘on the contrary they will destroy us.’ http://bahai-library.com/khan_political_noninvolvement_obedience. This does not mean that Bahá’ís refrain from engaging in practical activities for social wellbeing. But the question inevitably arises: is not shaping social reality in itself a political act? In our social relations evidently there is a positive expression of power on the level of the individual but actions only survive on collective volition, not on warring factions, on patterns of collaboration and not patterns of conflict, on engaging governmental and wwpromises. Humanity as a whole will forge the

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- basis of a new world order. The 'modern politics', a term used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is founded on peace with Bahá'ís reaching out to create unity and love and not revolting overboard with competing ideas of change and social transformation.
- 18 Book of Romans 13:8 [KJV] "...for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law."
- 19 There exists an intersection here of 'caritas' understood to mean neighbourly love and Augustine's quaestio "What is the relevance of the neighbour?" when we are in God's presence isolated from all things mundane.
- 20 Poverty is not itself the criterion nor is oppression for this would leave the rich and the oppressor without a criterion for moral self-reflection and repentance.
- 21 See the Statement from the Bahá'í International Community entitled 'Religious Values and the Measurement of Poverty and Prosperity' presented in Johannesburg, South Africa, 12th January, 1999. Also refer to the article by Professor Ruerd Ruben calling for a greater and more mature relationship between religion studies and development studies, in "Can Religion Contribute to Development? The Road from 'Truth to 'Trust.'" https://brill.com/abstract/journals/exch/40/3/article-p225_2.xml
- 22 Quoted in the **The Art of Peace** by Morihei Ueshiba. The irony is that economics in its origins used to be considered a moral science and not a natural science i.e. 'it employs introspection and judgments of value' [John Maynard Keynes]. Harmony of interests is considered a solid rational basis for morality. However, as history has shown, once industrial capitalism and the class system had become recognized structures of society, the doctrine of the harmony of interests acquired a distorted significance whereby a dominant group asserts its predominance by claiming the identity of its interests equal to those of the community as a whole. Today's theories seek to explain the behavior of economic agents through self-interested, rational, and egoistic motives divorced from ethical considerations and moral reasoning. In the omnipresent confrontation of markets, moral values seem to deteriorate at the point of disappearing altogether. But this seems counter-intuitive. Is it not the laissez-faire school of political economy that popularized the very notion of the harmony of interests, whereby the individual promotes the interests of the community for the very reason that those interests were identical with his own? We can question the sincerity of Mr. Henry Ford when he wrote in 1930 'that anything which is economically right is also morally right. There can be no conflict between good economics and good morals' quoted in E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, pages 43-44, but he voiced a prevailing current of accepted thought at the time which stated that men do the greatest service to the public when they are thinking of nothing but their own gain. Modern economics, however, cannot dismiss ethics in favor of a narrow focus on self-interest. All human actions do not have a calculus of maximizing. We

- give blood out of a sense of civic duty and in many other social situations, the idea of compensation even feels as bribery. Refer to *Licence to Be Bad: How Economics Corrupted Us*, by Jonathan Aldred, Allen Lane, 2019.
- 23 Such scepticism attacks all fields and a good rebuttal is forcibly provided by E.H. Carr with regard to political science, for example, in his landmark opus, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939*, page 9: "For while the transmutation of lead into gold would be no nearer if everyone in the world passionately desired it, it is undeniable that if everyone really desired a 'world-state' or 'collective security'...it would be easily attained; and the student of international politics may be forgiven if he begins by supposing that his task is to make everyone desire it."
- 24 For the sake of clarity the term realism and reality are not the same. Realism is a thesis, a school of educational thought; reality refers to a state or quality of being. The doctrine of realism, metaphysical or scientific, aims at the inquiry of observable and non-observable realities of the world's constituents.
- 25 John Locke (1632-1704), quoted in *Beliefs in Action: Economic Philosophy and Social Change*, by Eduardo Giannetti da Fonseca, CUP, Cambridge, 1991, page 192.
- 26 Paul Lample, in his thought provoking book, *Revelation & Social Reality: Learning to Translate What is Written into Reality*, Palabra, Florida, 2009 provides an excellent and detailed analysis of the dichotomy - rational certainty vis-à-vis spiritual certitude - in the Section entitled 'Human Rationality and the Bahá'í Teachings', pages 174-186.
- 27 An achievable state of mind best exemplified by the preeminent Bahá'í scholar Mirza Abu'l-Fada'il (1844-1914), who has been heard to comment "that when he first read the *Iqan* [the Book of Certitude], as a non-believer, its deep meaning remained obscure to him, but when he read it afterward as a believer it was the key that unlocked all the holy Scriptures of the past." Cited in *Summon Up Remembrance*, by Marzieh Gail, page 113.
- 28 Shoghi Effendi, letter dated, September 24th, 1924, quoted in 'Unfolding Destiny: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'í Community of the British Isles', BPT, 1981, p.27
- 29 I hesitate to use the term 'public intellectual', this 'vestigial organ of modernity', in the Bahá'í context because it assumes a political and ideological dimension. The ordinary public vacillates between seeing the intellectual as "unusually sensitive to the sacred [with] an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of the universe and the rules which govern their society" (Edward Shills

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- (Intellectuals and the Powers, 1974, p. 3), or “the industrial technician, the political economist, the organizer of a new culture and a new law” (Antonio Gramsci), both are quoted in the article by Maria Laura Bettencourt Pires, ‘Public intellectuals – past, present and future’, published in *Comunicação & Cultura*, n.º 7, 2009.
- 30 Voltaire, for example, in his article “L’homme de lettres” (*Dictionnaire philosophique*, published 1764), espouses engagement and shuns “the scholastic obscurantism of decadent universities and academies.” Quoted in *Public Intellectuals – An Endangered Species*, Ed. A. Etzioni & A. Bowditch, Rowman & Littlefield, Oxford, 2006, p 158.
- 31 Bacon, from his 1605 book, *Advancement of Learning*, quoted in *Beliefs in Action: Economic Philosophy and Social Change*, by Eduardo Giannetti da Fonseca, CUP, Cambridge, 1991, page 154.
- 32 Bacon’s rhetorical principle is a good reminder of how words are ultimately about arousing imagination (or emotion) as a mechanism for influencing behavior (“the will”), whether by intent or effect.
- 33 “First, it will be said that literary imagination is unscientific and subversive of scientific social thought. Second, it will be said that it is irrational in its commitment to the emotions. Third, it will be charged that it has nothing to do with the impartiality and universality that we associate with law and public judgment.” Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1995, p.4
- 34 The emphasis is one of perception as fair-minded observers never viewed the Bab and His followers as ‘revolutionary’ or engaging in ‘anarchical conspiracy’.
- 35 The ideal of a stationary state reads like a lyric cry and squanders the most precious thing there is, the spirit. This cannot mean that only the individual agent knows what his or her needs are, nor can it mean enforcing a re-education to help enhance our moral or aesthetic capabilities which can be ‘wooden and awkward’ (a phrase used by Mr. Paul Lample in his talk at the 32nd annual conference of the Association for Bahá’í Studies – North America 29 August to 1 September 2008). But guidance from the top is indispensable (a) to give official scope to experiments designed to permit the practice of new and essential skills but also (b) address the problem of initiative and efficient use of existing resources which can only be genuinely solved from below. “The periodic re-evaluation of the effectiveness of the teaching work is an essential factor in promoting the growth of every community.” [Universal House of Justice Message, July 30th 1987]
- 36 C.S. Lewis, “The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition”, *Galaxy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1958, page 1.

- 37 Religious texts may criticize imagination: “for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” [Genesis 8:21 KJV] yet the same texts are interpreted to provide for a positive imagination that facilitates a dialogue between the human and the divine. Coleridge identifies Logos as the communicative intellect in God and man and the ultimate power of making. Refer to the contributing article by James Engell, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Harvard University, in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*, 4th edition, 2012, pp 666-674.
- 38 Proposed by Joseph Campbell who researched extensively the study of comparative mythology. His widest popular recognition followed his collaboration on the PBS series, *The Power of Myth*, which was first broadcast in 1988, the year following his death. The series discusses mythological, religious, and psychological archetypes. A book, *The Power of Myth*, containing expanded transcripts of their conversations, was released shortly after the original broadcast.
- 39 A term coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung, or ‘kollektives Unbewusstes’ in German, referring to structures of the unconscious mind shared among human beings. The theory of myth developed by the father of analytical psychology is one of the few that answers fully the subject matter, origin, and function of myth. Refer to his work, in collaboration with C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, published in 1949.
- 40 Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), leader of the British Romantic movement. He uses the word ‘symbol’ rather than ‘myth’ in his 1816 *Statesman’s Manual*. Symbol is conceived as an expression of unity between the representative and semantic function of language. Myth and symbol are interchangeable in that both refer to a ‘structure of significance’ whose power over collective intelligence, purpose and behavior is strong. Myths operate as mediating symbols.
- 41 We use the magical figure of Mullá Husayn, as we can countless others such as the audacity of the village girl, Zaynab, during the Zanjan upheaval or the 17-year old Mona who was hanged with nine other Bahá’í women in June 1983, precisely to underpin the fact that ‘bios theoretikos’ or contemplative thinking, cannot stand alone as an essential human activity but must follow or be followed by other principal human activities, such as willing and judging, essential roles that lead to action. Hannah Arendt expands bios theoretikos into these other mental faculties to show that contemplation and actualization through action are inseparable. It is precisely in the enactment of the ethical excellences that contemplation is immortalized. Action becomes not an end, the telos, but rather the beginning, undertaking new ventures whose outcome or end cannot be foreseen and whose standard is courage, daring to embark on something new and unpredictable. Augustine’s dictum is Arendt’s start-off ‘Initium ut esset creatus est homo, “man was created so that a beginning be” in

order that entirely new undertakings and ventures could come about in the historical human world.

- 42 As spiritual beings, we are guided in our thought and action by a special gift from our Creator, who has seen fit to implant in our souls the deeper truth of the nature of the world, and special guidance about how we are to act in it. We must discover this inner truth, and adhere to it in the face of the often-distracting course of our experience. Perception and inquiry remind us of what is innate in us. The doctrine of anamnesis is not without its historical controversies, however. Refer to Jerry Samet's article, "The Historical Controversies Surrounding Innateness", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2019 Edition. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/innateness-history/>).
- 43 To quote from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian: "Just as the muscles enable the body to carry out the will of the individual, all Assemblies and committees must enable the believers to carry... the love of Bahá'u'lláh..." Directives p. 2
- 44 Quoted in 'The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics', 4th edition, 2012, p. 674.
- 45 The body of doctrines and practices that form the fundamental organizing principle of a state (its constitution or 'politeia') have a built-in tendency for self-protective stratagems and the conduct of its associated defined arrangements of offices, functions, and jurisdictions oftentimes engendering sufficient mistrust so as to exact confrontation with a community's own thoughts and intentions.
- 46 Implied to mean that seekers of heavenly thoughts, inhabitants of a cramped hill in Mount Zion, are not in battle with the dwellers of the first fiery scientists of Western civilization, as epitomized by Greece's towering Mount Olympus.
- 47 These three words, 'everything that is', readily describe the Greek term 'cosmos'.
- 48 As early as 2001, the Universal House of Justice encourages the Bahá'ís to engage and seek opportunities to meet individuals "... who are willing to engage in meaningful conversation, exploring spiritual realities and learning more and more about the Faith." Letter dated, 3rd of June, 2001, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Union of Myanmar.
- 49 By looking into lives that are not ours, we avoid the personal bias which can misinterpret information. Martha C. Nussbaum: "... ideally the process of reading must be completed by a conversation among readers." Quoted in her book, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1995, p. 75. Such empathetic participation and external assessment are crucial in determining the degree of compassion it is rational for a person

to have. We see this principle in the new approach to Bahá'í culture, 'to help the believers draw upon the Writings as a guide for action, while avoiding both an inflexible literalism intent upon "finding the one right answer" and an unfocused subjectivism that indulges in a prolonged exchange of personal views on "what the quotation means to me".' Mr. Paul Lample, *Revelation & Social Reality: Learning to Translate What is Written into Reality*, Palabra, Florida, 2009, pp 81-82.

- 50 Utilitarian thinking, a product of the nineteenth century, continues to dominate Western thought, with its tendency to aggregate human beings, to overlook individual differences, and to reduce the mysteries and complexities of human motivation to mathematically predictable elements of self-interest. To conceive order through the greatest good for the greatest number, or through a balance of enlightened self-interest and the pursuit of economic profit, has proven at variance with the disorder and human suffering precipitated by the Industrial Revolution. Voegelin pithily remarks: "The substance of order moved down in the ontological scale from God, through reason, pragmatic intellect, usefulness, production forces, and racial determinants, to biological drives." Quoted in Dr. Paulette Kidder's 2004 article *The Eclipse of Transcendence in Dickens' Hard Times*, and may be obtained at the site <https://sites01.lsu.edu/faculty/voegelin/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2015/09/Kidder2004.pdf>.
- 51 "The tendency to narrow the field of human experience to the area of reason, science, and pragmatic action, the tendency to overvalue this area in relation to the bios theoretikos and the life of the spirit, the tendency to make it the exclusive preoccupation of man, the tendency to make it socially preponderant through economic pressure in the so-called free societies and through violence in totalitarian communities- all these tendencies are part of a cultural process that is dominated by a flight of magic imagination..." Voegelin (*ibid.*)
- 52 In fact, from a religious point of view apprehension is placed in between the intellectual and the sensible, its purpose being to see the good in the relation between perception and existence.
- 53 Cited in *The Four Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh* and which could be interpreted to mean human learning to understand the non-human, grammar's rules to guide us to renunciation..
- 54 The exotic new theories in physics today – string theory, loop quantum gravity, and the like – share the common ambition of seeking to explain features of the universe that quantum physics and modern astrophysics place beyond the explanatory reach of physical science. Does this not suggest a new religious cosmology?

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- 55 The Latin *apprehensio*, from which the English term is derived, was employed by late medieval logicians, as the three fundamental operations of the scientific mind: apprehension, judgement and ratiocination.
- 56 This is in reference to Laplace's 'demon' in classical mechanics as the canonical articulation of scientific determinism which has played a vital role in statistical thermodynamics, quoted in 'Confessions of a Born-Again Pagan' by Anthony T. Kronman, Yale University Press, 2016, page 765. "In this sense, modern physics is committed to the principle of sufficient reason and to the proposition, which this principle implies, that the world is infinitely intelligible, while conceding...that our finitude prevents us from ever exhausting its intelligibility completely." (ibid. pp 615-616)
- 57 The Greek term *metaxy* (μεταξύ) denotes the middle, the intermediate, the in-between or the center.
- 58 For a bold and imaginative attempt in searching for a mythological landscape and substance in the Bahá'í Faith, refer to the article by William P. Collins, *Sacred Mythology and the Bahá'í Faith*, JBS, Vol:2, N°4, 1990.

A Survey of the Cardinal Maxims of Islamic Philosophy in the Bahá'í Writings¹

Vargha Bolodo-Taefi

Abstract

This paper explores the influence of Islamic thought and intellectual tradition on the Bahá'í Writings and presents thirty-four cardinal maxims of Islamic philosophy that are adopted and expounded in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Each section explains the meaning of a maxim, describes its usage by prominent figures in Islamic intellectual history, and demonstrates its application in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith.

Introduction

The development of Islamic intellectual tradition witnessed the emergence of four major schools of thought in its Golden Age. A rationalist form of Islamic theology was created to formulate the principal doctrines of Islamic belief and to rebut criticisms levelled against it by its opponents. It produced able theologians like Shaykh Mufid, Al-Ghazálí, Zamakhsharí, Fakhr-i-Rází, 'Allámah Al-Hillí, Íjí, and As-Suyúṭí. The Peripatetic Islamic school incorporated doctrines of Greek philosophy, most notably of Aristotle and Neoplatonism, into early Islamic philosophy. It found such prominent philosophers in its ranks as Al-Kindí, Al-Fárábí, Avicenna, and Ibn Ruṣhd (Averroes). Features of Islamic mysticism were gradually incorporated into the Islamic philosophical tradition. Islamic mystical philosophy became a method of attaining esoteric wisdom and of rational expression of the mystical elements within an Islamic milieu. Some outstanding Muslim mystical philosophers include Suhrawardí, Ibnu'l-'Arabí, Qúnaví,

Ḥaydar-i-Ámulí, and Jílí. Influenced by Peripateticism, Neoplatonism, Avicenna's philosophy, and Islamic mystical philosophy, Suhrawardí founded the school of Illuminationism. Its holistic and innovative philosophy, based on both discursive and intuitive approaches to knowledge, revived Islamic philosophy after its Golden Age. Some notable Illuminationist thinkers after Suhrawardí include Quṭbu'd-Dín-i-Shírází, Shahrazúrí, Mír Dámád, and Mullá Ṣadrá.

Mullá Ṣadrá synthesized the many tracts of the Golden Age of Islamic thought into what he termed the Transcendent Theosophy. His several doctrines, such as the ontological primacy of existence and substantial motion, revolutionized Islamic metaphysics. Through his novel approach to philosophy that combined theology and mystical intuition, he introduced a holistic method of understanding reality and philosophical inquiry that harmonized logical and theological reasoning, study of the religious texts and scriptural hermeneutics, exegesis, and spiritual inspiration. Some of the able representatives of the Transcendent Theosophy school of thought include Fayḍ-i-Káshání and Mullá Hádý-i-Sabzivárí.

In the early nineteenth century, at a time when Mullá Ṣadrá's thought had emerged as the dominant philosophical paradigm in the Shí'ih seminary in the Islamic East, heterodox doctrines of Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥṣá'í, and after him Siyyid Kázim-i-Raṣhtí, laid the foundations for a new approach to Shí'ih theology. This messianic, millenarian movement, known as Shaykhism, derived its focus from some of the main themes of the Transcendent Theosophy, such as the names and attributes of God, and the effusions of existence and revelation, and acted as an intellectual link between Islam and the Bábí Faith.

Why and how is a study of Islamic thought useful in understanding the Bahá'í Revelation? Utilizing Aristotle's philosophical theory of hylomorphism, the distinguished Bahá'í philosopher Dr. 'Alí-Murád Dávúdí explains that all beings—except incorporeal essences, such as the Essence of God—are composed of matter and form. Religions,

likewise, at least inasmuch as they relate to the world of creation, are composed of matter and form. The form of religion is the Cause of God, the reality which relates to and emanates from Him. The matter of religion is the potential which appears in the world of creation to receive this form. The form of religion is born of divine revelation. The matter of religion is situated in human civilization in every age and dispensation. Elements of the cultures, sciences, literatures, philosophies, technologies, and ethics of every age enter the religion and shape the development of practices, rites, observances, and laws of the peoples. Every religion speaks in the language of the people in that dispensation; steers the customs, habits, and traditions of its age; benefits from the verse and prose, science and industry, and laws of the day; and assimilates a portion of the histories, anecdotes, and tales of that time. For instance, the influence of Greek philosophy, Roman civilization, and Jewish culture on Christianity, or of Arab, Jewish, Greek, Syrian, and Persian cultures and civilizations on Islam, is well known. All such influences, from whatever source they may be, constitute the matter in which the form of religion appears. The form of religion, however, which is the Cause of God, has no source but divine revelation. Therefore, caution should be exercised, lest we confuse the elements which are derived from worldly sources in any religion with the true and divine source of its revelation which is the cause of its novelty, or reduce the divine form of religion to its earthly matter (*Áhang-i-Badí* 327:23–24).

With this in mind, Islamic thought and intellectual tradition can be considered as constituting the matter of the Bahá'í Faith and shaping the appearance of its wondrous form. It is important to note, however, that Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not merely adopt, confirm, and cite the elements of Islamic thought in Their Writings. They rather breathe the spirit of life into the body of Islamic intellectual tradition; revitalize and reinvigorate the views of the philosophers and theologians of old; choose them as one of means of establishing the new Revelation; associate this matter with others that pertain to the refinement of character, the upholding of justice, the establishment of order and of the kingdom of God on earth; animate this receptive matter

with the quickening form emanating from God; and manifest His Cause in the world of creation. The Bahá'í Faith, therefore, exemplifies, reunites, and integrates within its Sacred Text some of the wholesome and noble elements that can be found in Islamic philosophy (ibid. 28).

It must be remembered that the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith are not devoid of social and historical context. As the Universal House of Justice explains (1982, 1998), the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá chose to employ philosophical themes, terms, and concepts, among others, as a vehicle, because it is a mode which Their audience is capable of grasping, not because it reflects Their own state or voice. Their understanding and perception transcend those of any human being or the traditions and concepts of any society. They used the familiar mediums of human language and philosophy and common standard of acquired knowledge to raise humanity to a wholly new level of awareness and behavior.

This paper presents thirty-four cardinal maxims of Islamic philosophy that are adopted and expounded in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Each section explains the meaning of a maxim, describes its usage by prominent figures in Islamic intellectual history, and demonstrates the author's understanding of its application in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Much of this paper relies on the author's reading of the Bahá'í Sacred Text in its original language, Text for which there is no authorized English translation. The author has provided provisional English translations in a few cases.

1. Contradictory propositions cannot both be true or false

This maxim is comprised of two axiomatic principles that are known in classical logic as the law of non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle. The law of non-contradiction stipulates that two contradictory propositions cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. The law of excluded middle states that two contradictory propositions cannot both be false and that either one proposition or its

negation holds. Together, these two laws create a logical dichotomy in which the two contradictory propositions are mutually exclusive—as required by the law of non-contradiction—and jointly exhaustive—as expressed by the law of excluded middle.

This maxim is widely recognized as an *a priori* axiom and one of the foremost among primary principles, indemonstrable premises that are inherent in human intellectual faculty on the basis of their appeal to self-evidence. It is considered to be a sufficient foundation underlying rational discourse, human thought, and all the other theorems and propositions of logic. Without assuming the truth of this maxim, the truth of no other principle can ever be demonstrated. But this maxim is itself a primary premise whose truth does not depend on, and is not inferred from, the proof or the validity of any other principle. Reasoning is the process through which the existence of a thing signifies the existence of another and the non-existence of a thing indicates the non-existence of another. Were we to assume the law of non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle to be false, the existence of a thing would no longer signify the existence of another and its non-existence the non-existence of another; the foundation of reasoning would thereby collapse. The truth of this maxim is indemonstrable because in order to demonstrate the truth of the law of non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle—that is, in order to reason—one must presuppose the truth of this same maxim upon which the truth of all the other principles and propositions of logic must be founded—and, in so doing, commit the fallacy of circular reasoning.

Mullá Šadrá (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 1.3:443), Avicenna (*Al-Ilāhiyyāt* 48), Fakhr-i-Rāzī (*Al-Arba'in* 154), and Ījī (*Sharḥu'l-Mawāqif* 64) have all recognized this maxim as foremost among *a priori* axioms. Some Islamic theologians have even gone a step further and relied on the self-evidence of the law of non-contradiction and the law of excluded middle in order to demonstrate the axiomatic self-evidence of existence (ibid. 170). This indicates that this maxim is considered to appeal to self-evidence more than the concept of existence does.

In one of His Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh utilizes to the logic of the law of excluded middle in His reasoning to outline the only two possible outcomes when an appeal is made to tyrants—either they take heed or they reject (INBA 31:8). The Báb, in several of His Writings, such as the Persian Bayán (INBA 62:10–20), the Kitáb-i-Asmá' (*Selections* 5:19), the Panj Shá'n (INBA 1:5–6, 43), and the Dalá'il-i-Sab'ih (25, 44), invokes this principle when describing the contrast between negation and affirmation, or between denial and acceptance, in the world of existence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also employs this maxim in multiple settings. In one Tablet, for instance, He compares the views of Bahá'u'lláh and the Arch-breaker of His Covenant, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, concerning the appointment of the Center of the Covenant after Bahá'u'lláh's passing, establishes that these two views are contradictory propositions, states that they cannot both be true or false, and suggests that one guides people while the other leads them astray (*Muntakhabát* 4:157). Similarly, in the Lawḥ-i-Hizár Baytí, 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes the importance of service over names and titles and states that one of the following logics must be true: either we succeed in serving the Faith, in which case all the beauteous names revolve around us; or we are deprived of such a service, in which case names and appellations avail us nothing (ibid. 250). In His commentary on the Islamic tradition "I was a hidden treasure" (*Makátib* 2:26, 39), 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes an adaptation of the law of non-contradiction twice and states that a thing cannot embody the attributes of its negation. In order to reject a proposition that before their formal existence in the world of creation the essences of things were absolutely non-existent, He cites this maxim and explains that absolute non-existence cannot acquire the capacity and worthiness to emerge from a state of non-existence into the realm of existence. He demonstrates that the essences of all things, as the subjects of God's knowledge, have a pre-existent intellectual existence in God's knowledge and are one with His Essence. In *Some Answered Questions* (53:7), 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines death and non-existence as a transformation in the form of a decomposition of constituent elements. Rejecting death as annihilation and absolute non-existence, He relies on this maxim and concludes that insofar as

created things still have a mineral existence after their decomposition, they cannot be in contradictory states of existence and non-existence simultaneously. In yet another elucidation (ibid. par. 4), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá contrasts the procession of creation from God through emanation with appearance through manifestation and maintains that a belief in emanational procession preserves the transcendence and the pre-existence of God, whereas a belief in manifestational appearance “would require unconditioned pre-existence to take on the attributes of the originated, absolute independence to become abject poverty, and the essence of existence to become pure non-existence.” Applying the law of non-contradiction, He concludes that a belief in manifestational appearance is untenable.

2. A reference is identical with its referent in reality and existence

In its existence and reality, a name is identical with its referent. But in its sense and meaning, a name is different from its referent. Islamic theologians, according to Fakhr-i-Rázi (*Lavámi*‘10), state that a name signifies the essence of a thing, as it is in itself, without it being characterized by an attribute. Examples of names include God, woman, and human. They also suggest that an attribute designates the essence of a thing when that essence is considered from the perspective of a specific quality or feature.

In reference to God, however, some Islamic mystical philosophers believe that without any characterization of an attribute, the Essence is the ineffable station of Supreme Singleness, absolute invisibility, and the hidden treasure. Therefore, according to Qayṣarí (*Sharḥu Fuṣṣús* 44), an expounder of Ibnu’l-‘Arabí’s works, a name, in relation to God, signifies His Essence as characterized by an attribute—not the uncharacterized Essence, as posited by Islamic theologians. In order to explain this maxim, he thus distinguishes between the Essence as characterized by an attribute (name) and the word with which to refer to the Essence as characterized by an attribute (name of name). The name “Merciful”, for example, is then identical with the Essence of God in

the sense that it signifies the Essence as characterized by its mercy—in the sense of its reality and existence. However, as a word with which to refer to the name of God “the Merciful”, it is not identical with the Essence of God in meaning.

Similar to the debate about the relationship between God’s names and His Essence, there are fundamental differences between the various schools of Islamic theology and between Islamic theologians and philosophers concerning the association of God’s attributes with His Essence. Ash’arites, for instance, stipulate that God’s attributes are separate from His Essence. At-Taftázání, a prominent Ash’arite, further states that a multiplicity of pre-existences in God’s attributes is quite plausible; what is logically untenable is rather a multiplicity of pre-existences in His Essence (*Sharḥu’l-Aqá’id* 50). The Mu’tazilites find the Ash’arites’ view on the separation between God’s attributes and His Essence to be indefensible. But they also consider the oneness of God’s attributes and His Essence to be impossible. As a result, they completely reject God’s attributes and hold that all qualities and characters attributed to God are to be found directly in His Essence.

Bahá’ís believe that God is invisible, inaccessible, unknowable, and ineffable (*Gleanings* no. 84; *Selections* no. 30). Therefore, as He is in Himself—not as we recognize Him—He cannot be designated by any names, nor can He be regarded as possessing any attributes (*Tablets* 102, 113). Confessing this precept, Bahá’ís state daily in their Long Obligatory Prayer “I testify that Thou hast been sanctified above all attributes and holy above all names” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 95). The reason for this assertion is that God’s embodiment of human attributes, which are specific and many, would require that His Essence be limited to specific meanings (Dávudí, “Discourse” 64), be divided into various aspects and relationships, and be in need of component parts. But limitation, plurality, and need are characteristics of created and contingent beings (*Some Answered Questions* ch. 27). Accordingly, in His world, God’s names and attributes are identical with His Essence; otherwise, “there would be a multiplicity of pre-existences” (*ibid.* no 37).

Further, if God's essential names and attributes were not identical with His Essence, inexorably they would be a creation of His Essence and, therefore, not befitting its station. Consequently, the Bahá'í teachings distinguish between the essential names and attributes of God in His world, which are identical with His Essence and therefore unknowable, and the names and attributes that we ascribe to Him within the limits of our existence in the world of creation in order to worship Him and praise His perfections (Bolodo-Taefi, "God, Revelation, and Manifestation" 177). With this framework in mind, depending on the world and the station in which the reference of the names of God is considered, the names of God could signify His Essence; they could refer to the Essence as characterized by an attribute, such as the All-Knowing and the Almighty; or they could designate the Essence of God as the source of an action, such as the Sustainer and the Creator (Dávudí, "Discourse" footnote 47).

Bahá'u'lláh (Rafati, *Yádnámih* 174) writes that names can have multiple stations, allusions, and indications. In one sense, a name is the revelation of the referent. In another respect, a name is identical with its referent and is its truth, its identity, and its essence. In yet another sense, a name is different from its referent. In yet another, a name can testify to, and indicate, its referent. From another perspective, it circles around the referent. He further states that these meanings each have multiple stations and manifestations. Concerning the relationship between names and attributes, He writes that, in one sense, names are the garments of attributes; because attributes, like generosity and dominion, are actions which proceed from the source of the action. He, nevertheless, asserts that names are non-existent in the station of God's Essence and of His revelation in the Manifestations of His signs and perfections.

The Báb cites this maxim in several Tablets. In the Panj Sha'n (INBA 1:7), He writes that when one utters the verse "No God is there but God" in order to testify to Divine Unity, one exalts and sanctifies the one Essence of God because none is manifested in names but their

referent. Were one, for instance, to utter the words “No sun is there but the sun”, the referent of the name “sun” will always be the physical sun. He also states that there are different stations of testifying to Divine Unity just as there are different stations of names and attributes. He further instructs (ibid. 72–74) that the reality of all things should be seen when considering their names and that all names should be understood as bespeaking God. This, He explains, is because nothing is manifested in names but their referent, and the referent of all names is essentially—not numerically—one. He likens names to mirrors facing the sun and stresses that the essence of all names can be found in their referent and that nothing is manifested in names but the referent. He subsequently writes that one should not worship the names of God next to their referent to the point that one would join partners with God, nor should one worship the names of God without their referent to the extent that one would commit blasphemy. He further explains that, in one sense, the referent of every name occupies the same station as that name; nevertheless, all things are of God. For example, the referent of the name “the powerful” in every station and sense of that name is a mirror which occupies that same station, but which faces God and betokens Him. In His *Tafsír-i-Súriy-i-Baqarih* (commentary on the *Súrih* of the Cow), the Báb expatiates upon the relationship between names, their meanings, and their referent by quoting several statements from Imám ‘Alí and Imám Muḥammad al-Báqir about not worshipping names, worshipping names without their meanings, worshipping names together with their meanings, and worshipping meanings (INBA 69:206–207).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in His commentary on the Basmalah (*Makátib* 1:49–52), maintains that the names of God derive from attributes which signify the perfections of His Essence. He stipulates that in God’s station of Supreme Singleness, names have no manifestation, entification, or individuation; nor do they signify, indicate, or betoken anything. But they have an uncompounded reality which is identical with the Essence. In God’s station of Oneness, however, His names find a manifestation, entification, and life-giving existence in the form of Fixed

Entities. He then cites this maxim and stresses that in God's station of Supreme Singleness, names are identical with their referent and are its essence and reality. This is because names and attributes are in truth descriptions of God's perfections and designations of one reality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá then clarifies that by names are meant their meanings and truths which are exalted above and sanctified from all indications. He distinguishes them from names which are uttered words pronounced using language and which, He states, are not identical with their referent. The names of God and their meanings which are identical with their referent exist in an uncompounded oneness, without any distinction among them.

3. Knowledge of the realities of things is impossible to the human mind

This maxim conveys that the realities and the inner identities of things are inaccessible to human comprehension. This principle is put forward in the works of Avicenna and Mullá Šadrá, who also believed in an intellectual existence as well as a formal existence of things. They postulated that the essence of things can also exist in the human mind in the same manner that they exist formally in the world of existence. Some have suggested that a belief in the intellectual existence of the essence of things contradicts a belief that knowledge of the realities of things is impossible to the human mind (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'áliyab* 1.1:391).

Ṭabáṭabá'í (ibid. fn1) interprets and defends Avicenna's view of this maxim. Mullá Hádý-i-Sabzivári (ibid. 392, fn1) addresses and resolves the perceived contradiction in Avicenna's and Mullá Šadrá's statements by differentiating between the ontic reality of existence and its epistemic understanding. Mullá Šadrá (ibid. 392–393) reiterates this maxim and posits that comprehending the reality of a thing requires its presence and existence within human knowledge; whereas the outer form of things, which is their actuality and existence, and which exists outside of the human mind, cannot become present and encompassed within human knowledge.

'Abdu'l-Bahá utilizes this maxim in His commentary on the Islamic tradition "I was a hidden treasure" and explains that knowledge of a thing means encompassing it. Unless and until one encompasses a thing, one cannot comprehend its reality. He then concludes that since no being can encompass the Essence of God, the knowledge of His Essence is impossible (*Makátib* 2:13, 29). He also quotes this maxim in an utterance (*Some Answered Questions* 59:3–4) and stresses that the essence of things can only be known through its attributes. Since we cannot encompass the originated reality of any created being, how can it be possible to encompass the pre-existent Reality of God? If our knowledge of all created things, no matter how simple they are, is not of their essence but of their attributes, how can it be possible to understand the Essence of God?

4. Change is not instantaneous

The existence of change and transformation in the world of creation is an axiomatic article which cannot be denied. Change and transformation cannot take place in this world without motion. Motion is a facet of existence through which things actualize their potential. Until Mullá Şadrá, it was generally accepted that only accidents of things, such as quantity, quality, and location, are subject of change and motion. The Peripatetics, in particular, also maintained that change can be instantaneous or gradual. Mullá Şadrá introduced his doctrine of substantial motion and argued that all material beings undergo change and transformation in their substance and essence, as well as in their accidental properties. Gradual change in which things constantly move from potentiality to actuality can be more evidently understood as motion. What is referred to instantaneous change, however, is not as readily understood as motion without accepting the truth of the doctrine of substantial motion. Just as gradual change is inconceivable without the existence of motion, what might appear to be an instantaneous change cannot take place in the absence of motion either.

Why do some changes develop gradually, yet others take effect instantaneously? Mullá Šadrá explains this difference with his doctrines of substantial motion and the gradation of existence. When, for example, water evaporates through intense heating, what appears to be an instantaneous transformation of liquid into gas is in fact gradual. Notwithstanding the speed of change from one form or phase to another, it is not incompatible with it being gradual. Motion remains to be continuous. Unless the liquid and gas phases intersect—in other words, unless the water and vapor have the same substance—there would be two successive moments in time which are disconnected. This is impossible because time is one continuous whole and there are infinite number of moments between any two given moments. Another logical problem with the non-intersection of the two forms in an instantaneous change is that at the moment of transformation the matter of the water and vapor would be inevitably without a form, which is impossible (*Naháyatu'l-Hikmah* 202).

In His utterances, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms substantial motion and rejects instantaneous change. In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that all beings are in motion, that motion cannot be dissociated from them, and that motion takes place at the level of the essence of things. He refers to this as “essential or natural motion” (63:1). He explains that it is “the universal and divinely ordained law and the natural order” that “the growth and development of all beings proceeds by gradual degrees”, through the gradual appearance of what is latent in things (51:3, 5).

5. The uncompounded reality is all things, but it is not any single one of them

Mullá Šadrá considers this maxim to be one of the abstruse subjects of divine philosophy (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'alíyah* 3.1:110). It is reported to have been espoused by some of the Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle (*Some Answered Questions* 82:2; footnote 162); but Mullá Šadrá

established it as a philosophical subject and maxim and adduced arguments in its proof. In brief, it asserts that any reality or essence in which an attribute can be denied or from which something can be negated is inevitably composed of affirmative and negative aspects and is, therefore, compounded. For instance, to say that an essence is X but is not Y means that it comprises two distinct aspects: the existence of X and the non-existence of Y. The presence of these distinct affirmative and negative aspects requires that essence to be a compounded reality. The contrapositive of this statement infers that in every uncompounded reality, nothing can be denied or negated. Therefore, the Essence of God must be all things in order for it to be an uncompounded reality. Mullá Şadrá also asserts that the predicate in this maxim is only the existential aspects of “all things”; otherwise, a reality that also possesses the imperfections of things is, of necessity, a compounded reality (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'áliyá* 3.1:110).

The uncompounded reality, therefore, possesses and encompasses the perfections of all things. Then how are God's attributes that negate things are to be understood? Mullá Şadrá explains that to attribute a negation to the uncompounded reality of God is to negate non-existence or to deny that He has any imperfections. This reiterates that He is pure existence and perfection. For example, when we negate matter from the reality of God or deny that He has a quality or a quantity, we are negating negative attributes from His Essence and stressing that He is pure existence (ibid. 114).

After Mullá Şadrá, his followers, such as Mullá Hádý-i-Sabzivári and Fayḍ-i-Káshání, also propound the doctrine of uncompounded reality in their works. Mullá Şadrá (ibid. 4.1:51) and Mullá Hádý-i-Sabzivári (*Sharḥu'l-Manẓúmá* 1:309), for instance, argue that the rational soul is an uncompounded reality and, therefore, encompasses all the powers and perfections that are to be found in the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. Fayḍ-i-Káshání utilizes this maxim to explain God's knowledge of and revelation in His own Essence (*Uşúl* 30).

In one of His best-known works, known as the *Lawḥ-i-Basīṭatu'l-Ḥaqqīqih* (the Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality), Bahá'u'lláh confirms the truth of this maxim and unfolds its meaning. He clarifies that by "all things" is meant existence and its perfections and asserts that the Uncompounded Reality, insofar as it is uncompounded in all senses, possesses and encompasses all perfections infinitely. He rejects a misinterpretation of this maxim that God is dissolved into innumerable forms of existence. He further expatiates upon two stations of proclaiming the oneness of God and sanctifying Him from all multiplicity. Existential monotheism consists of denying all existence other than God and confessing the evanescence of all things before His revelation and remembrance. Intuitive, or visible, monotheism involves witnessing in all things signs of the revelation and manifestation of the Uncompounded Reality. Bahá'u'lláh also specifies that in one sense, all that is mentioned concerning the Uncompounded Reality refers to the Manifestations of God, inasmuch as God Himself is unknowable and indescribable and His chosen representatives are the manifestations of His oneness and the dawning-places of His singleness. Outwardly, They are subject to the bounds of the world of creation; yet inwardly, They are an uncompounded reality and free from any limitation. Their uncompounded reality, however, is neither absolute nor uncompounded in every sense; it is a secondary and relative uncompounded reality. This signifies that Their station, as the Word of God and the manifestation of His singleness, is the educator of all beings and the possessor of infinite perfections (*Iqtidárát* 105–109). Bahá'u'lláh also refers to Himself as the Uncompounded Reality which has been manifested in the form of a human temple (*ibid.* 114).

In another Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh informs that the Uncompounded Reality signifies first and foremost the Essence of God. But since all things are reflections of His names and attributes, it is correct to state that the Uncompounded Reality is all things (INBA 31:104–105). In yet another Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh defines the Uncompounded Reality as the Primal Word from which all beings originate, the splendour and sovereignty of which they manifest, and to which they return (*Yádnámih* 207).

In His commentary on the Uncompounded Reality, the Báb addresses a misrepresentation of this maxim through which some seek to prove the appearance of God into all created beings. Rejecting the notion of the dissolution of God into innumerable forms of existence and multiplicity in the Essence of God, the Báb states that the Essence of God is sanctified from all dissolution, division, comparison, and change. He highlights the error of those who attempt to comprehend the Essence of God as though it were a created thing and stresses that, in so doing, they will either have to believe in a multiplicity of pre-existences in the Essence of God or downgrade it to the level of corporeal created beings (INBA 69:422–425).

In an utterance about the unity of existence, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cites this maxim, attributes it to some of the Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle, and demonstrates how it has been erroneously used in support of a misconception of the doctrine of the unity of existence by some Theosophists and Sufis (*Some Answered Questions* ch. 82). Concerning statements that affirm certain attributes of the Uncompounded Reality or negate other attributes from Him, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stresses (ibid. 37:6–7) that if we ascribe certain names and attributes to God, we are not affirming His perfections. This is because we do not understand them as they are in themselves; we are rather denying that He has any imperfections. This is the basis of the apophatic theology of the Bahá’í Faith. Therefore, we consider God’s attributes to be identical with His Essence and negate everything that is other than His Essence. Were we to ascribe affirmative attributes to Him, therefore, we are not ascribing them to Him as things that can be accepted and possessed; this rather conveys negating some attributes from His Essence—attributes that we see in His creation and that indicate the imperfection of the world of creation compared with His world (Dávudí, “Discourse”65).

Further, the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith are replete with statements about the uncompounded reality of the rational soul and its possession of the powers and perfections of the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. Bahá’u’lláh writes that some describe the rational soul as

the “lesser world”, but He regards it as the “greater world” owing to the potentialities inherent in it (*Gleanings* 162:1). In the Seven Valleys, He stresses that all the perfections of the greater world are folded up and hidden within the human creation (*Call* 2:70). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasizes that unlike the vegetable and animal spirit, the rational soul is uncompounded and incorporeal and, therefore, everlasting (*Some Answered Questions* 38:8); that it “is the substance through which the body subsists” (ibid. 66:2); and that it “encompasses all things” (ibid. 55:5), discovers their realities, comprehends their properties, and penetrates the mysteries of existence (ibid. 58:3).

6. An effect cannot be dissociated from its sufficient cause

This maxim stipulates that there is a constant association and union between a sufficient cause and its effect. Sufficient cause, or complete cause, is a cause which is adequate to bring about an effect and which is not in need of any other factor for that effect to occur. Therefore, as long as a sufficient cause for an effect exists, the effect exists too; the effect cannot violate its association with its sufficient cause. This principle plays a prominent role in philosophy and can indeed be considered a foundation of all philosophical reasoning. This is because if effects were to be dissociated from their sufficient causes, the impervious and immutable law of causality would collapse and philosophical and scientific thinking, as well as daily life, would be interrupted.

Many Islamic philosophers and thinkers invoke this maxim when demonstrating the truth of other propositions. Some even regard it as an axiom which is independent of any proof. Avicenna, for instance, writes that if anything, in its essence, is the cause of the constant existence of another thing, then, so long as the former exists, the latter will also exist and as soon as the former appears, the latter will appear too (*Al-Iláhiyyát* 166–167, 266). Expounding Suhrawardi’s thought, Quṭbu’l-Dín-i-Shírází employs the Illuminationist light imagery to prove the permanence of the world of creation. He explains that since God, the Necessary Being, is the sufficient cause of the existence of the

world of creation, it will last as long as God Himself will last (*Sharḥu Ḥikmatī'l-Isbráq* 378–379). Íjī relies on this maxim as a premise to prove the impossibility of infinite regress of causes and effects, which is itself one of the foundational principles of philosophy (*Sharḥu'l-Maváqif* 400–401). Fakhr-i-Rázi (*Al-Mabáḥith* 458, 477–478), Mullá Ṣadrá (*Al-Ḥikmatu'l-Muta'áliyab* 1.2:131), the mystical philosopher Ibn Fanárí (*Miṣbáḥ* 26), and Qúnaví, quoting Ibnu'l-'Arabí (ibid.), all adduce proofs and arguments in support of this maxim.

The logical argumentations and reasonings present in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith evidently accord with the law of causality. The principle of constant association and union between a sufficient cause and its effect, however, specifically informs 'Abdu'l-Bahá's proof of the infinity of God in His Tablet to Auguste Forel. God is the sufficient Cause of the existence of all beings. Beings are created through the composition of their constituent elements and are infinite. Since the existence of the effect cannot contradict the existence of its sufficient cause, the infinity of God can be inferred *a fortiori*.

7. Infinite regress of causes and effects is impossible

Infinite regress in causation occurs when an endless series of causes depend on one another—when a thing or an event is caused by another element, which is itself caused by yet another one *ad infinitum*. Many important philosophical arguments and theorems are founded upon, or derive their truth from, the premise that the chain of causes and effects cannot logically continue endlessly. One example is the argument for the existence of the Necessary Being. The existence of all beings can be either necessary or contingent. For a contingent being to be brought into existence, a cause is needed. That cause, if not a necessary being, will in turn require another cause in order to be called into existence. This chain of causation must end with the Necessary Being Whose existence is not in need of a cause; otherwise, it would continue endlessly, which is logically impossible.

Many Islamic philosophers, like Al-Fárábí (“Ad-Da’áví” 2–3), Avicenna (*An-Naját* 235), and Suhrawardi (*Sharḥu Ḥikmatī’l-Isbrāq* 298), rely on an infinite regress argument to demonstrate the existence of the Necessary Being. Very few of them, however, adduce elaborate proofs to establish the truth of this maxim. Avicenna dedicates a section of *An-Naját* to proving this maxim; Fakhr-i-Rázi (*Al-Mabáḥith* 470–476) produces three arguments to demonstrate its truth; Íjī (*Sharḥu’l-Mawāqif* 403–412) provides five reasons to substantiate it in one of the most expansive expositions of this maxim in Islamic theology and philosophy; and Mullá Ṣadrá (*Al-Ḥikmatu’l-Muta’áliyāh* 1.2:144–169) also cites ten elaborate arguments in its support.

In His Tablet to Auguste Forel, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cites this maxim to stress the absurdity of an infinite regress of causes and to prove the existence of “the Ultimate Cause”, “the Universal Reality”. In another Tablet (*Selections* no. 21), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá similarly employs an infinite regress argument to demonstrate that the growth and development of all beings are dependent upon external influences in a process that must lead to One Who influences all, and yet is influenced by none. In a statement about the connection between God’s Essence and His essential names and attributes (*Some Answered Questions* 37:7), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stresses that the names and attributes of God—as they really are, not the names and attributes that we ascribe to God in the world of creation in order to praise His perfections—are identical with His Essence, otherwise “there would be a multiplicity of pre-existences” and the distinction between His Essence and attributes would also be pre-existent. The distinction between all these pre-existences, including between pre-existent distinctions, would in turn be pre-existent. Therefore, there would be countless distinctions between distinctions, which are all pre-existent. He asserts that this represents an infinite regression and concludes that it is impossible. In a Tablet regarding the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (*Tablets* 512–514), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá resorts to the same infinite regress argument to reject the pre-existence of the distinction between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, which would lead to an infinite regress of pre-existent distinctions. In a similar

statement (*Some Answered Questions* 82:5–6), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá employs the same argument in support of the Theosophist and the Sufi belief in the pre-existent intelligible existence of all beings in the Divine knowledge. He states that the objects of the Divine knowledge are identical with His knowledge, which is in turn identical with His Essence. He argues that if the Knower, the knowledge, and the objects of knowledge were not one single reality, this plurality of pre-existences would necessitate an infinite regress of pre-existent distinctions. Refuting their belief in the manifestational appearance of God in all His creatures, however, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá utilizes the same argument to demonstrate that the infinity of God’s creatures and the distinction between them amounts to an infinite regress of God’s manifestational appearances (*Star* 2, nos. 7–8:12). Responding to a question about retributive justice and whether the person administrating justice and prosecuting the offender also deserves a sentence for his role in inflicting punishment, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rejects the notion as one leading to an infinite regress of prosecutions and prosecutors (*Makátib* 1:360).

8. Origination, whether temporal or essential, is preceded by non-existence

The reality of existence can be divided into origination and pre-existence. This division is an essential property of existence. In other words, the undifferentiated reality of existence, before any entification, specification, or individuation, accepts these attributions. Therefore, the attributes “originated” and “pre-existent” are essential attributes of the reality of existence. The concepts of origination and pre-existence do not require a true definition because they are equal to the concept of “existence” itself in clarity and self-evidence and because they do not have a formal and actual existence in order to have a true definition. Any definition of these two terms, therefore, is purely a description.

An originated being is described as one which is preceded by its non-existence. Conversely, a pre-existent being is one which is not preceded by its non-existence. Origination and pre-existence can in turn be

divided into temporal and essential. The case of non-existence preceding the existence of a temporally-originated being, like this table or that bird, is readily understood: there is a point in time before which some originated beings did not exist. How can the notion of non-existence preceding the existence of beings which are not originated in time—essentially-originated beings which have always existed—be explained? Although essential origination is not preceded by a temporal non-existence, or a non-existence in time, nevertheless it receives its existence from another being. Without it being created by another cause, therefore, essential origination would find no existence. Accordingly, considered on its own merits, as it is in itself, essential origination is non-existence; it exists only in its relation to its cause. Examples of essential origination include the Holy Spirit, the world of creation, and the human species.

Consequently, non-existence precedes all originated beings, whether temporal or essential: temporal origination is preceded by its temporal non-existence; essential origination is characterized by non-existence in its essence—a non-existence which precedes its existence through the agency of another cause. No time separates essential origination from its cause. As previously stated, there is a constant association and union between a sufficient cause and its effect such that as soon the former appears, so does the latter. This simultaneity and union in time can be illustrated using an analogy: when a person unlocks a door using a key, the key, as the effect, and the hand, as the cause of the turning of the key, move simultaneously.

Now that it is established that essential origination is not preceded by a temporal non-existence, it also becomes evident that an existence which is not situated in time cannot be described as temporal, be it originated or pre-existent. Therefore, temporal pre-existence has no formal, or actual, application. For an existence described as temporal pre-existence there are two possibilities: either it is situated in time, or it is not. If it is situated in time, then it is defined as essential origination. If it is not situated in time, then it cannot be called temporal.

It can, therefore, be concluded that all originated beings, whether temporal or essential, are preceded by their non-existence: temporal origination is preceded by an actual non-existence; essential origination is preceded by an essential non-existence. The source of actual non-existence is the lack of a sufficient cause for the effect to come into being; the source of essential non-existence is essential contingency, in which the essence of a thing demands or allows neither its existence nor its non-existence (Avicenna, *An-Naját* 213–228; Mullá Şadrá, *Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'alíyah* 1.3:160–162; Mullá Hádý-i-Sabzivári, *Sharhu'l-Manẓúmah* 1:172–173). The essence of a contingent has no entity prior to its existence: it is neither existent nor non-existent.

In several Tablets (*Gleanings* 82:10; 81:1), Bahá'u'lláh stresses the temporal origination of all that is created, including the human soul. In several others, such as in the Lawḥ-i-Hikmat (Tablet of Wisdom), He asserts that the world of creation is essentially originated, as it is preceded by a cause, but has no beginning (*Tablets* 9:8; *Tabernacle* 2:49). 'Abdu'l-Bahá expatiates upon this maxim in His Writings and utterances (*Selections* no. 30; *Some Answered Questions* 53:5). An entire chapter of *Some Answered Questions* (80) is dedicated to the difference between temporal and essential origination and pre-existence.

9. A circular motion is unnatural

Islamic philosophers divide motion into straight and circular and assert that a circular motion can never be natural. Al-Farábí, the founder of Islamic philosophy, considers motion to be natural when a moving object which has been separated from its original place and natural state returns to it. He concludes that the circular motion of celestial spheres cannot be natural (“Ad-Dá'í” 7). Avicenna (*An-Naját* 258) also argues that the two elements of the definition of a natural motion, namely evading the unnatural position and returning to the natural state, are not found in a circular motion and concludes that a circular motion cannot be natural. In a circular motion, evading the unnatural position and returning to the natural state is impossible because the

moving object will return to any point on the circular path from which it evades. Additionally, returning to the natural state is also impossible in a circular motion because a natural motion, unlike a circular motion, ends once the moving object reaches its target, its original position.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá utilizes this maxim in a statement in which he sets forth several arguments to refute reincarnation. In one of His arguments against reincarnation, He intimates that the advancement and the movement of the human soul in a direct line is according to the natural order, whereas its return to this world after death is incompatible with the natural motion and is against the natural and divine order (*Some Answered Questions* 81:10).

10. The presence of an effect requires the presence of a cause

Whenever and wherever an effect exists, so does inevitably its cause. In other words, the existence of a cause is a pre-requisite for the existence of an effect. This maxim is a law of the intellect upon which all human thought and investigation is founded and from which there is no escape. As a primary premise, the truth of this principle is not established only through experience and inductive reasoning. Rather, every experience and experiment itself is validated by, and receives its credence from, the law of causality. Without causality, an observer can never expect to conclude anything from any experiment.

Avicenna considers facts that come from experience to be axiomatic. He believes that the rational soul accepts the results of experiments and verifies experiences without an intermediary. He also suggests that although experiences are formed after many repetitions of the same observation and sense perception, nevertheless they are always verified through logical deduction, which indicates causality. An experience which is not followed by an inference—which is laden with causality—cannot be trusted and does not give rise to knowledge (*An-Naját* 61). Demonstrating the truth of this maxim, Fakhr-i-Rázi stresses that the essence of any effect is contingent, or, in other words, indifferent toward

existence and non-existence, such that potentially it can become either existent or non-existent. It requires a cause to necessitate its existence or non-existence. The presence of an effect whose essence is brought out of its state of indifference and whose existence is necessitated, inevitably indicates the presence of a cause which has determined that existence. An implication of this argument is that an effect requires a cause in both existence and continuance (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 477).

In the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat (Tablet of Wisdom), Bahá'u'lláh writes that the Word of God is the cause which has brought the world of creation, which is essentially contingent, into existence (*Tablets* 9:12). In another Tablet (*Gleanings* 81:1), He affirms that the human soul has a contingent existence and depends on a cause, the grace of God, in order to come into being and to continue its existence after its departure from this world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also asserts that the continuance, as well as the creation, of the world requires a cause (*Some Answered Questions* 2:5). In several Tablets and utterances, 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes this maxim to discuss the formation and emergence of life and refutes an accidental composition of life as representing an effect without a cause ("Forel"; *Makátib* 1:377; *Khiṭábát* 1:247; *Star* 6, no. 8:63). In His Tablet to Auguste Forel, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also employs this maxim to reason that the existence of this infinite universe requires the existence of an Ultimate Cause.

11. The presence of a cause requires the presence of an effect

As soon as the existence of a sufficient cause becomes necessary, and as long as it so remains, it necessitates the existence of its effect. As discussed in section 6, dissociation of an effect from, and its violation of, its sufficient cause is logically impossible, because it is tantamount to the collapse of the law of causality. How is then the association of the pre-existent God with the originated world of creation to be understood? The world of creation is an originated effect. Its origination signifies non-existence preceding it; its being an effect indicates its association and union with its sufficient cause from eternity. Fakhr-i-Rází states

that, as explained in section 8, God's precedence before the world of creation is an essential, not temporal, precedence. In essential precedence, the effect is not separated from its cause in time. The essential pre-existence, as the cause, is united in time with the essential origination, as the effect; yet it precedes the effect in essence (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 477–479).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in numerous Tablets and utterances that the world of creation has no beginning. Invoking this maxim, He explains that just as a creator without a creation, a provider without those provided for, a lord without vassals, a sovereign without subjects, and a teacher without pupils are inconceivable, the existence of God necessitates that as long as there has been a God, there has been a creation (*Makátib* 2:158; *Muntakhabát* 3:7–8; *Some Answered Questions* 47:2; *Promulgation* nos. 58, 139).

12. A vicious circle is impossible

A vicious circle occurs when in a series of two or more things or propositions the existence of the first member of the series depends on the existence of another member whose existence, in turn, depends on the first member. The logical absurdity of a vicious circle, like that of an infinite regress of causes and effects, is a foundational maxim upon which many significant philosophical issues are built. One such issue is the proof of the existence of the Necessary Being.

Al-Fárábí states that the existence of any being is either contingent or necessary. A contingent existence requires a cause to bring it into being—a cause which is itself either contingent or necessary. If this cause is a contingent being, it will, in turn, require another cause to necessitate its existence. Were there no Necessary Being, either this chain of causes and effects would continue endlessly, which is logically impossible as shown in section 7, or there would be a vicious circle in which the existence of a being depends on the existence of another being, which itself depends on the existence of the former. This circularity is logically absurd (“Ad-Da’áví” 2–3). In his rejection of vicious

circle, Avicenna writes that each member of the chain of causes and effects in a vicious circle would at once be the cause and the effect of its own existence. This is logically impossible because it necessarily implies that a thing must precede itself, and succeed itself, existentially, since the existence of a cause necessarily precedes the existence of its effect (*An-Naját* 236). After Avicenna, most Islamic philosophers and theologians rely on the logical impossibility of a thing's preceding itself and succeeding itself in order to refute circularity. Fakhr-i-Rázi, for instance, defines vicious circle as the dependence of a first thing on a second thing and of the second thing on the first thing without or without intermediary and rejects it using Avicenna's arguments (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 469–470). Íjī similarly defines vicious circle, sets forth arguments against it, and states that Fakhr-i-Rázi considers its impossibility to be axiomatic and not in need of a proof (*Sharḥu'l-Maváqif* 398). Mullá Ṣadrá adds a third argument, the impossibility of a thing standing in need of itself, to the previous two—the impossibility of a thing preceding itself and the impossibility of a thing succeeding itself (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'áliyāh* 1.2:142).

Much of the logical reasoning in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith relies on the truth of this foundational maxim. In His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá differentiates between God's knowledge of the intelligible realities of all things, which is pre-existent and identical with His Essence, and a knowledge of the actual existence of all created beings, which is originated and identical with the existence of created things. He then expatiates upon the appearance of the matter and the form in creation, and of the prime matter—the indeterminate substratum or potentiality—and the prime form. He demonstrates that the matter and the form of each created being are created simultaneously, just as the prime matter and the prime form are created simultaneously. The matter depends on the form in its existence, and the form is in need of the matter in its appearance. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá stresses that this correlation between matter and form does not represent a vicious circle of causes and effects, but rather a concomitance. He defines vicious circle

as dependence of a thing on another, which in turns depends on that thing, with or without intermediary and asserts that matter and form are correlative opposites both of which exist simultaneously and each of which implies the other (*Makátib* 2:35–37). Examples of correlative opposites each of which implies the other, but none of which is the cause of the existence of the other, include father and child, teacher and pupil, and king and subject.

13. A subject can only comprehend an object if they are similar

According to this maxim, a similarity between that which comprehends and the object of its comprehension is essential, such that no comprehension would take place without some similarity between the subject and the object. Avicenna attributes this principle to the Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles and states that the rational soul comprehends the four basic elements of matter—earth, water, air, and fire—which the ancient Greek philosophers believe constitute everything. He asserts that a subject can only comprehend the objects to which it resembles and concludes that the rational soul is composed of the four basic elements (*Aṭ-Ṭabí‘īyyát* 6:15). Mullá Šadrá also affirms that a similarity between the knower and the object of its knowledge is a prerequisite for comprehension. But he goes even further than the notion of similarity and believes in a unity between the subject and the object (*Al-Hikmatu’l-Muta‘álíyah* 4.1:253).

The Bahá’í teachings stress that there is a fundamental separation and distinction between God and His creation (*Paris Talks* no. 17). Bahá’u’lláh writes that while all created things are the signs of God, they are, nevertheless, His creatures and that the Creator can never be likened to His creatures (*Gleanings* 93:7–8). Underlining the absolute transcendence of God, in the *Lawḥ-i-Sarráj* (*Má’idiy-i-Ásmání* 7:7), Bahá’u’lláh likewise emphasizes that “the One True God, exalted be His glory, is bound unto none by the least tie of relationship or association, of similarity or resemblance” (Dávúdí, “Discourse” 62). In the *Panj Sha’n*, the Báb cites this maxim and states that since there is no likeness

between God and His creation, He cannot be known (INBA 1:30–31). In His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá likewise rejects any likeness, similarity, or kinship between God and His creatures in order to demonstrate the difference between knowledge in the contingent world and that in the world of the Necessary Being (*Makátib* 2:33). He then quotes this maxim, gives the examples of the dissimilarity between the human reality and the lower kingdoms, and states that consequently animals, vegetables, and minerals can never comprehend the human being. Additionally, He defines the similarity that is meant in this maxim as the likeness of quality. No two things can be said to be similar unless they are qualitatively alike. He then asserts that quality is an accident that subsists through physical bodies and concludes that God has no physical body in order for an accident to be associated with His reality. Since no created being is qualitatively similar to God, He cannot be known (ibid. 46–47).

14. A subject can only comprehend the objects which it precedes

Avicenna also attributes this maxim to early Greek philosophers. According to this principle, that which comprehends always precedes the mental image and the intelligible form of an object that is being perceived. As a result, they consider the rational soul to be the origin of all the objects that can be perceived, including the four basic elements of matter. As mentioned in the previous section, Avicenna defends the ancient Greek belief that the rational soul is composed of the four elements of matter (*At-Tabi‘íyyát* 6:15). It was also discussed in section 3 that according to Mullá Şadrá, comprehension is the presence and the existence of the intelligible reality of a thing within human knowledge. Mullá Şadrá further writes that this presence and existence is impossible without an essential connection between that which comprehends and the object of its comprehension and defines this connection as that of cause and effect. Evidently, unlike the early Greek philosophers, Mullá Şadrá considers the rational soul to be uncompounded. He, therefore, employs this maxim to an entirely different end and concludes that the relationship between the reality of

the knower and the object of its knowledge is that of a cause preceding its effect (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 4.1:251).

The Central Figures of the Faith often utilize the logically equivalent contrapositive of this maxim as one of the proofs of God's unknowability, a tenet of Bahá'í theology. The Báb, for instance, emphasizes this principle of precedence in causation in relation to comprehension in His commentary on the Súrih of the Cow using a rhetorical question: "how can one who has not created God ever hope to know Him?" (INBA 69:158) In numerous Tablets and utterances, 'Abdu'l-Bahá similarly alludes to this principle and stresses that the contingent and originated human reality can never comprehend the necessary and pre-existence reality of God (*Selections* 21:4; "Forel"; *Some Answered Questions* 59:5; *Abdu'l-Bahá in London* 23; *Promulgation* 46:2; *Khiṭābāt* 2:280). In one statement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that human understanding is preceded by human existence, which is itself preceded by the divine reality. He then asserts that it is impossible for human perception to comprehend the reality of God or for any utterance to unfold its truth or intimate its mystery (*Some Answered Questions* 37:3–4).

15. Nothing ceases to exist *per se*

According to this maxim, nothing by and of itself ceases to exist without the involvement of external factors. The essences of things do not necessitate their own non-existence; rather, non-existence is always an accidental property that befalls them. Had the essence of a thing necessitated its non-existence, it would have never come into being in the first place. This reasoning is found in the writings of Al-Fārābī ("At-Ta'liqāt" 19) and quoted by Suhrawardi (*Sharḥu Hikmatil-Ishraq* 300). Suhrawardi utilizes this maxim to demonstrate the immortality of God (ibid).

The theme of the composition and the decomposition of elements—and consequently of existence and non-existence—appears in several Tablets and utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In His Tablet to Auguste Forel,

for instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that existence, or the coming together of the constituent elements, cannot be compulsory, or an essential property. This would indicate that the essences of created beings would necessarily need to exist and that a decomposition of formation becomes impossible. In another Tablet (*Makátib* 1:375–376), 'Abdu'l-Bahá references material philosophers who posit that all creation is composed of an infinite number of uncompounded elements and that non-existence is the decomposition of these uncompounded elements. While He disagrees with, and refutes, their conclusion that this composition and decomposition of elements can take place without God, He agrees with their argument that by non-existence is meant a relative, not an absolute, non-existence. In a statement recorded in *Some Answered Questions* (80:5), He reiterates this argument, disproves absolute non-existence by equating it with non-existence as an essential property, and stresses that if the essence of a thing had necessitated its non-existence, it would have never come into existence. The very existence of a thing, therefore, indicates that it cannot have been preceded by an absolute non-existence. In one of His talks (*Khiṭábát* 1:247), 'Abdu'l-Bahá similarly rebuts existence and non-existence as essential properties of things, thereby proving the contingent existence of all created beings through a voluntary formation. The essences of things necessitate neither their existence nor their non-existence: neither existence nor non-existence is an essential property of a created being. They are both accidental properties imposed upon the essences of things by the Necessary Being.

16. A thing does not exist unless it becomes necessary

Unless a thing reaches the point of necessity, it does not come into being. Another related maxim which is briefly addressed in previous sections, especially sections 10 and 15, is that preponderance without a preponderant is impossible. The contingent, which is indifferent to both existence and non-existence, depends for its existence on a preponderant, a cause which is external to the essence of the contingent and without which it cannot exist. The logical impossibility of

preponderance without a preponderant is a foundational principle for many questions of philosophy. For instance, Islamic philosophers rely on this principle to posit that the reason a thing requires a cause is its contingency, not its origination. Islamic theologians, conversely, argue that the criterion for a thing's requirement of a cause is its origination. Islamic philosophers maintain that when a thing is indifferent to both existence and non-existence, its emergence out of the state of indifference is impossible unless an external preponderant brings it out of the state of indifference to existence and non-existence. This emergence out of the state of indifference, the state which denotes contingency of the essence, demonstrates the need for a cause.

Fakhr-i-Rázi writes that there is a consensus among Islamic philosophers about the logical impossibility of preponderance without a preponderant and that some consider it to be an axiomatic primary premise, whereas others accept it as a proven postulate (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 125; *Al-Arbaʿín* 104–105). Philosophers who attested to the axiomatic truth of this maxim include Mullá Ṣadrá (*Al-Ḥikmatu'l-Mutaʿáliyāh* 1.1:207) and Fayḍ-i-Káshání (*Uṣūl* 42). Suhrawardi also utilizes this principle to prove other questions of philosophy. He affirms that the essence of the contingent is indifferent to existence and non-existence and is not in itself drawn to either: for if it were, it would not be contingent; it would be either the Necessary Being or a being the existence of which is impossible to think (*Sharḥu Ḥikmatī'l-Isbrāq* 173). Consequently, an essence which exists without an external factor is not indifferent to existence and non-existence: existence is a necessity of its essence; it is the Necessary Being.

Therefore, the possibility of non-existence is never completely removed from the essence of the contingent, unless all the possible paths to non-existence are closed to it, that is, unless it reaches the threshold of necessity. Not only the essence of the contingent but also the preponderance of the external factor which necessitates the existence of the contingent must reach the point of necessity in order to cause the contingent to emerge out of its state of indifference. Thus, a

preponderant which itself does not reach the point of necessity cannot act as the sufficient cause for the existence of a contingent being (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 1.1:223–224). Avicenna elaborates on this maxim in several of his works (*An-Naját* 226; *Uyún* 55–56) and Fakhr-i-Rázi adduces arguments in its proof (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 131–132). In his expositions of this maxim, Mullá Ṣadrá speaks of two necessities: the necessity which the contingent essence must derive from its cause in order to exist; the necessity which the cause must reach in order to act as the sufficient cause of the emergence of the contingent out of a state of indifference towards existence. He stresses that necessity in both senses is required for the existence of the contingent essence (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 1.1:223–224). Fayḍ-i-Káshání expounds on these views of Mullá Ṣadrá's (*Aynu'l-Yaqín* 71) and Mullá Hádíy-i-Sabzivárí uses this maxim to prove that the Essence which is necessary in its existence is likewise necessary in its possession of all attributes (*Sharḥu'l-Manẓúmah* 1:260, 348).

In the Ṣaḥífíy-i-'Adlíyyih, the Báb stresses that God necessitated the existence of all contingent beings, related them to His own Self, and drew them away from non-existence and toward existence (INBA 82:135–136). In another Tablet in response to questions from the governor of Shúshtar, the Báb also states that God, through the operation of His sovereign will, brought all things into being; for otherwise, they would never exist (ibid. 67:199). In His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá differentiates between actual non-existence and state of the indifference of the contingent essence toward existence and non-existence. He writes that in the latter state, the contingent essence is not absolutely non-existent, because if it were, it could never come into being. The current existence of contingent beings disproves the possibility of their former non-existence. He argues that according to the law of non-contradiction, a thing cannot embody the attributes of its negation and absolute non-existence cannot acquire the capacity and worthiness to emerge from a state of non-existence into the realm of existence (*Makátib* 2:39). In one of His utterances, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also explains that just as absolute non-existence cannot acquire

existence, in like manner, things that exist or once existed will not be entirely destroyed and annihilated. Their death, rather than actual non-existence, consists of transformation into a mineral existence. He also affirms that God is the cause that has realized all contingent things and has brought them into existence (*Some Answered Questions* 53:5–7).

17. A thing does not create unless it exists

This maxim is similar in meaning and reference to the principle expounded in the previous section: “a thing does not exist unless it becomes necessary”. That principle identifies the necessity of a thing as the criterion of creation, whereas the maxim “a thing does not create unless it exists” specifies the existence of a thing as the prerequisite for it to create. Since the two notions of necessity and existence are concomitants, these two maxims can also be said to be concomitants. Unless existence reaches the point of necessity, creation is impossible, just as necessity without existence cannot be perceived. This is because necessity is the essential need for existence. Therefore, existence and necessity, two concepts which denote the same reality, are the criteria and the prerequisites for the creation of all beings (Dinani, *Qavá'id* 1:238).

Mullá Hádý-i-Sabzivárí relies on this maxim to prove the omnipotence of God. He conditions creation upon existence and argues that since contingent beings lack true existence, they cannot create in the true sense of the term. Only the Necessary Being, Who has a true existence, can truly create (*Sharhu'l-Manzûmah* 3:621).

The essence of this maxim is captured in a line of the Persian poet Jámí's verse, which is cited in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá often to highlight the principles of the Covenant and the Bahá'í social teachings:

That soul which hath itself not come alive,
Can it then hope another to revive?

This intertextuality, for instance, occurs in the Kitáb-i-Badí' (2) where Bahá'u'lláh questions the ability and the motive of Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Iṣfahání, the Antichrist of the Bahá'í Revelation, to guide and to save anyone when he has gone astray himself and broken the Covenant of the Báb. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also uses this motif (*Selections* no. 221; *Ma'ákhidh-i-Ash'ár* 3:290, 292) to stress the importance of perfect unity among the believers before they can invite others to harmony and peace, and of purity and sacrifice before one can teach the Faith. An early translation of this verse also appears in *Memorials of the Faithful* (no. 3) where 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that a teacher must first teach and purify himself before he can teach and guide others:

Shall he the gift of life to others bear
Who of life's gift has never had a share?

'Abdu'l-Bahá likewise employs this principle to refute that a fallible or wayward individual can be the interpreter of the Bahá'í Revelation or the source of guidance (INBA 13:91).

18. The bestower of a thing cannot be deprived therefrom

One can only give what one possesses. An aspect of this principle is explored in the previous section. This maxim stipulates that all the perfections of an effect also exist in its cause and that no perfection can be found in an effect which does not exist in its cause.

In his commentary on the Treatise of Zeno, Al-Fárábí refers to the cause as the bestower and to the effect as the recipient of grace ("Risálatu Zínun" 4). Similar expressions can also be found in the works of Avicenna (*An-Naját* 213). Mullá Ṣadrá uses this principle to demonstrate the truth of his maxim of the uncompounded reality (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'alíyah* 3.1:116) and to support his assertions concerning the attributes of the Necessary Being and God's knowledge of His own Essence (*Al-Mabda'* 189). Mullá Hádí-i-Sabzivári likewise resorts to

this maxim in support of his argument for God's knowledge of His Essence (*Sharḥu'l-Manẓúmah* 3:561).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá invokes the logic of this principle in several Tablets and utterances. He states, for instance, that since we can observe infinite perfections, knowledge, and composition of elements in humankind, we can conclude that the cause of its existence, God, must also be infinite in perfections, such as knowledge, power, and existence (“Forel”; *Promulgation* 46:3). In one of His talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that the very existence of a worldly being indicates the existence of a Divine Being (*Khiṭábát* 1:149). In another talk, He proves by contradiction that an absence of human perfections—such as the discovery of the realities of things, the power of idealization or intellection, science, memory, perception, and volition—in nature demonstrates that human reality is not a part of, and caused by, the world of nature (*Promulgation* no. 111).

19. A thing in its absoluteness does not yield to distinction or repetition

A thing in its essence and the absoluteness of its substance allows of no distinction or multiplicity. An assumption that the essence and the reality of a thing admits of division or multiplicity leads to contradiction. Were we to assume that in the reality of a thing, which is free of all things beside the pure essence, a duality or multiplicity exists, this duality or plurality must necessarily come from time, location, quantity, quality, or other accidental properties that the substance possesses contingently. This contradicts our original assumption that the absolute substance is free of all things beside the pure essence.

Suhrawardi uses this maxim and the above logic to demonstrate that the reality of existence yields to no repetition or multiplicity. Where the absoluteness of existence is considered, any secondary factor that can be perceived in relation to that reality is nothing but existence

(*Mawsú'atu Muṣannafát* 56). Mullá Hádíy-i-Sabzivári arranges the logic of this proposition as minor and major premises of a syllogistic demonstration in order to prove that the reality of existence admits of no repetition or multiplicity (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 1.3:338, fn1). Mullá Ṣadrá draws upon this maxim in his exposition of several philosophical questions. He writes, for example, about the oneness of the rational soul in human species insofar as it is what defines human species. The true reality of human species, without considering accidental properties such as quantity, quality, relation, time, and location, is one (ibid.). He also employs this logic to refute reincarnation. He states that the rational soul, just like the prime matter, is one in the absoluteness of its reality but can accept infinite forms. The oneness of essence is not incompatible with the multiplicity that can take place outside of the essence. The oneness of human species despite a plurality of its members can therefore be explained using the existence of the rational soul, which is one in its essential reality but many in its external references and forms. But it can admit of no multiplicity or repetition in its true reality and the absoluteness of its substance (ibid. 4.2:19–20). Sabzivári relies on this maxim to demonstrate the truth of Mullá Ṣadrá's statement about the oneness of the prime matter in its absolute reality despite the infinite forms it can accept (ibid. 20, fn1). Fayḍ-i-Káshání uses this principle to prove the supreme singleness of God and to reject any multiplicity in relation to His Essence (*Uṣūl* 14).

In the Súriy-i-Haykal (*Summons* par. 45), Bahá'u'lláh describes His station of essential unity—a station in which all Manifestations of God, owing to Their association with the world of God, are seen as one essence, one soul, and one reality (Bolodo-Taefi, “God, Revelation, and Manifestation” 184)—as a reality which admits of no duality and which should be regarded as one with God. The Báb, in His exposition of the meaning of “the uncompounded reality”, cites this maxim and demonstrates that the names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence. He refutes a statement that the multiplicity of the objects of God's knowledge is tantamount to a multiplicity in the Essence of God and highlights the epistemological error of attempting to

comprehend the Essence of God in the same manner that His creation of the world of being can be understood. He stresses that just as the existence of God is not dependent upon the existence of other forms of life, His knowledge also does not require objects of knowledge (INBA 69:423–424). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá likewise explains that the reality of Divinity admits of no division or multiplicity, which stems from accidental—not essential—properties of things (*Some Answered Questions* 27:2–3). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also appears to appeal to this maxim as one of His arguments against reincarnation. He states that in the world of creation, “the divine appearances are not repeated” and “no created thing can be identical with another in every way”. He concludes that reincarnation, a “repeated manifestation in this world of the same spirit with its former essence and conditions”, is impossible (ibid. 81:6).

20. Principle of the nobler contingent

According to this principle, a nobler contingent always precedes a baser contingent in existence. Therefore, the existence of a baser contingent necessarily indicates the existence of a nobler contingent prior to it. This maxim is meant to apply only to what exists beyond the world of matter and in the specific setting in which the nobler and the baser contingents are of the same essence, such as the First Intellect or the Platonic Ideas.

Mullá Şadrá attributes this principle to Aristotle (*Al-Ḥikmatu’l-Muta‘álíyah* 3.2:244). Avicenna (*Rasá’il* 2:24), Şahrazúrí (explicated in *Al-Ḥikmatu’l-Muta‘álíyah* 3.2:245), and Sabzivári (ibid. 3.1:97, fn2) utilize it to prove several philosophical propositions. Suhrawardí quotes this maxim in several of his works (*Mawsú‘atu Muşannaḡát* 67–68, 623–624) and uses it to prove the existence of the rational soul and its immortality (ibid. 67). Mullá Şadrá also employs it to prove the intellect, among other things (*Al-Ḥikmatu’l-Muta‘álíyah* 3.2:263).

He demonstrates the truth of this maxim and writes that for the emanation of a nobler contingent from God to not precede the emanation of a baser contingent, one of the following scenarios must necessarily occur:

1. The nobler and the baser contingent must emanate from God simultaneously: This would suggest the emanation of multiplicity from one and extend plurality to the Essence of God.
2. The nobler contingent must emanate from God after the baser contingent does: This would indicate that the effect is nobler than its cause.
3. The nobler contingent, despite its contingency, must not emanate from God at all: The non-existence of a contingent being which God could have brought into existence must be necessitated by a cause which is nobler and loftier than the Necessary Being.

It is clear that all of these scenarios are logically impossible (ibid. 244–246).

In one of His utterances (*Some Answered Questions* 28:4), after discussing causal and temporal kinds of precedence, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes precedence with regard to distinction. He states that “the most distinctive precedes the distinctive” and cites the example of the reality of Christ which precedes all created things in essence, attributes, and distinction.

21. A pre-existent being shall never cease to exist

A pre-existent being is a being which requires no cause for both its existence and continuance. It is neither preceded nor succeeded by non-existence. It is a being to which non-existence has no access—it is beyond non-existence. An equally valid inverse of this statement can also be inferred: All corporeal beings will cease to exist.

The first Islamic philosopher, Al-Kindí, considers all material beings to be composed of the four basic elements of earth, water, air, and fire and subject to eventual non-existence (*Falásifatú'l-'Arab* 8:14). In his works, he defines this philosophical dictum and demonstrates its truth (*Rasá'ilu Al-Kindí* 113–114, 169). Al-Fárábí regards the existence as the composition, or coming together, of elements and non-existence as their decomposition and disintegration. He holds that any composition is ultimately followed by decomposition (“*Masá'ilu Mutaḥarriqah*” 5). Bahmanyár, Avicenna's distinguished pupil, adduces proofs in support of this maxim. Originated beings are preceded by non-existence. This indicates that there was a time when the matter of the world of existence was devoid of the form of originated beings. The matter of the world, then, always contains the potential of being devoid of this form, for without such potential the non-existence of the form of originated beings could have never been actualized. Insofar as the matter of the world of existence was at some point devoid of the form of originated beings, it can also be devoid of this form in the future (*At-Taḥṣíl* 630). Mullá Ṣadrá relies on this maxim occasionally, for instance to demonstrate the immortality of the rational soul. He writes that any being which is not incorporeal and uncompounded—and which is therefore accidental or compounded—is subject to non-existence (*Al-Ḥikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 4.1:314, 388). Sabzivárí equates the maxim “all originated, material beings are subject to non-existence” with the principle “all compositions are subject to decomposition”. He explains that all compositions consist of diverse elements. The formation of any being as a result of a composition of elements requires that its diverse constituent elements come together against their original nature. This compulsion in nature cannot persist. All compositions will eventually disintegrate and their underlying elements will return to their original conditions according to their respective nature. He also writes that in order for non-existence to befall a being, that being must possess a prior potential for it. Potential requires matter, whereas pre-existence beings are free from matter (*ibid.* 4.1:388, fn1; *Asrāru'l-Ḥikam* 241–242).

The Writings of utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are replete with statements that associate existence with composition and non-existence with decomposition of constituent elements. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that composition—and therefore existence—is not an essential property of corporeal and contingent beings; for otherwise a decomposition of elements could not take place and nothing would cease to exist. It is, rather, an accidental property bestowed upon them through a voluntary formation fashioned by God (“Forel”; *Selections* no. 225; *Makátib* 1:375–376; *ibid.* 4:146; *Some Answered Questions* 36:2, 39:2, 53:7, 55:4, 60:6, 81:7). Further, the human soul is an incorporeal being; consequently, while not pre-existent, once it comes into being, it shall never cease to exist (*ibid.* 36:3). Nevertheless, as mentioned in section 10, it has a contingent existence and depends on a cause, the grace of God, for its continuance (*Gleanings* 81:1). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also stresses that the world of God is free of all composition and decomposition and is therefore imperishable (*Makátib* 4:146).

22. Where an essence is predicated on plural subjects, its predication is not from itself

If an essence can be predicated on more than one being, this predication on multiple beings cannot be from the essence itself, but rather from another thing. Al-Fárábí asserts that if the predication of an essence on multiple beings is from itself, then that essence *per se* requires plurality and it can never be predicated on only one being. However, predication of essence on a single being is an undisputable fact. It can be concluded then that the predication of an essence on multiple beings is necessarily from a thing which is different from the essence itself. Such predication is, therefore, an effect (“Fuşûş” 4).

It must be noted that essence *per se* is neither singular nor plural. It is indifferent in its relation to both singularity and plurality, as it is to both generality and specificity, or to both actuality and potentiality. Therefore, just as the essence does not demand plurality, neither does

it demand singularity. Both singularity and plurality are accidental properties that subsist through the essence. The difference between singularity and plurality, however, is that singularity and existence are concomitants. Therefore, when an essence exists, it is always predicated on one being. This is because if singularity and existence are concomitants, then the predication of essence on existence is also concomitant with the predication of essence on singularity. But the predication of essence on more than one being requires a cause which is external to the essence itself. Avicenna, for instance, considers plurality to be the effect of singularity and its repetition. He also holds singularity and existence to be concomitants (*An-Najāt* 198). Fakhr-i-Rází (*Al-Mabāḥith* 90) and Mullá Ṣadrá (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 1.2:82) likewise believe in the concomitance of singularity and existence. Mullá Ṣadrá further recognizes singularity as the cause and plurality as the effect, suggesting that a cause is required for plurality to occur (ibid. 122). Sabzivári similarly upholds the causal relationship between singularity and plurality and emphasizes that plurality is but the repetition of singularity. He adduces arguments to conclude that an admission of plurality in relation to the essence necessitates its non-existence. Therefore, plurality is concomitant with non-existence (*Sharḥu'l-Manẓūmah* 3:511). Fayḍ-i-Kāshānī posits that the only thing which is potentially plural in essence is the reality of matter (*Uṣūl* 57).

In His commentary on the Súrih of the Cow, the Báb expatiates upon the different meanings of life and death and states that singularity is concomitant with life, while plurality is concomitant with death (INBA 69:231).

23. For every motion there is a motive force

This maxim is one of the most important means of proving the existence of God. Through this philosophical principle, as well as the impossibility of infinite regress and vicious circle, thinkers have proved

the existence of the Prime, or the Unmoved, Mover. Such proofs demonstrate either the agency, or efficiency, of the Prime Mover as a cause, or its finality.

Al-Kindí attributes this maxim to Aristotle. Aristotle describes several types of motion, but recognizes generation and corruption—changing from one substantial form to another—as the most notable among them. In order to explain how things come to be and pass away, he states that an originated being *potentially* exists before its coming into being. Potential existence is nothing but the prime matter; once it receives a form, that potentiality is actualized in the form of an actual existence. Aristotle specifies this change from potentiality to actuality as motion. Asserting that every motion requires a motive force, he identifies the final cause as the motive force which causes things to actualize their potentiality (*Rasá'ilu Al-Kindí* 153–154, 162). Al-Fárábí similarly considers the motive force to be the final cause in relation to this maxim (“Ad-Da’áví” 8). Avicenna uses this philosophical principle to prove the existence of the Prime Mover. He concludes that the Prime Mover is the motive force insofar as it provides the end and the purpose of motion (*An-Naját* 262). Bahmanyár (*At-Taḥṣíl* 478) and Sabzivárí (*Sharḥu'l-Manẓúmah* 3:509) consider the Prime Mover to be both the efficient and the final cause.

Philosophers before Mullá Ṣadrá believed that motion occurs in only four categories of accidents: place, quality, quantity, and position. They suggested that the actualization of motion requires a fixed subject that persists as long as motion itself persists. Were the substance of a being to be the subject of motion, they claimed, nothing about that original being would persist through motion. Proving the occurrence of motion in the indeterminate substratum of the world, Mullá Ṣadrá resolved several significant philosophical questions. The scope of the principle concerning the requirement of motion to motive force is, however, confined to motion in the four categories of accidents. Whereas motion in such accidental categories requires a motive force, substantial motion requires a life force. Therefore, according to Mullá

Şadrá, the above maxim would change to “For every moving thing there is a sustainer” (*Al-Hikmatu’l-Muta’álíyah* 1.3:39–40).

The original form of this principle also gained popularity among rationalist theologians, such as Allámah Al-Ĥillí (*Ídāh* 276–278) and Fakhr-i-Rází, who provides several arguments in its proof. One such argument, for instance, states that if an object were capable of moving *per se* and required no external motive force, then it would never stop moving and its stillness would be impossible. Since the essential properties of an object persist so long as its essence does, the motionlessness of an object indicates that motion is not its essential property but is caused by an external motive force (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 554). Another argument, presented by Bahmanyár (*At-Taḥṣíl* 475), Fakhr-i-Rází (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 555), and Mullá Şadrá (*Al-Hikmatu’l-Muta’álíyah* 1.3:41–42) among others, states that in order for an object to move without an external motive force, motion must be its essential property. This requires the simultaneous potentiality and actuality of the object in relation to motion, which is logically impossible.

As shown in section 4, in His utterances, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms substantial motion. Further, in His Tablet to Auguste Forel, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses this maxim in His discussion of the chain of causation in order to prove the existence of the Ultimate Cause. In another Tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá invokes the logic of this maxim to stress that in this day, “the signs of the revelation of the Sun of Truth are present and manifest in all created things”, yet the unfair, the ignorant, and the unheeding “remain utterly unaware of the cause of this growth and development, and the source of this boundless progress”: “They see the motion, but reflect not upon its motive force” (*Light* 45:5). Moreover, Bahá’u’lláh refers to God in a prayer as the “Prime Mover” of the entire creation (*Prayers* 169:2) and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that the motive force of both voluntary and involuntary motions in the world of creation is God (*Má’idiy-i-Ásmání* 5:103).

24. All that is known to humankind exists

Whatsoever humankind can know must inevitably exist. The contrapositive of this statement is also equally valid: That which does not exist can never be known to humankind. Human ignorance of that which is non-existent can be considered an axiomatic proposition. Khájih Naşíru'd-Dín-i-Ṭúsí (“*Al-Fuṣúl*” 1) states that from one’s knowledge of an object one’s recognition of its existence can be inferred *a fortiori*. Asserting that human knowledge of an object is inseparable from human knowledge of the principle of existence, Ṭúsí uses this maxim to prove the truth of existence. Fakhr-i-Rází adduces a proof to demonstrate this maxim. That which is known to humankind, according to Fakhr-i-Rází, is necessarily distinguished from other objects, and that which is distinguished from other objects necessarily exists. Having established the truth of this maxim, Fakhr-i-Rází accepts its contrapositive without further proof (*Al-Mabáḥith* 377–378), although he substantiates it elsewhere (*Jámi‘u’l-‘Ulúm* 7).

As described in section 12, in His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá narrates the views of some schools of Islamic thought that differentiate between God’s knowledge of the intelligible realities of all things and a knowledge of the actual existence of all created beings. Concerning the latter, He refers to the view which considers the objects of knowledge—that which is known—to be originated and created (*Makátib* 2:34–35). While this discourse takes place in the context of God’s knowledge of His creation, the principle to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers, the origination and actual existence of that which is known, equally applies to human knowledge.

25. All contingents are compositions

According to this maxim, the cause of any composition is its essential contingency. Conversely, the notions of singleness, simplicity, non-delimitation, and incorporeality fall outside the contingent realm and are associated with the Necessary Being. When an essence is considered in its relation to existence and non-existence, there are only three

possibilities: the essence requires existence; it requires non-existence; or it requires neither existence nor non-existence. If an essence *per se* requires existence, its existence is “essentially necessary”. If it requires non-existence, its existence is “essentially impossible”. If an essence requires neither existence nor non-existence, it is “essentially contingent”. It is this essential contingency that is the subject of this maxim.

Al-Fárábí discusses this principle in his commentary on the Treatise of Zeno (“Risálatu Zínun” 3–4). Avicenna states that if the existence of a reality comes from another source, then that reality is a composition; it is not an uncompounded reality. According to Avicenna, that which comes from another source is different from that which the reality possesses *per se*. A reality whose existence comes from another source then has two distinct aspects and is a compounded reality. Therefore, beside the Essence of God, Which is the only Necessary Being, Whose existence does not come from another source, and Which is truly uncompounded, all other beings, which are contingent, contain some kind of composition (*Al-Iláhiyyát* 47). Mullá Şadrá also describes that the notions of singleness, simplicity, pre-existence, non-delimitation, and incorporeality are concomitants with the concept of essential necessity and their referent is the Essence of God. On the contrary, the notions of plurality, composition, origination, delimitation, and corporeality are concomitants with the concept of essential contingency and their referent is to be found in the essences of created beings. All contingent beings, therefore, are composed of matter and form, of essence and existence, and of potentiality and actuality. Even the world of creation itself can be said to comprise an intelligible matter and form: contingency is its matter, whereas composition is its form (*Al-Hikmatu’l-Muta‘alíyah* 1.1:186–189). He further uses this maxim to assert that a plurality of the attributes that we ascribe to God does not contradict the singleness of His Essence. He argues that despite their plurality and differences in their meanings, all such attributes are united in reference—with God as their single referent (*ibid.* 3.2:232). For a discourse on the difference between meaning and reference in relation to God’s attributes, see section 2. Mullá Hádí-i-Sabzivárí relies on this maxim

to examine composition and demonstrate the need of all creation to a cause (*Asráru'l-Hikam* 47–48).

A discussion of the Bahá'í Writings concerning composition appears in several sections of this paper, particularly in sections 15 and 21. Moreover, as mentioned previously, in His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá narrates the views of some schools of Islamic thought concerning God’s knowledge of His creation. According to one such view, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, all created things are composed of matter and form (*Makátib* 2:35).

26. The existence of all things is commensurate with their station

The portion which every essence takes of existence and its manifestation are commensurate with the station of that essence. Qúnaví introduced this maxim to elucidate the concept of Fixed Entities according to the views of the mystical philosophers (*An-Nuṣṣ* 70). It is through the concept of Fixed Entities that Islamic mystical philosophers explain God’s pre-existent knowledge of, and His relationship with, all creation. They believe that each essence occupies a station, according to the portion it takes of existence, along the hierarchy and gradation of existence. Some beings, therefore, are nobler than others, precede others on the continuum of existence, and act as causes; yet some beings are baser than others, are further down the hierarchy of existence, and act as effects. Further, any one essence may likewise receive different gradations of existence and, consequently, have different manifestations. For instance, any one essence may have an intelligible existence, an archetypal or ideal existence, an actual or formal existence, a vocal or literal existence, and a written existence, among others. The stations that various essences occupy on the continuum of existence, as well as gradations of the existence of any one essence, therefore, manifest different intensities of existence. A superior being possesses the properties and qualities of an inferior being, but an inferior being does not possess the properties and qualities of a superior being.

Fixed Entities are described as one manifestation of the existence of the essences of things—their intelligible existence in God’s knowledge. Fixed Entities do not have an actual, or formal, existence; they represent the pre-existent fixity of things in the Divine knowledge—things as they are known to God. The mystical philosopher Ibnu’l-‘Arabí and his followers stress the intelligible fixity of all beings in the Divine knowledge prior to their actual existence. Islamic mystical philosophers suggest that the manifestation of all things in the world of creation is determined in the knowledge of God through Fixed Entities, that all things reflect some of God’s attributes, and that only humankind can reflect all of the attributes of God (Jundí, *Sharḥu Fuṣúṣ* 342). Qúnaví further states that any being can be considered pre-existent when considered from the perspective of its Fixed Entity—its fixity in the Divine knowledge. It can also be said that all that is fixed in the Divine knowledge is originated and contingent when viewed in relation to its existence in this world (*An-Nuṣúṣ* 70).

Several aspects of this maxim, such as the oneness of the universal revelation and the outpouring of existence, the difference in stations and capacities of essences, the gradation of existence, the plurality of the manifestations of existence in each station, and a superior being’s possession of the properties and qualities of an inferior being, have been affirmed in the Writings and utterances of the Central Figures of the Faith. In *Tafsír-i-Nubuvvat-i-Kháṣṣih* (INBA 40:95), for instance, the Báb expatiates upon the entification and individuation of the first emanation from God, its manifestation in different stations of existence, and its reflection in the human soul. In another Tablet (*ibid.* 176), the Báb also states that the first emanation from God has different manifestations according to the capacities and stations of beings and according to the portion that the entification of distinctions and degrees—as they are enshrined in intelligible existence of essences in the Divine knowledge—takes of actual and formal existence. As stated in section 2, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in His commentary on the Basmalah (*Makátib* 1:49–52), stipulates that in God’s station of Oneness, the Divine names find a manifestation, entification, and life-giving existence in the form

of Fixed Entities.² 'Abdu'l-Bahá (*Some Answered Questions* 82:17) describes the first emanation in the following words:

The first emanation is the outpouring grace of the Kingdom, which has emanated from God and has appeared in the realities of all things, even as the rays emanating from the sun are reflected in all things. And that grace—the rays—appears in infinite forms in the realities of all things, and is specified and individuated according to their capacity, receptivity, and essence.

Further, in His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, 'Abdu'l-Bahá relates the views of Islamic philosophers who believe in the origination of the essences and stations of beings. They state, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that the outpouring of the grace of existence and of God's life-giving creation is one and universal in relation to all beings, without any distinction; each being, however, takes a portion of existence and occupies a station according to the receptivity and the capacity its own essence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes this notion of the gradation of existence using the Illuminationist light imagery: The sun shines and bestows its grace upon all its rays equally. Some rays, however, reside myriad leagues afar, while others abide within the proximity of the sun. It is not that the sun chooses to keep some rays close and send others afar. It casts upon all rays the same effusion of its radiance. Each ray, however, occupies a station according to its own receptivity and capacity (*Makátib* 2:38–39).

In another Tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms and elaborates on the notion of the gradation of existence by differentiating between the singularity of its meaning and the plurality of its references. He asserts that the concept of “existence” has only one meaning, but that existence has different stations in each of which it also has different entifications, individuations, and specific qualities and properties. The mineral, the vegetable, the animal, and the human all exist. None of these essences is deprived of existence. In each station, however, the existence has a unique manifestation and reflects unique qualities and properties

commensurate with the reality and the capacity of that station. In the human station, for instance, the effusion of the grace of existence is most effulgent and its manifestation is most intense (ibid. 1:218).

In several talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stresses the oneness of the outpouring of existence and the equality of its life-giving bestowal in relation to all created things notwithstanding the diversity of the stations of beings and the difference in their capacities and receptivity (*Khiṭābāt* 1:6; *Promulgation* 62:3). A corollary to this maxim is that, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, owing to the difference in stations and degrees of existence, an inferior being in the order of existence does not possess the qualities and perfections of a higher degree and cannot comprehend it. Conversely, a superior being possesses the qualities and perfections of a lower degree and can comprehend it (*Makātīb* 4:57–58; *Some Answered Questions* 59:6, 70:5; *Paris Talks* no. 5; *Khiṭābāt* 1:5; *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London* 23; *Promulgation* 62:2). The human being receives the greatest share of the effusion of existence, encompasses all created things, and embodies “all the perfections of the world of creation: the mineral body, the vegetable tenderness, and the animal senses” (*Khiṭābāt* 1:6, provisional translation).

Further, as described in section 12, in His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expatiates upon the appearance of the matter and the form in creation, as well as the prime matter and the prime form, by narrating the views of some schools of Islamic thought. He demonstrates that the matter and the form of each created being are created simultaneously, just as the prime matter and the prime form are created simultaneously. The undifferentiated matter depends on the form in its entification, individuation, specification, and existence, and the form is in need of the matter in its appearance. Therefore, the capacities of essences and the outpouring of existence are created simultaneously (*Makātīb* 2:35–36).

27. In every motion, the subject must continue to exist

The question of motion has perplexed philosophers since Classical Greece. Some regard it as the very manifestation of existence, while others deny its actual existence. One of the most celebrated challengers of the truth of motion is Zeno of Elea whose arguments against motion, such as his dichotomy paradox, arrow paradox, and paradox of Achilles and the tortoise, have puzzled the keenest minds for over two millennia. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the view that the world of existence is nothing but the different manifestations of change and motion—a view immortalized by Heraclitus in his philosophical dictum, “No man ever steps in the same river twice”. The constant and ever-present motion of all things is examined thoroughly in Mullá Şadrá’s doctrine of substantial motion. According to this doctrine, not only accidental properties of things but also the very substance and the essence of the world is in a constant flux: Nothing is motionless (*Al-Hikmatu’l-Muta‘aliyah* 1.3:69–105).

Every motion requires a beginning, an end, a motive force, a distance traversed, a purpose, and a subject. The subject of motion—that which moves and changes from one state to another—must continue to exist throughout the motion. Its continuance is as necessary as its existence in any motion. Should the subject of motion not remain, but cease to exist, in the course of the motion, it cannot be said that a *thing* has moved and actualized its potentiality; it can only be observed that an existent thing ceases to exist and then another thing comes into existence. This would impair the possibility of evolution. Islamic philosophers generally recognize motion in four categories of accidental properties—location, quality, quantity, and position—with the subject of motion being the substance, or the essence, of a thing. They posit that in the case of motion in accidental properties, despite any change, the substance remains intact. They disagree, however, that the subject of motion also continues to exist in the case of motion in substance. Were the substance and the essence of a thing—and consequently its essential reality—to suffer change, a subject would no longer remain in motion in order to connect its future to its past, or its actuality to its

potentiality. The connecting link between the future and the past and between the actuality of a thing and its potentiality in a motion is the continuance of the subject of motion (Dinani, *Qavá'id* 2:723–724).

Fayḍ-i-Káshání, Mullá Šadrá's distinguished pupil, maintains that in substantial motion, a material being has different forms and phases. Although these forms and phases constantly change, an all-inclusive factor nevertheless unifies them. Therefore, in its substantial motion, each material being continually moves from one phase of substantiality to another. The continuance of the subject of motion is achieved through two means. Firstly, the active intellect, or the agent intellect, which according to Muslim Peripatetics gives all things their form, encompasses the entirety of the motion of a being. Secondly, the prime matter—the indeterminate substratum or potentiality—finds individuation and specification in each phase of substantial motion by receiving an essential form. This association between the prime matter and forms engenders a single continuous existence through which all phases of substantial motion subsist. These preserve the unique identity of the being and continue the unscathed existence of the subject of motion. The phases and forms in substantial motion can be likened to those in the life of a human being. Through childhood, youth, and old age, the identity of a person, which is the subject of motion, continues to exist (*Uṣūl* 109).

In His utterances, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms motion in essence and substance in addition to motion in accidental properties. He states that “nothing that exists remains in a state of repose”, that “all things are in motion”, that they experience qualitative, quantitative, essential, and substantial motion, that “they are either growing or declining, either coming from non-existence into existence or passing from existence into non-existence”, and that motion is an essential property of existence (*Some Answered Questions* 63:1–2; *Khiṭábát* 1:142–143).

28. Any being which can be described as nondelimited is partly delimited

In order to describe a being, one must first perceive it. A being cannot be perceived unless it is an individuated or a specified entity. Such entification demonstrates its delimitation. Therefore, that which can be described as nondelimited is partly delimited.

Islamic mystical philosophers Ibnu'l-'Arabí (*Al-Futúḥát* 4.272:313–315) and Qúnaví (*An-Nuṣúṣ* 39–40, 66) distinguish between two different senses of nondelimitation. When considered from the perspective of their essence, beings can be corporeal, incorporeal, or nondelimited. Although a nondelimited essence is free from delimitation of corporeality and incorporeality, it is still delimited by its being described as nondelimited. When considered from the perspective of existence, however, God, the Absolute Existence, is not only nondelimited, but its nondelimitation is such that it is not even delimited by its nondelimitation. Existentially, God is essentially nondelimited. He is infinite and absolute, undefined and undefinable, indistinct and indistinguishable, whereas the world of creation is distinct, defined, and limited. Therefore, owing to God's essential nondelimitation, one must resort to an apophatic theology in order to consider His existence. His nondelimitation is such that He must be exalted above any description, including a description of nondelimitation, which is tantamount to delimitation.

The Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith are replete with statements that negate all that is other than God's Essence, emphasize His nondelimitation, and exalt Him above any names and attributes, above any description (*Aqdas* 92, 96; *Íqán* 70; *Gleanings* 26:1, 26:3–4, 124:1, 148:1; *Tablets* 102, 113; *Áthár* 4:95; *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání* 7:142; INBA 15:179, 31:107, 41:282–83, 82:54, 86:186; *Prayers* no. 176; *Makátib* 1:134, 1:188, 2:141), above any entification and specification (*Makátib* 2:7), and even above exaltation and sanctification (*Má'idíy-i-Ásmání* 7:81; *Áthár* 6:198; *Some Answered Questions* 27:2–3). Bahá'u'lláh, for instance, writes: “Far is the realm of names from the court of His

presence to which praise itself is ashamed to claim any relation and sanctification itself is abashed to allude. Exalted, immeasurably exalted, is He above every mention and every description” (Dávúdí, “Discourse” 64, provisional translation).³ Further, in an iteration of this maxim, Bahá’u’lláh writes: “Whatsoever in the contingent world can either be expressed or apprehended, can never transgress the limits which, by its inherent nature, have been imposed upon it. God, alone, transcendeth such limitations.” (*Gleanings* 78:2)

29. There is no reason for god’s action save his essence

Any action which proceeds from one’s will is taken for a cause or to serve a purpose. God’s action proceeds from His will. It is logical to conclude then that any Divine action is taken for a reason or to serve God’s purpose. How can the existence of a reason or purpose be justified in relation to God’s action?

Many Islamic rationalist theologians reject the existence of a reason or purpose in relation to God’s action. Fakhr-i-Rázi, for instance, asserts that any being who does anything with a motive, an intention, or a goal, is inevitably imperfect and incomplete. He elaborates that a being who takes an action according to a motive, with an intention, or toward a goal, cannot be indifferent to its existence and non-existence. One acts because one will be better off having taken that action. If one does not fulfil that which leaves one better off, one will be imperfect and incomplete. Therefore, one who takes an action according to a motive, with an intention, or toward a goal, has a need which one seeks to satisfy with that action (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 542–543). Would the existence of a reason or purpose in relation to God’s action then not be tantamount to deficiency and imperfection in His Essence?

As described in section 16, according to Mullá Hádíy-i-Sabzivárí, the Essence which is necessary in its existence is likewise necessary in its possession of all attributes (*Sharḥu’l-Manẓúmah* 1:260, 348). This principle requires that God be sanctified from all aspects of contingency.

Just as God is necessary in His existence, He is also necessary in His knowledge, His will, and all the other attributes. Since His will is a property of His Essence, no reason outside His Essence can exist for His action. As discussed in section 23, God is at once the efficient and the final cause. Therefore, the reason for His action is nothing but His own Essence.

As has been shown in sections 2, 5, and 7, Bahá'ís believe that God's names and attributes in His world are identical with His Essence. Therefore, the reason for the operation of any one of God's names and attributes through His action is nothing but the necessity of His Essence. Further, the Central Figures of the Faith reject need and dependence in relation to God (INBA 69:423–424; *Makátib* 2:11; *Some Answered Questions* 53:4). This precludes the existence of a reason or purpose outside God's Essence in relation to His action. In His exposition of the meaning of “the uncompounded reality”, the Báb highlights the oneness of God's names with His Essence to stress the essential distinction between the Necessary Being and the contingent and to reject God's need of external, contingent factors for the operation of His attributes. He states that just as the existence of God is not dependent upon the existence of other forms of life, His knowledge also does not require objects of knowledge (INBA 69:423–424). By the same token, the operation of His sovereign will, which, like His other attributes in His world, is identical with His Essence, is not in need of a reason or a purpose located outside His Essence. Similarly, in His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (*Makátib* 2:32–33) contrasts contingency with necessity and completely negates all aspects of contingency from the Necessary Being. He writes:

It is evidently clear and established that all that pertaineth unto the contingent world is in no wise possible in relation to God, inasmuch as no likeness, resemblance, kinship, or affinity can ever exist between the Creator and the created, between the Necessary and the contingent, between God and His creation. For, from time immemorial, the attribute of God, glorified be He, hath been the

absolute power, glory, and wealth, and the condition of the created things and the contingent beings utter abasement, wretchedness, and poverty. Whatsoever the contingent beings and the created things possess of essential attributes, that Essence of essences and Truth of truths is sanctified and exalted therefrom in the supernal heights of His holiness and the sublime dominion of His sanctity. Wherefore, how can the Necessary compare with the contingent and the Creator be likened unto His creatures? (provisional translation)

30. There is a parity between correlative opposites in potentiality and actuality

This philosophical maxim serves as the bedrock of several important questions of philosophy. An essential otherness or duality between two concepts or states which cannot come together in an individual referent at the same time and in the same respect is known as opposition. A relation of opposition is of four kinds: contradiction, contrariety, the relation between privation and possession, and correlation. In correlative opposites, each concept implies the other; neither concept can be perceived without the other; yet, neither concept is the cause of the existence of the other. Examples of correlative opposites include father and child, teacher and pupil, and king and subject (Suhrawardi, *Mawsú'atu Mušannafát* 51). Therefore, two correlative opposites are equivalent and alike not only in their potentiality and actuality, but also in their existence and non-existence. Mullá Šadrá (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'dliyah* 3.2:238–239) and Mullá Hádí-i-Sabzivári (*Šharḥu'l-Manẓúmah* 3:565–566) rely on this principle to demonstrate the oneness of the knower and the objects of knowledge.

As described in section 12, in His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expatiates upon the appearance of the matter and the form in creation. He demonstrates that the matter and the form of each created being are created simultaneously. The matter depends on the form in its existence, and the form is in need of the matter in its appearance. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stresses that this correlation

between matter and form does not represent a vicious circle of causes and effects, but rather a concomitance. He defines vicious circle as dependence of a thing on another, which in turns depends on that thing, with or without intermediary and asserts that matter and form are correlative opposites both of which exist simultaneously and each of which implies the other (*Makátib* 2:35–37).

31. An effect must resemble its cause

The unique association of an effect with its cause is the foundation of all philosophical reasoning. Every effect has some similarity, compatibility, and affinity with its cause and every cause has a distinct characteristic in respect to which it can engender its effect. Without this unique association, any cause would bring about any effect, any effect would proceed from any cause, the indispensable and fundamental law of causality would collapse, and philosophical and scientific thinking, as well as daily life, would be disrupted. Fayḍ-i-Káshání relies on this principle to advance the views of Mullá Ṣadrá's Transcendent Theosophy school of thought on God's causation of His creation and the ontological primacy of existence (*Uṣūl* 71–72).

Notwithstanding its centrality to the law of causality, however, Islamic rationalist theologians reject this principle in relation to God, as they consider any notion of resemblance between God and His creation to be incompatible with a belief in His transcendence. Therefore, while they recognize God as the original Cause of the entire creation, they also reject any likeness, similarity, comparison, resemblance, and affinity between God and His creation.

One of the most significant fruits of this principle is the cardinal maxim which declares that “nothing except ‘one’ can emanate from ‘one’”. This maxim and the above-mentioned objection by Muslim theologians concerning the similarity between an effect and its cause in relation to God are explored in section 33.

In a Tablet explicating the meaning of the maxim “nothing except ‘one’ can emanate from ‘one’”, the Báb rejects a view that the Essence of God is the cause of His creation. He argues that an effect must resemble its cause, yet there is no similarity, comparison, and affinity between the Essence of God and His creation. In the absence of the resemblance criterion, no direct causal relation between the Essence of God and His creation can be perceived. The Báb explains that the cause of the world of creation is rather God’s divine creation itself—His very act of fashioning the world of creation through the operation of His sovereign Will in Himself and by Himself. This is known as God’s station of Oneness, which is the first revelation, or mention, of divine creation and the cause of the emanation of multiplicity and the world of creation (INBA 69:430–432).

32. Privation of a sense is tantamount to privation of some knowledge

According to this principle, the source of all human knowledge is the sensory faculty, such that a person who is deprived of some senses is also deprived of some knowledge. By knowledge in this maxim is strictly meant mediated—not immediate—knowledge, which is acquired, in Aristotelian terms, through perception—the reception of a sensible form by a sensory faculty—and thinking—the reception of an intelligible form by an intellectual faculty. Islamic philosophers generally subscribe to Aristotle’s views on knowledge and understanding. They believe that both our universal concepts—concepts like “human”, “flower”, and “book”, which the intellect abstracts from external reality—and our derivative concepts—*a priori* concepts like “existence”, “unity”, “contingence”, and “causality”, which the intellect formulates through analysis—originate from our senses, albeit indirectly (Fakhr-i Rázi, *Tafsír* 20:91–92; Mullá Šadrá, *Ash-Shaváhid* 1:202–203).

Al-Ghazálí recognizes the sensory faculty as the source of all mediated knowledge. He asserts that immediate knowledge and esoteric wisdom

can be acquired, conversely, through sensory deprivation, asceticism, and attraction of the heart (*Ihyá'* 896). Mullá Šadrá utilizes this maxim to conclude that the rational soul cannot attain to the station of the active intellect unless it tears away the veils of the senses (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'alíyah* 4.2:126).

In His Tablet to Auguste Forel, 'Abdu'l-Bahá appeals to the truth of this maxim and states that "the human intellect develops and weakens, and may at times come to naught", that "for the mind to manifest itself, the human body must be whole", that "a sound mind cannot be but in a sound body", that "it is by the aid of such senses as those of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, that the mind comprehendeth", and that the mind "understandeth not while the senses have ceased to function". Beyond the scope of mediated knowledge acquired through the sensory faculty, however, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith harmonize sensory perception, reason, rational perception, discursive and intellectual learning, scientific knowledge, religious revelation, and intuitive and spiritual perception. They state that some insights, truths, realities, and meanings cannot be comprehended by, and can in fact be acquired without,⁴ the sensory and rational faculties, which are susceptible to error (*Íqán* 148; *Some Answered Questions* ch. 83). Nevertheless, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that none of these criteria of human knowledge can be entirely relied upon and that certitude can be attained only through confirmations of the Holy Spirit (*Some Answered Questions* ch. 83).

33. Nothing except 'one' can emanate from 'one'

This maxim is one of the most important principles of Islamic philosophy and many questions of philosophy are either directly or indirectly founded upon it. Al-Fárábí attributes it to Aristotle ("Risálatu Zínun" 3–4). According to this maxim, a thing, insofar as it has only a single ontological aspect, can be the source of the creation of only one thing. In other words, if a cause is "one" in the true sense of the term, is uncompounded, and incorporates no mental, intelligible, or actual

composition—such as composition of essence and existence, genus and differentia, or matter and form—then the effect that emanates from it is necessarily also “one” and contains no composition. The converse of this statement is also equally valid: “one” can emanate from nothing except “one”. This maxim derives its truth from the necessity of the existence of an essential affinity between a cause and its effect—the unique association of an effect with its cause which, as described in section 31, is the foundation of all philosophical reasoning and without which any cause would bring about any effect, any effect would proceed from any cause, and the law of causality itself would be impaired. If it is assumed that a cause is truly one and uncompounded, yet two distinct effects emanate from it, then that cause would necessarily have a unique association with each of the two effects. The existence of two unique associations in the cause contradicts the assumption of its true oneness and is tantamount to its composition. Therefore, where multiple effects emanate from a cause, either the cause is not truly one—that is, it has more than a single ontological aspect—or the effects are not truly plural.

Al-Kindí (*Rasá'ilu Al-Kindí* 207) expatiates upon this maxim; Al-Fárábí (“Ad-Da'áwí” 4) demonstrates its truth in relation to the emanation of creation from God; Avicenna (*Al-Ishárát* 3:122) adduces arguments in its proof; and Bahmanyár (*At-Taḥṣíl* 531) and Averroes (*Taháfatu't-Taháfát* 288–291) discuss it in their works. Suhrawardi (*Mawsú'atu Muṣannafát* 502, 622) elaborates on this maxim in several of his writings. Khájih Naṣíru'd-Dín-i-Ṭúsí (*Al-Ishárát* 3:122), who formulates this maxim mathematically (ibid. 462–463), and the Illuminationist thinker and expounder of Suhrawardi's works, Quṭbu'd-Dín-i-Shírází (*Sharḥu Hikmati'l-Ishráq* 305), both recognize it as an axiomatic principle. Mír Dámád (*Al-Qabasát* 351) acknowledges it as an immediate axiom and one of the most foundational principles of reason and Mullá Hádíy-i-Sabzivárí (*Asráru'l-Hikam* 109, 120, 150) discusses it in relation to the emanation of creation from God.

Owing to its prominent status in philosophical reasoning, this maxim serves as a major point of divergence between Islamic philosophers and

rationalist theologians, particularly in relation to its application to the emanation of the world of existence from God. Some rationalist theologians, the most distinguished of whom are Al-Ghazálí and Fakhr-i-Rází, reject the truth of this maxim. Al-Ghazálí states that this maxim is incompatible with a belief in the emanation of the world of creation, which is characterized by plurality, from God, Who is the essence of oneness (*Tabáfatu'l-Falásifah* 143). Fakhr-i-Rází questions the arguments which have been adduced in proof of this maxim (*Al-Mabáhiṭh* 460–468) and censures it as a proposition which is at variance with a belief in God's omnipotence (*Al-Arba'in* 333–335).

How can plurality in the world of creation emanate from God's oneness? Mullá Ṣadrá explains, as also described in section 25, that all contingent beings incorporate the two aspects of contingency and existence. Therefore, the first emanation from God, while it is one, is composed of essence and existence. It embodies the two aspects of possession and privation. It is an effect in its relation to God and a cause in its relation to the world of creation. This composition of aspects, and its concomitant plurality, is an essential property of the first emanation through which the rest of the creation comes into being (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 3.2:232). Qúnaví similarly identifies further aspects of plurality in the first emanation from God (*Miṣbāḥ* 30).

The application of this maxim can be seen in the formulation of several tenets of the Bahá'í teachings, such as the emanation of the world of creation from God and the essential unity of the Manifestations of God despite their diversity and human distinction. The first emanation from God, the universal reality known as the First Intellect, the Primal Will, and the Word of God (*Some Answered Questions* chs. 38, 42, 53, 54), receives the strongest effusion of God's revelation and, "even as a clear mirror in which the Sun of Truth is revealed and manifested in the fullness of its attributes and perfections" (ibid. ch. 27), reflects the light of existence upon the rest of the creation. It is the channel, Bahá'u'lláh states, through which other creatures come into being (*Íqán* 73; *Ḥadiqiy-i-'Irfán* 110–111). Further, the first

emanation, that single pre-existent revelation that has emanated from God in eternity, without becoming plural or limited to the bounds of time, is associated successively with a Manifestation of God in every age. Therefore, to consider the Manifestations of God to be distinct and plural in Their station of essential unity, while They are the first emanation from God, is to extend plurality to His Essence, which is tantamount to blasphemy (Dávúdí, *Ulúhíyyat* 182, 187).

In a Tablet explicating the meaning of this maxim, the Báb emphasizes its truth but rejects a view that the “one” from which only one can emanate refers to the Essence of God, insofar as the Essence of God is exalted above any association, relationship, or affinity. He asserts instead that the “one” from which only one can emanate refers to God’s station of Oneness from which the first emanation, the Primal Will, can emanate; that only “one” is capable of reflecting the Supreme Singleness of the Essence of God; that in the absence of any resemblance or association between the Essence of God and anything else no direct causal relation between His Essence and His creation can be perceived; that the original cause which God established as the cause of the entire creation is itself a creation of God; that the “one” which emanates from “one” is characterized by a duality; and that it is impossible for anything except the first emanation, the Primal Will, to emanate from the “one” which is God’s attribute of creativity itself (INBA 69:429–433).

34. ‘One’ is not a number, but is the source thereof

Philosophers do not generally recognize “one” as a number because they argue that the definition of quantity as something which is essentially susceptible to division does not apply to it. Instead, according to Mullá Šadrá, they consider it to be the source and the origin of all numbers because all numbers are formed through the repetition of “one”. Metaphysicians also identify every number on the infinite continuum of numbers as a unique species with a distinct essence and prove the difference between these essences in the sequence of numbers through

the difference between their essential properties. They conclude that no number can be the cause, or the origin, of the creation of the other numbers and that only the unit “one” can be the source of all numbers (*Al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'aliyah* 1.2:98–99). This principle is particularly prominent in Ibnu'l-'Arabi's doctrine of the unity of existence and his view on the emanation of the world of creation from God (*Al-Futúḥát* 1.46:383; 5.348:298).

In one of His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh reiterates this maxim and describes “one” as the ornament of all numbers. He states that although “one” is the source of all numbers and they are all derived from it and composed of it, it is nevertheless not a number itself and is free from such a designation (INBA 33:1, 3). ‘Abdu'l-Bahá echoes this principle in His commentary on the Islamic tradition “I was a hidden treasure”:

Consider the unit “one” and how all numbers emanate from it, yet it is not a number in itself, for it is the basis of all numbers. The first entification and emanation of the unit “one” is the number “one,” and from the number “one” do all numbers come into being. And now, these numbers, in the utmost simplicity and oneness, were folded up within the unit “one,” which was the hidden treasure of all numbers, and from which they emanated. (*Makátib* 2:9, provisional translation)

In a Tablet, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá likewise asserts that “one” is the source of all numbers, yet it is not a number itself. It occupies a throne which is the singularity of the unit “one” (INBA 84:295). In one of His utterances, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá recounts the views of the proponents of the unity of existence, such as the Theosophists and the Sufis. Narrating their imagery of the sea and its waves through which they describe the appearance of the real Existence in countless forms of the originated beings, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá states that “they compare this to the One and the infinite numbers, in that the former has manifested itself in the degrees of the latter, for numbers are the repetition of the One. Thus two is the repetition of one, and so on with the other numbers.” (*Some Answered Questions*

82:4) He then demonstrates and affirms the true meaning of the unity of existence, the real existence of the One through which all things have come to exist, and refutes the manifestational appearance of the One in infinite forms (ibid. 82:12, 16).

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that topics and concepts within Islamic thought and intellectual tradition have contributed to the efflorescence of the Revelation in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. That numerous precepts of Islamic philosophy are adopted and expounded in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, however, does not mean that the Bahá'í Writings necessarily endorse and uphold them in the sense in which they are used in Islamic milieu and intellectual history. When a philosophical maxim appears in the Writings of the Central Figures, it has ipso facto been revealed by Them, thereby showering Their favors upon the philosopher or theologian who may have first uttered it. In such uses of intertextuality, the Central Figures are engineering Their discourses by weaving into them maxims of Islamic philosophy, investing these maxims with new meaning and life, and at times changing them in the process or even rejecting them. Neither are these dictums static pieces that are inserted in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, nor did the Central Figures possess copies of volumes authored by these litterateurs in order to cite from them.

Elements of the cultures, sciences, literatures, philosophies, technologies, and ethics of every age enter the religions and shape the development of practices, rites, observances, and laws of the peoples. The Bahá'í Faith, unlike other religions, believes in the historicity of divine revelation and religion. Divine revelation is not devoid of social and historical context and does not unfold in a vacuum. It is for this reason that the Bahá'í Faith maintains that spiritual truth is revealed progressively and divine religions must be renewed.

Before the advent of the Báb, divine revelation sent down in the form of scripture never explicitly formulated principles of theology, philosophy, spiritual quest, and law. Therefore, the development of intellectual life witnessed the conflict between those who established a philosophical thought independent of religion and those who formulated a philosophy founded on religion. Islam was not immune from this clash between philosophy and religion either. Even though Islam sought to unify the Muslim community, the diverging approaches of Islamic philosophers, rationalist theologians, and mystical philosophers caused a division among the faithful.

The Bahá'í Faith addresses this challenge using several means. Not only is unity among believers specified as a goal of the Bahá'í Faith and ensured through the Covenant, principles of theology, philosophy, spiritual quest, and law are also established, detailed, and explicated in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith. Some distinctive themes in Bahá'í philosophy, as bodies of knowledge that will emerge to facilitate the acceptance of the Bahá'í teachings through reason and faith, may include historicity of divine revelation and renewal of religion, limitation of the criteria of comprehension, process thinking, gradation of existence, divine unity and transcendence, Manifestation of God, oneness, equality of rights, spiritual quest through service and life in society, and practical wisdom and morality.

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NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Dr. Iraj Ayman and Dr. Moojan Momen for their encouragement and valuable advice.
- 2 For a discussion of related themes, such as the emanation of plurality from oneness and of origination from pre-existence, intelligible existence in the Divine knowledge, and Fixed Entities, see Dávúdí, “Discourse” footnote 46.
- 3 For a comprehensive exploration of God’s nondelimitation and the apophatic theology of the Bahá’í Faith, including a broad catalog of the Writings and utterances of the Central Figures of the Faith on these themes, see Dávúdí, “Discourse”.
- 4 For instance, an experience, in the world of dreams, of precognition, or of solving a problem by the spirit that could not be solved in the realm of wakefulness (Some Answered Questions 61:2).

Understanding Traditional Discourses

JoAnn Borovicka

Abstract

In the Bahá'í Writings, one can find many references to ancient traditional stories and figures from biblical scripture. Read with a literal eye, one might assume that all of these references confirm the historical accuracy of those stories and, thereby, support a literal interpretation of the ancient scripture cited. However, in the works of a renowned scholar of the Bahá'í Faith, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání, we find a different mode of interpretation. Using the example of the Book of Exodus from the Hebrew Scriptures, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl explains that, in Their discourses, the Prophets may indulge people's historical understandings and address them according to their local traditions. One implication of his commentary is that even though a Central Figure might refer to a biblical story as if it was a historical fact, this reference would not necessarily confirm the historical accuracy of the story. This paper compares a brief excerpt of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's discourse on this topic to selections of the Bahá'í sacred text and authoritative guidance. The outcome of that comparison will be to suggest that Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's interpretive approach in this regard is sound.

A student of the Bahá'í Writings will notice how the Central Figures of the Faith often include elements of Bible stories and the mention of biblical figures in Their commentaries. Upon reading these references, this question of interpretation may arise: Does the Central Figures' mention of a biblical story as if it really occurred necessarily confirm that story as literal historical fact? Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání (1844–1914), one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh and often

referred to as the greatest scholar of the Faith, directly addresses this question. In the collection of his works entitled *Miracles and Metaphors*, considered the classic Bahá'í text of hermeneutics¹ (the science of interpretation), he states:

It is clear that the prophets and Manifestations of the Cause of God were sent to guide the nations, to improve their characters, and to bring the people nearer to their Source and ultimate Goal. They were not sent as historians, astronomers, philosophers, or natural scientists. Their position in the world of creation is like that of the heart in the body: it has a universal position with a general effect. The position of the learned in the world of earthly dominion is like that of a specific organ. That is, they have a particular position and a special effect. Therefore, the prophets have indulged the people in regard to their historical notions, folk stories, and scientific principles, and have spoken to them according to these. They conversed as was appropriate to their audience and hid certain realities behind the curtain of allusion.

. . . Finally, it is well known that neither the Prophet Muhammad nor the rest of the prophets ever engaged in disputes with the people about their historical beliefs, but addressed them according to their local traditions.”²

This explanation connects with a basic pedagogical principle: learning moves from the known to the unknown. A teacher has to start with what the students know – or think they know – and then gradually bring in new information. An implication of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's commentary is that if a Central Figure discourses on some element of the Bible as though it was fact, this reference would confirm those Bible verses as worthy vehicles for spiritual teaching and, because of their familiarity to the target audience, a worthy place to start a discourse, but that reference would not automatically confirm the story as historical fact. This is because the Central Figure might be speaking

according to the prevailing, but not necessarily accurate, historical understandings of the people.

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's interpretive approach is clearly stated. Nevertheless, however profound his importance in the early days of the Faith, his spiritual station as an Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh, and his accomplishments as a scholar, Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl is not a Central Figure of the Faith and his writings are not authoritative. My purpose in this study has been to try to confirm or deny Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's interpretive approach by researching this question: Is there authoritative evidence that any of the Central Figures or the Guardian have ever not engaged in disputes with people about their historical beliefs, but have addressed them according to their local traditions? From what I understand from passages gleaned from the Bahá'í sacred text and the guidance of the Guardian and the House of Justice, I believe that the answer to this question is, "Yes," and that Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's interpretive approach is sound. A selection of sacred text and authoritative guidance relevant to this question is presented below.

According to the Prevailing Understanding

In a discourse of Bahá'u'lláh on the Báb's Surih of Joseph, Bahá'u'lláh explains that the Báb revealed that Tablet according to the prevailing knowledge of the people of that time even though their understandings were characterized by ignorance and waywardness. Bahá'u'lláh states:

It is known to thee that the commentary on the Surih of Joseph hath been revealed according to the prevailing understanding of the people of that time. This hath been due to pure bounty haply the wayward and ignorant people may become transported to the realm of knowledge; because much of that which hath been stated therein are the material known to be truth with the people of Qur'án. Had it been revealed according

to that which God desired, no one would have accepted and remained loyal. [Ayát-i-Iláhi, vol. 2, 68]³

This paper is not the place to examine the details of what the people believed to be truth that was based on ignorance and waywardness, or how the Báb spoke to and used their immediate, however faulty, understandings to bring them to a higher revelation of truth. What I believe is apparent here is that this commentary by Bahá'u'lláh could well have inspired Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl's statement that "it is well known that neither the Prophet Muhammad nor the rest of the prophets ever engaged in disputes with the people about their historical beliefs, but addressed them according to their local traditions."⁴ This teaching should not surprise us. In the Hidden Words, Bahá'u'lláh states: "*All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice.*" [AHW #67] In the above scenario, we see that revealing a commentary "*according to the prevailing understanding of the people of that time*" [Bahá'u'lláh, Ayát-i-Iláhi, vol. II, 68] is one way that the Manifestation may teach in accordance with human capacity and understanding.

Discussion Conducted Conformably

Before a commentary on the biblical story of Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh and the Exodus of the Hebrew tribes from Egypt, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

The events that transpired at the advent of the Prophets of the past, and Their ways and works and circumstances, are not adequately set down in authoritative histories, and are referred to only in condensed form in the verses of the Qur'án, the Holy Traditions and the Torah. . . To preclude once and for all objections on the part of any of the world's peoples, We shall conduct Our discussion conformably to those authoritative accounts which all nations are agreed upon. [SDC 75]

In the above quote, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares that adequate histories of past Prophets are lacking. That would include the Dispensation of Moses. He also states that the histories of past Prophets exist “*only in condensed form*” [SDC 75] indicating, perhaps, that the essence of the Mosaic story has been preserved in largely figurative language. Allegorical stories are capable of holding layers of significant meanings that withstand the test of time, all condensed into powerful narratives. Finally, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states a proviso of His discourse: He will speak “*conformably to those authoritative accounts which all nations are agreed upon.*” [SDC 75] He then proceeds to discourse on the story of Moses and the Exodus precisely as it is presented in the Hebrew scripture – which He had just stated was “not adequately set down.” [SDC 75]

We could use Bahá’u’lláh’s words to paraphrase ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s proviso: the discourse would be “*revealed according to the prevailing understanding of the people of that time.*” [Ayát-i-Iláhi, vol. II, 68] The point being that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s discourse on the Exodus events exactly as presented in the Book of Exodus does not automatically confirm the historical facts of those events. This harmonizes with Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl’s interpretive approach which states that the Prophets did not engage in disputes with people about their historical knowledge, “but addressed them according to their local traditions.”⁵

Bring Stories Out As Though They Were Truth

Before I present the next commentary by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, some background information on the story of the People of the Cave may be helpful. This miracle story, also called The Seven Sleepers, originated as a Christian tradition. The story goes that during the Roman persecution of Christians in Ephesus in 250 AD, seven young Christian men who were pressed to recant their Faith under threat of death by the Roman Empire withdrew to a cave outside of Ephesus to pray. There they fell asleep. Carrying through with the persecution, Roman authorities ordered the mouth of the cave to be sealed as the

young men slept. Three-hundred years later, a farmer opened the sealed cave, and the seven sleepers awoke (thinking they had slept only overnight) to find that Christianity was not only the accepted religion of Ephesus but the state religion of the entire Roman Empire. For centuries, this miracle has been commemorated as a holy day in certain Christian denominations.

The tradition of the People of the Cave also appears in the Qur'án where chapter eighteen, entitled "The Cave," is devoted entirely to that story. Muhammad, Who was specifically asked about the People of the Cave, begins His commentary by stating, "It is We who relate to you their story in truth." [Qur'án 18:13, Sahih Int.] Then Muhammad relays a detailed moment-by-moment rendition of that story even adding elements that were not in the original tradition (such as a cave watchdog named *al Rakim*). Because of this realistic telling in the Qur'án, the miracle of the People of the Cave is honored in Islam, as well.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked about The Cave chapter of the Qur'án, He explained that although Muhammad's reply was stated as though the account was true, the story of the People of the Cave was "just a story" and that Muhammad was indulging the people in their traditional understandings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

In the days of the Prophet, the Jews incited the Quraysh to ask about the People of the Cave. When the question was asked, His Holiness said: "I will inform you tomorrow." . . . Because the Prophet knew that this was just a story, He did not wish to give an answer, nor did He wish to say outright that this is something that has no truth in it, but when He saw that the enemies would not stay their hand, his reply was couched as though it were truth. For certain matters are in reality just stories, but the Divine Manifestations bring them out as though it were truth and discourse upon them. For if they were to deny well-known and established matters, others would consider this evidence of their ignorance. Therefore they bring them out as though they were truth. [Amr va Khalq 2:211]

It is notable that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that this is the practice of not just Muhammad but of all of the Manifestations of God: *“For certain matters are in reality just stories, but the Divine Manifestations bring them out as though it were truth and discourse upon them.”* [Amr va Khalq 2:211] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s commentary could have inspired Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl’s statement that the Prophets may speak according to the people’s historical notions and folk stories.

Not Necessarily Endorsing Historical Accuracy

The following is a Memorandum which responds to an individual’s question about a discourse of Bahá’u’lláh in the Lawh-i-Hikmat in which Bahá’u’lláh refers to communications between certain ancient philosophers. The question revolves around the issue that western historians would consider communication between certain philosophers implausible because of chronological differences. The Memorandum states:

It is noteworthy that at both the beginning and end of this section of the Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh indicates that He is quoting “some accounts of the sages”. These would have been the historical accounts familiar to the person whom He is addressing in the Tablet. The fact that Bahá’u’lláh makes such statements for the sake of illustrating the spiritual principles that He wishes to convey, does not necessarily mean that He is endorsing their historical accuracy. In this connection, it is interesting to note the answer given by the beloved Guardian’s secretary on his behalf to a question about the “fourth heaven” mentioned in the Kitáb-i-Íqán [pp. 89, 133]. The translation of the passage is as follows:

“As to the ascent of Christ to the ‘fourth heaven’ as revealed in the glorious Book of Íqán, he [the Guardian] stated that the ‘fourth heaven’ is a term used and a belief held by the early astronomers. The followers of the Shi’ah sect likewise held this belief. As the

Kitáb-i-Íqán was revealed for the guidance of that sect, this term was used in conformity with the concepts of its followers.”

(3 November 1987, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)⁶

The above guidance directly states that “The fact that Bahá’u’lláh makes such statements for the sake of illustrating the spiritual principles that He wishes to convey, does not necessarily mean that He is endorsing their historical accuracy.” This guidance is reminiscent of Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl’s statement that the Manifestations are not sent as historians, but as spiritual teachers.

In addition, the guidance from the Guardian quoted in the above Memorandum explains that Bahá’u’lláh used the term “fourth heaven” in the Kitáb-i-Íqán in conformity with the understandings of the Shi’ahs to whom the Tablet was directed. (Islamic cosmology includes various traditions involving seven heavens.) Thus, we have another example from the sacred text that lends credence to Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl’s interpretive approach which recognizes that the Prophets may indulge understandings and speak according to what the people ‘know,’ but that this does not necessarily endorse those understandings.

Irrespective of Authenticity or Reliability

The following guidance on behalf of the House of Justice responds to an inquiry about an apparent contradiction between a discourse of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which He dismisses the biblical story of Lot as a “confused dream” and a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi which appears to give legitimacy to the same story.

In his email letter of 14 February 2015, Mr. ____ provides a provisional translation, obtained online, of an extract of a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concerning the story of Lot and his daughters found

in the Old Testament.⁷ In this extract ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the “story of Lot and his daughters and the apostasy of some of the prophets recorded in the Torah and the Psalms” are “confused dreams” that “are the words of historians among the People of the Book for which God has revealed no authority”. Mr. ____ then refers to an extract of a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, found in *Lights of Guidance*⁸, which states that, according to the text of Genesis 19:29–38, Lot bears no responsibility for the actions of his daughters. Mr. ____ concludes by asking how the Guardian could give legitimacy to the story in light of the statements made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Tablet. The Research Department offers the following response.

To date, nothing has been found in the letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in the Archives at the Bahá’í World Centre pertaining to the above-mentioned extract of a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. However, we note that various statements of the Guardian regarding the authenticity of the Bible are consistent with the statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarding the story of Lot. For example, in a letter dated 11 February 1944 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, we read: *“When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states we believe what is in the Bible, He means in substance. Not that we believe every word of it to be taken literally or that every word is the authentic saying of the Prophet.”*

With this in mind, it would appear that, in the letter to which Mr. ____ refers, the Guardian is commenting on the meaning of the story of Lot and his daughters as found in the Bible, irrespective of its authenticity or reliability, and that he is not maintaining that the text of Genesis 19:29–38 is to be understood literally.⁹

The above guidance, that Shoghi Effendi was commenting on the meaning of the story of Lot irrespective of its authenticity or reliability could be seen as a paraphrase of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement entered earlier in this paper that *“certain matters are in reality just stories, but*

the Divine Manifestations bring them out as though it were truth and discourse upon them." [‘Amr va Khalq 2:211] To comment on the meaning of a story irrespective of the story’s authenticity or reliability also evokes Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl’s statement that the Prophets may address people according to their local traditions.

Discussion

Returning to the question of this study: Is there authoritative evidence that any of the Central Figures or the Guardian have ever not engaged in disputes with people about their historical beliefs, but have addressed them according to their local traditions? It is the opinion of this writer that the answer is, “Yes” and that Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl’s interpretive approach in this regard is sound. Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Guardian, the House of Justice, and Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl use different but harmonizing descriptors of this phenomenon:

- Tablets may be “*revealed according to the prevailing understanding of the people of that time.*” [Bahá’u’lláh, Ayát-i-Iláhi, vol. 2, 68]
- The Central Figures may conduct discussions “*conformably to those authoritative accounts which all nations are agreed upon.*” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC 75]
- “[C]ertain matters are in reality just stories, but the Divine Manifestations bring them out as though it were truth and discourse upon them.” [‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Amr va Khalq, 2:211]
- The Central Figures may use terms of certain religious sects “*in conformity with the concepts of its followers.*” [The Guardian¹⁰]

- “The fact that Bahá’u’lláh makes such statements for the sake of illustrating the spiritual principles that He wishes to convey, does not necessarily mean that He is endorsing their historical accuracy.” [Memorandum¹¹]
- “Finally, it is well known that neither the Prophet Muhammad nor the rest of the prophets ever engaged in disputes with the people about their historical beliefs, but addressed them according to their local traditions.” [Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl] ¹²
- In a Tablet recorded in Gleanings, Bahá’u’lláh asks: “What language should He Who is the Mouthpiece of God choose to speak, so that they who are shut out as by a veil from Him can recognize His glory?” [GB LIII] I propose that the examples cited in this paper demonstrate that a language that the Central Figures and the Guardian may choose to speak according to Their wisdom is the language of traditional understandings, and this may include discourses on meaning-filled biblical stories that may not represent literal historical facts. This phenomenon begs the question: How might one distinguish between statements that indulge the people’s historical beliefs about biblical scripture and those that confirm the historicity of those stories or figures?

In two of the examples presented in this paper, the Central Figures state provisos that could be seen as alerts that the discourses will be revealed according to prevailing understandings. In *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that He is speaking “*conformably*” to what the people believe. Similarly, in the 2 November 1987 Memorandum it is pointed out that in the Lawh-i-Hikmat Bahá’u’lláh prefaces His commentary on the ancient philosophers with a statement that He is “*quoting some accounts of the sages.*” Perhaps readers

could train themselves to be sensitive to such alerts. But we can also see from other examples that the Central Figures do not always give such notice. For example, when Bahá'u'lláh uses the term “fourth heaven” in the Kitáb-i-Íqán [¶98] He does not alert the reader that He is about to speak conformably to the prevailing understandings of a particular religious sect. It would follow that readers cannot depend on getting written notice that a Central Figure is about to speak according to prevailing understandings.

Although the question of how one might distinguish between statements that indulge the people's historical beliefs and those that confirm the scriptural stories as literal events is intriguing, there is reason to believe that it is not the most important question. Consider, for example, Bahá'u'lláh “Responses to questions of Mánikchí Sáhíb” found in *The Tabernacle of Unity*. Mánikchí Sáhíb had requested distinct rulings on an array of seemingly contradictory religious traditions. Which was most acceptable in the sight of God? In His response, Bahá'u'lláh does not engage in the disputes surrounding those traditions but confirms the unity of the divine process that is evident in all of them. In His discourse on differing religious principles Bahá'u'lláh states, *“These differences are not worthy of mention. The eye of divine mercy casteth its glance upon all that is past. It behoveth us to mention them only in favourable terms, for they do not contradict that which is essential.”* [TU 2.18] Bahá'u'lláh also repeatedly states the following imperative as the ultimate answer to all of Mánikchí Sáhíb's inquiries about differing religious traditions: *“Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.”* [TU 2.5, 2.7, 2.16, 2.31]

In light of this Tablet and the guidance and sacred text explored earlier in this paper, one might consider that when a Central Figure of the Faith refers to an ancient biblical story He may be engaging that tradition in favorable terms because it does not contradict that which is essential, is well known among the people, and is judged to be a worthy vehicle to convey eternal spiritual verities. The question of the

historicity of the tradition cited pales in comparison to the imperative to “*Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.*”[TU 2.5, 2.7, 2.16, 2.31] The most pertinent questions may be: What is the essential spiritual instruction in this discourse that draws on an ancient tradition? What does it teach about the needs of this age? What do I need to do to today to embody the spiritual principles that the Central Figure is teaching through that tradition?

I closing, I’d like to return to this excerpt from Mirza Abu’l-Fadl’s commentary in *Miracles and Metaphors* which speaks eloquently to a phenomenon that, I believe, has been confirmed in the sacred and authoritative text explored in this paper:

It is clear that the prophets and Manifestations of the Cause of God were sent to guide the nations, to improve their characters, and to bring the people nearer to their Source and ultimate Goal. They were not sent as historians, astronomers, philosophers, or natural scientists. Their position in the world of creation is like that of the heart in the body: it has a universal position with a general effect. The position of the learned in the world of earthly dominion is like that of a specific organ. That is, they have a particular position and a special effect. Therefore, the prophets have indulged the people in regard to their historical notions, folk stories, and scientific principles, and have spoken to them according to these. They conversed as was appropriate to their audience and hid certain realities behind the curtain of allusion.

. . . Finally, it is well known that neither the Prophet Muhammad nor the rest of the prophets ever engaged in disputes with the people about their historical beliefs, but addressed them according to their local traditions.”¹³

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NOTES

- 1 See Stockman and Winters, chapter 30: “Hermeneutics and Interpretation”
- 2 Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, p. 9-10
- 3 Provisional translation by Foad Seddigh, also found in Laáí ael-Hiekmat, vol. 2 page 57
- 4 Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, p. 9-10
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Memorandum 3 November 1987 cited in “Socrates” Memorandum, 22 October 1995.
- 7 <http://www.kashkul.org/2010/09/09/the-true-torah/>
- 8 See Hornby, #1689
- 9 Memorandum 29 March 2015 (29 March 2015, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, see “Socrates” Memorandum to the Universal House of Justice, last entry)
- 10 “Socrates” Memorandum 22 October 1995
- 11 “Socrates” Memorandum 22 October 1995
- 12 Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, p. 9-10
- 13 Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, p. 9-10

Which World Are You In?

Ian Kluge

Introduction

This paper takes its cue from Shoghi Effendi's statement that

Bahá'ís should consciously guard themselves against being caught in what one might call *the undertow of materialism and atheism, sweeping the world these days. Skepticism, cynicism, disbelief, immorality and hard-heartedness* are rife, and as friends are those who stand for the antithesis of all these things they should beware lest the atmosphere of the present world affects them without their being conscious of it.¹

It is noteworthy that the Guardian's list of negative results of materialism and atheism (the two usually come together) are both intellectual and affective, i.e. they refer to intellectual ideas but also to the feelings and attitudes correlated with ideas. For example, cynicism is the belief that people tend to be motivated by self-interest and are not usually sincere.² However, this belief also has an affective aspect, as a feeling of distrust, suspicion, anxiety and pessimism about human nature. In daily life such feelings easily inhibit the development of positive relationships especially with individuals and/or groups that are 'other.' "Hard-heartedness" is both a way of thinking about or dealing with others but also a feeling of indifference, callousness and lack of charity. Here, too, the development of positive relationships is seriously eroded.

This paper explores the intellectual and affective consequences of answering a single question, 'Does God exist or not?' There are three main answers to this question. The first is theism, the belief in one

transcendent and personal God. The second is atheism which denies that such a God exists or even could exist. The third is agnosticism, the belief that there is no decisive evidence in favor of or against theism and atheism. We shall also look at several subtypes of agnosticism, among them apatheism, the complete intellectual and emotional indifference to anything related to God or religion.

Following Shoghi Effendi's guidance, we hope to make readers more aware of the nature and consequences of committing to one of these three viewpoints. Doing so allows readers greater freedom in choosing their options.

This paper specifically references the Bahá'í Writings for two reasons. They share the fundamental premise of the other theistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—on the existence of one transcendent personal God Who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent and is the creator of the phenomenal world. Moreover, as a more recent revelation, the Bahá'í Writings explicitly deal with issues that the other scriptures do not cover directly but which have come to the forefront of mankind's development especially since the European Enlightenment.³ In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

The superiority of the present in relation to the past consists in this, that the present can take over and adopt as a model many things which have been tried and tested and the great benefits of which have been demonstrated in the past, and that it can make its own new discoveries and by these augment its valuable inheritance.⁴

As a result of our exploration of both intellectual and affective aspects of theism, atheism and agnosticism we may gain three benefits. First, it is hoped that readers may gain additional ways of understanding and appreciating the foundational texts of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. This contributes to Shoghi Effendi's goal of helping people to "consciously guard themselves against being caught in what one might call the undertow of materialism and atheism."

Second, more complete understanding of different beliefs increases the opportunities for positive dialogue. By ‘positive dialogue’ we mean dialogue that encourages understanding and respect for differences. Achieving this goal requires at least some awareness of *both* the intellectual and affective consequences of theism, atheism and agnosticism since very few people are motivated to accept and maintain their beliefs on purely intellectual grounds. Obviously, positive dialogue makes Bahá’í teaching more effective.

Third, more complete understanding of other beliefs enable more effective apologetics, i.e. defending the Bahá’í revelation against criticisms of its teachings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that

The beloved of the Lord must stand fixed as the mountains, firm as impregnable walls ... Let them be a mighty fortress to *defend His Faith*, an impregnable citadel for the hosts of the Ancient Beauty. Let them faithfully guard the edifice of the Cause of God from every side.⁵

1. Worldviews

If we found ourselves suddenly transported to another planet, we would immediately be faced with a horde of questions about the nature of this new reality in which we find ourselves. “What kind of a world are we in?” “What are the potential physical threats we must overcome?” “What kind of beings live here—if any?” “If so, how must we relate to them?” “What is the nature of this new reality? Is it ordered and ruled by certain laws or is it chaotic and unpredictable? “Are there non-physical aspects of this new reality? “Are the things we see here real or illusory? How much of this reality is knowable to us? Given this utterly unprecedented situation, asking such questions is, of course, plain common sense since both physical and psychological survival and well-being depend answering them with at least some degree of accuracy.

In answering these questions, we are consciously or unconsciously engaged in the process of developing a world-view, i.e. an individual and collective response to the reality in which we find ourselves. A world-view is a synthesis—to various degrees of logical consistency—of our intellectual, affective (emotional) and conative (intentional, purposive) responses to our external environment. It is a complex of observed facts, intellectual understandings, expectations, emotions and intentions expressed in our values, attitudes, expectations, goals and, perhaps above all, a sense of meaning. Such responses are not merely abstract and intellectual, but also affective i.e. they shape our feelings, attitudes and intended actions. World-views need not necessarily be expressed in abstract philosophical discourse but can also be expressed in art, music, poetry, myth, religious beliefs, narratives and rituals as well as in secular and sacred imagery.

According to Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the founders of methodical world-view studies,⁶

[t]here is in mankind a *persistent tendency to achieve a comprehensive interpretation, Weltanschauung, or philosophy, in which a picture of reality is combined with a sense of its meaning and value and with principles of action ...*⁷

In other words, all human beings—not just cultural elites—need a world-view in order to make sense of and give coherent order to their lives at both the individual and societal levels. Without a world-view—whether invented or, or as in most cases, adopted from society—effective action is impossible because we would lack a hierarchy of ideas, values and feelings to motivate and guide action. Such a lack makes survival let alone the optimization of well-being highly unlikely. Indeed, we would not even understand our own identity because having a personal identity assumes certain things to be true about oneself and the world.

James Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door* reiterates and expands Dilthey's claims about the universality of world-views and explains why they are necessary.

Everyone has a world-view. Whenever any of us thinks about anything—from a casual thought (Where did I leave my watch?) to a profound question (Who am I?) we are operating within such a framework. In fact, it is only the assumption of a world-view—however basic or simple—that allows us to think at all.⁸

Thinking—as well as feeling and willing—always occurs in the context of a world-view, a paradigm or framework either consciously known or unconsciously assumed. If we have no intellectual criteria to tell us what is worth thinking about and to distinguish error from truth, right from wrong, and reasonable from unreasonable, we become unconcerned and blasé about things and spend no more time and energy thinking about them.⁹ Such pre-reflective, uncritical responses subject to little if any questioning and/or rational discourse are simply accepted at face value because they are assumed to be true.¹⁰ They remain “prephilosophic.”¹¹

The existence of other—sometimes competitive—world-views presents an important challenge: what is the most effective way of understanding them? Dilthey concluded that abstract intellectual knowledge of their beliefs is insufficient; the feelings correlated with the abstract ideas are must also be taken into consideration for an accurate understanding of our own and others' world-views. To achieve this, he developed his method of “*verstehen*,” or ‘understanding’ as the evidence-informed “imaginative re-experiencing of the subjective point of view of the actor”¹² in regards to other world-views. This requires empathy or “*empfinden*” (literally ‘feeling into’) not just for abstract ideas but also for feelings and emotional states.¹³ “*Empfinden*” uses evidence-based imaginary exercises us to understand human existence empathetically, i.e. subjectively from within the standpoint of an ‘other.’¹⁴ Subjectively

oriented fact-based imaginative understanding is necessary for deeper intellectual and affective understanding of all world-views.

The underlying premise of Dilthey's method is the oneness of human nature regardless of race, gender, culture or any other accidental factors. A. H. Hodges points out that Dilthey's method of fact-based imaginative and "sympathetic insight"¹⁵ provides genuine knowledge of other world-views because it is "*based on the identity of nature between ourselves and what we study* [i.e. human expression]."¹⁶ In short, human nature is one. (The "oneness of mankind"¹⁷ is a common teaching by all the Manifestations of God.) Dilthey's method of "*ein-fühlen*" or 'feeling into' shows that humans essentially share a similar inner life, and, thereby, encourages "discovering myself in the Thou."¹⁸ Furthermore, Dilthey's method of *verstehen* and *ein-fühlen* provides a disciplined scholarly practice built on a universal religious teaching. The modern historian and political philosopher Isaiah Berlin agrees with Dilthey on this issue.

Members of one culture can, by force of *imaginative insight* understand (what Vico calls *entrare*) the values, the ideals, the forms of life of another culture or society, even those remote in time and space ...¹⁹

Contrary to Spengler and contemporary theorists and practitioners of 'identity politics,' world-views are not isolated and impermeable monads with insuperable barriers between them. On the basis of our common human nature, we can gain genuine knowledge and understanding about different cultural and ethnic groupings. The key to gaining such knowledge is an open-minded and open-hearted willingness to do so. The Roman poet and playwright Terence (2nd century BCE) sums up this approach to understanding humanity in a single line: "I am a man and nothing human is alien to me."²⁰

The contemporary philosopher of religion, Linda Trinkaus Zogzebski builds on Dilthey's practice of "*ein-fühlen*," pointing out there is a close connection between the abstract beliefs expressed in a world-view and

their concomitant feelings and emotions. She is particularly emphatic about the need for affective or emotional understanding, stating that “many emotion-dispositions ... have an important role in evaluating any kind of belief.”²¹ Her statement reminds us that very few people adopt a world-view on strictly logical and intellectual grounds. Almost invariably, personal and affective components are involved, e.g. feelings of loyalty to a parental tradition, an emotionally overpowering experience of some kind, or an unshakeable intuition that some idea is ‘right.’

Perhaps the best known work of connecting emotions with the concept of the divine is Rudolf Otto’s *The Idea of the Holy*. This famous text asserts that beliefs in the “holy,” the divine, the “numinous”²² “cannot strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked”²³ and such evocations elicit intellectual, affective and conative responses. Otto’s goal is not only to provide intellectual understanding but also to enable the reader to “feel” the experiences associated with “the holy,” i.e. to understand through “*einfühling*” (‘feeling into’) why *the experience of the holy* is so compelling. He identifies the important emotional states the holy evokes, for example, “the consciousness of creaturehood”²⁴—as seen for example in the Bahá’í *Noonday Prayer*—a sense of the “wholly other”²⁵ and a feeling of “wonderfulness and rapture which lies in the beatific experience of deity.”²⁶

Following the example provided by these scholars, this paper examines the connection between theistic, atheistic, agnostic and apathetic world-views and the correlated intellectual, conative and especially the affective responses they are most likely to arouse. Knowledge of this connection is essential to answering the question, “What is the nature of the world in which I find myself?” We shall pay special attention to the way in which certain affective states encourage a sense of confidence in and worthiness of human nature and the decisively important concepts that grow out of these feelings.

Guidance from the Manifestations of God is necessary to inspire such confidence in the spiritual aspects of human nature because, all too

easily, especially in the autumn and winter season of civilizations,²⁷ human beings fall into the “Slough of Despond.”²⁸ Judaism, Christianity and Islam provide this guidance in a general way. The Bahá’í Writings do as well but add explanations about the declining condition of the post-Enlightenment world. Shoghi Effendi calls for greater heroics from Bahá’ís “as humanity plunges into greater depths of despair, degradation, dissension and distress.”²⁹ He continues,

People are so markedly lacking in spirituality these days that the Bahá’ís should consciously guard themselves against being caught in what one might call the undertow of materialism and atheism, sweeping the world these days. Skepticism, cynicism, disbelief, immorality and hard-heartedness are rife”³⁰

In “an age of scepticism and unbelief”³¹ a loss of confidence in the spiritual nature and destiny of mankind takes hold, leading to a deep scepticism, discouragement, pessimism, cynicism and that hinders mankind from living up to its God-given spiritual nature and its potentials. Especially the history of the 20th century CE has normalized this inward condition with its degraded view of humans as no more than an animal-like material being without any spiritual aspects. When such viewpoints become wide-spread, human self-understanding becomes fore-shortened, seeing only the material world and its temptations and rewards as ‘real.’ It is denigrated by a pervasive philosophical and consumerist materialism that reduces humankind to an electro-chemical process without any spiritual features whatever. Such attitudes are not only reflected in serious literature and philosophy—*vide* Sartre’s *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*, George Orwell’s *1984* or Camus’ *The Stranger* and William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* but also in popular literature such as Agatha Christie’s *The Murder at the Vicarage*. Christie’s aging spinster heroine, Miss Marple reflects that “At my time of life, one knows that the worst is usually true.”³²

The development and strengthening of human self-confidence and feeling of worthiness is one of the “eternal verities”³³ of God’s

Manifestations. Here, too, there is agreement among the four global theist religions. In the *Qur'an*, God says, man is His “vicegerent on earth”³⁴ whereas Judaism, Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith teach that mankind is made in the spiritual image of God,³⁵ i.e. the *imago dei*. In addition, the Manifestations provide guidance to help humanity gain courage, confidence in its own nature and a sense of worthiness to overcome the seemingly overwhelming power of matter and our animal aspects.

We shall find, among other things, that ideas and feelings are in a reciprocal relationship, each feeling often leads to certain ideas, and certain ideas lead to particular feelings, emotions and attitudes. For example, the deeply felt intuition that non-physical, i.e. transcendental forces, processes and/or entities exist encourages theistic belief. In turn, theistic belief encourages feelings about the value of mankind's spiritual nature and destiny. These results shape our attitudes to and about the world.

Four general answers to this question are available in contemporary Western societies:

1. Theism i.e. reality cannot be adequately explained in strictly material terms; that there is one God only who possess the attributes of personhood;
2. Atheism i.e. non-material entities, processes and forces do not exist; belief in them is delusional and harms mankind in innumerable ways;
3. Agnosticism, i.e. the limitations of human understanding prevent us from deciding between the previous two viewpoints.

We may, of course, ask why not simply survey ‘practicing’ theists, atheists and agnostics about how they experience/feel their beliefs. Such a study of actual adherents would, provide valuable information for the *sociology* of belief. However, our focus is *philosophical*: on exploring the logically necessary intellectual and affective consequences of these beliefs and how they shape our theories of reality. These

two approaches are not mutually exclusive since they study different aspects of these beliefs. Indeed, sociology can gain new data by using the logical philosophical template to measure the logical coherence of actual beliefs among practitioners of these world-views.

2: Theism Part I

Explicitly or implicitly, all belief systems whether religious or secular, embed certain metaphysical principles about the basic, “most general structure of reality.”³⁶ Theism is no exception. For theism, although matter and spirit both originate from and depend on God as their necessary and sufficient condition for existence, they are ontologically different insofar as they have mutually exclusive attributes.³⁷ While matter is perceptible by the physical senses, spirit is an “intelligible reality[] which [has] *no outward existence*.”³⁸ In Christianity, this distinction is made in the statement “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”³⁹ Judaism’s view of the difference between matter and spirit evolved in the direction of clearly distinguishing the two.⁴⁰

The matter/spirit distinction has far-reaching intellectual and affective consequences. Recognizing the existence of non-material aspects of reality—identified in the Bahá’í Writings as “intelligible realities”⁴¹—determines how we orient ourselves in the world. Because reality is not metaphysically one-dimensional⁴² but dual, we cannot limit our attention to sensible things but must also take account of aspects of reality that cannot be physically perceived or measured and quantified. The matter/spirit distinction may be described as being ‘open’ insofar as it does not confine our intellectual and affective knowledge to the material world. It opens new possibilities for human growth and evolution.

The presence of the unseen may arouse fear (more on this below) but it also encourages us to be more curious about and more conscious about our surroundings and to pay more attention to the natural world as a carrier of ‘signs’ of its divine origin. This heightened attention to the

nature of reality may plausibly be regarded as one of the factors in the beginnings of science and theology, since both start with the need to understand the real world more adequately. As we try to explain what we observe and/or intuit, “the rational soul” develops new capacities of thinking, such as the use of analogical reasoning, i.e. explaining the unseen by references to the seen.⁴³

From the human perspective, the difference between matter and non-material spirit is exacerbated because spirit has powers denied to material things. It can, for example, exist invisibly and, thereby, can observe us without being observed itself. Unlike material bodies, the intuited non-physical reality can be everywhere at the same time, i.e. omnipresent. Whereas non-physical, spiritual entities are immune from physical harm, material bodies of all kinds are subject to accidents to diseases and all manner of natural disasters, to starvation and attacks by human and animal foes, and eventually death. This, too, suggests supernatural powers not available to humans (though there will be some who seek to acquire such powers). Such differences encourage humans to distinguish among (1) the most powerful and the less powerful or powerless⁴⁴; (2) the contingent and non-contingent; and (3) the unlimited and the limited.

These conclusions regarding our ontological situation vis-à-vis non-physical aspects of reality awaken deep and unshakeable feelings of human dependence and weakness vis-à-vis the invisible entities, forces or processes. However, as will be shown below, they also lead to certain insights about human strengths that we can build on. Indeed, doing exactly that is the purpose of God’s Manifestations on earth.

The combined effect of the powers of the non-physical entities and forces easily lead to an overpowering feeling of mankind’s vulnerability and even powerlessness, and, with it, to a sense of ontological dependence and inferiority. For good or ill, non-material entities can act on us in enigmatic ways, i.e. unseen, by unknown means and for unknown purposes. These abilities can arouse not only wonder,

respect, awe, curiosity and a desire to investigate but also suspicion vis-à-vis nature and other people, fear and even inhibit the ability to act. The labyrinthian tangle of contradictory feelings may also generate a strong overwhelming sense of the inherent mysteriousness of and fascination with the non-material aspects of existence.

Fascination, be it the fascination of the wonderful or the fascination of the horrible or a convoluted snarl of both that we find difficult if not impossible to untangle, leads to what Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* identifies as the “*mysterium tremendum*.”⁴⁵ His emphasis is, rightly, on the feelings, not on the merely abstract intellectual knowledge about the reality and truth of the unknowability, omnipresence and omnipotence of the “numinous” or “the holy.” According to Otto, the complexity of our experience and feeling of the “*mysterium tremendum*”⁴⁶ unleashes a wide range of emotions ranging from the sudden transformative feeling-knowledge of “transport and ecstasy,”⁴⁷ to “intoxicated frenzy”⁴⁸ and even to “wild and demonic”⁴⁹ emotional episodes. The intrinsic mysteriousness of reality, encourages a welter of seemingly contradictory feelings. Among them we find the feelings of uncanniness and dread; bafflement, perplexity and confusion as well as curiosity, wonder and amazement.

Rudolf Otto associates the recognition of inferiority and dependence as “the element of absolutely mysterious power over which humans have no control. The various beings hypothesized—gods, ghosts, animal spirits—“retain numina,”⁵⁰ i.e. an aura of power, “awefulness” and the “uncanny.”⁵¹ We feel surrounded by mysterious forces, processes and beings, and, therefore, easily fall prey to feelings of cosmic paranoia exile and existential homelessness, (reflected in the story of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden), isolation, estrangement from the world, hopelessness and meaninglessness in the face of human transience. According to Rudolph Otto, at best we can propitiate these super-human powers by attaining “consciousness of *createdness* and the consciousness of *creaturehood*”⁵² by means of humble acceptance,

individual and communal prayer and ritual, and by practices to foster a feeling of harmony with the unseen powers. Indeed, recognizing that “Thou art all,”⁵³ and becoming “weary of self”⁵⁴ we may even seek “the annihilation of self”⁵⁵ by following a mystical or monastic path.

However, as noted above, there are positive intellectual and affective gains to be derived even from these seemingly invincible negative feelings. In fact, these positive gains are unachievable without first directly facing the negatives because they are the necessary conditions for awakening humanity’s consciousness of its own powers of mind, of its own “rational soul”⁵⁶ which distinguishes it from the rest of creation. Without the challenges presented by the material world mankind would have little if any opportunity to discover its own mental and spiritual powers because there would be no pressing reason to actualize these potentials. This actualization entails realizing that “Man possesses conscious intelligence and reflection; nature does not.”⁵⁷ Consequently, mankind’s self-confidence is promoted and sustained. Consciousness and reflection give humans power over physical nature.⁵⁸ Even more, consciousness—an “intelligible reality”—is experienced or felt (through intuition⁵⁹) as a non-physical process diminishes the ontological distance between humankind and the non-physical or spiritual aspects of reality. Recognition of similarity to the spiritual beings and forces, encourages feelings of self-confidence and worthiness in human nature. Among other things, such consciousness of our pre-eminence in the created world and the resulting confidence is the basis for diminishing the propensity to “To act like the beasts of the field.”⁶⁰ Consciousness is what gives humankind a sense of its superiority over material reality and, thereby, strengthens humanity’s self-confidence in the struggle to survive—and thrive—in an often hostile and dangerous world. Even more, it encourages confidence in our ability to control—not suppress—our lower animal nature and, thereby, continue our evolution as moral beings. Without the feeling of confidence in our mental and spiritual powers and a sense of worthiness as human beings, it is easy to ignore our potentials as moral and

spiritual beings. The Manifestations of God inspire us to outgrow this diminished, self-inhibiting and depressed understanding of ourselves, often as no more than one animal among all the others.

Uncanniness need not necessarily provoke only negative reactions. It can also stimulate a feeling of astonishment and with it, curiosity not only about “the Holy” but about ourselves as well. Awareness of our limitations combined with a “fascination”⁶¹ with the ultimate source of this experience prompts—at least in some—an epistemological quest for ‘other ways of knowing’ appropriate to this mysterious aspect of reality. Obviously, sense perception is not well-suited to this quest. Therefore, we seek “other forms of experience which deserve to be called cognitive.”⁶² Among these ways are an openness to intuition,⁶³ an “awaken[ing] [of] spiritual susceptibilities,”⁶⁴ inspiration, i.e. the “promptings of the Holy Spirit”⁶⁵ and meditation practices.⁶⁶ Even such relatively common experiences as dreams, visions, physical disciplines such as fasting or self-isolation, and NDE’s can provide knowledge, especially about ourselves. Again, the feeling of confidence in our potentials for acquiring all kinds of knowledge plays an important role in pursuing knowledge.

Moreover, overpowering awe in the presence of “the holy” inspires worship and praise along with a feeling of gratitude for the unearned and unasked for gift of existence. Reminding us of existence as a good is an essential task of theistic religions amid the sufferings of the world. We sense that life has intrinsic value and that human existence is ‘ontologically right,’ despite what our own personal fate may be and, thereby, transcend these events.⁶⁷ Once this good is forgotten or worse, never recognized, despair and nihilism with their attendant cynicism and self and socially destructive attitudes and actions, individuals and societies have come to the ‘end of the road.’ Like Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, they will feel and act out the belief that it is best not to be born and if this catastrophe happens, it is best to return to non-existence.

*Not to be born at all
Is best, far best that can befall,
Next best, when born, with least delay
To trace the backward way.*⁶⁸

This existential optimism is a necessary motivator for good will to all as well as affective and intellectual progress. As will be shown below, this feeling is enhanced by the theist doctrine of a personal God.

The mysterious nature of transcendent beings and/or forces may also cause us to experience what Otto calls “creature-consciousness or creature feeling ... [which] is the note of submergence into nothingness before an overpowering absolute might of some kind.”⁶⁹ Such feelings are easily understood given the unknown and, thereby unpredictable reality seems to surround us at all times and all places; its omnipresence—and knowledge of our secret deeds—can easily unnerve us. The Bahá’í Writings—in agreement with Judaism, Christianity and Islam—teach that compared to God’s absolute, i.e. unconditionally independent existence, mankind does not exist, is ‘as nothing’ because humans are totally dependent on God.⁷⁰

However, an acute feeling of mankind’s intrinsic deficiencies need not necessarily lead to a “peculiar dread” but can also lead to positive intellectual and affective results. Dread can activate as well as paralyze us. A sense of deficiency can prompt a desire to improve which, in turn, requires the slow and careful cultivation of humankind’s latent intellectual and affective capacities needed for ethical, material, cultural and psycho-spiritual progress. Among these necessary skills are self-observation, reflection, self-critique, a sense of humility, a sense of responsibility and a deeply felt commitment to do better in the future. These practices also require an unflagging dedication to truth, which itself requires a willingness to distinguish between preferences and fact and a willingness to override personal preferences for truth. We

may call this complex of feelings and their ensuing beliefs ‘conscience’ which depends on the independent investigation of truth. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá praises those who have

investigated the truth and have been freed from imitations and superstitions, that ye observe with your own eyes and not with those of others, hearken with your own ears and not with the ears of others.⁷¹

Furthermore, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out that God “has endowed [mankind] with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and *that which he finds*⁷² *real and true he must accept.*”⁷³ It is noteworthy that both religion and science have their roots in the skills and commitments acquired from “dread” and a consciousness of human deficiencies. In other words, both science and religion have the same existential origins and the same purpose.

The tendency to reflect on our own thoughts and actions encourages greater social and moral self-consciousness which are required for human psycho-spiritual progress both in individuals and societies. For this reason Bahá’u’lláh admonishes us to

[b]ring thyself to account ere thou art summoned to a reckoning, on the Day when no man shall have strength to stand for fear of God, the Day when the hearts of the heedless ones shall be made to tremble.⁷⁴

Affectively, such growing powers of self-consciousness can stimulate feelings of self-confidence and with it, hope for oneself and even humanity in general as seen, for example, in the Bahá’í doctrine of progressive revelation. We shall discuss below how hope is enhanced and becomes one of the great gifts of belief in a personal God.

3. Theism Part II

The consequences of recognizing the existence of non-material realities become intensified and expanded with the theist principle that the world is the creation of a single, transcendent and personal Being Who is actively involved in the life of mankind. This development is not merely an arbitrary anthropomorphic imposition prompted by ‘pre-philosophic’ i.e. unreflective and uncritical thought or by “vain imaginings.”⁷⁵ There is also an underlying logic that is not difficult to discern. It is based on the previously examined distinction between matter and spirit and its consequences as well as on empirical observation of human actions.

The unusual and seemingly ‘supernatural’ powers of the non-material aspects of reality—especially in contrast to the contingency of material things and life—suggest that spirit is permanent and, therefore, more real than matter. Since material things are never observed to come into existence from nothing by their own power, i.e. they are contingent, analogical reasoning on the basis of this evidence suggests that the physical world itself originated from or was created by external permanent i.e. non-contingent spiritual agency. In other words, there is a distinction between (4) the Creator and the created, or, the Origin and the originated; (5) the independent and the dependent; and the (6) the essence and the accident. The existence of the contingent material world depends on non-contingent external action by non-material, i.e. spiritual agent. In addition, because the physical world is accidental, i.e. contingent and the spiritual power is essential, i.e. it is the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of the physical world.

Logic supports this view. Because the universe is existentially constituted entirely of material, i.e. contingent entities, it follows that the universe itself is contingent.⁷⁶ If every part of a machine is destructible, the machine itself is destructible, i.e. its existence is not necessary. Claiming otherwise implies that machines, mountains, plants—or the universe—can exist separately from their parts. Such a claim—that a

mountain or tricycle can exist separately from their parts—is, in effect, an admission of non-material realities, akin to Plato's theory of Ideas. The readily apparent consequence is that the contingency of the universe requires a Creator Who is not subject to the limitations of physical existence. In the same way, a pot requires a potter, i.e. an external entity possessing consciousness, the ability to make choices and intentionally work towards a purpose and desiring the existence of the pot. Such an entity also possesses individuality because it is a particular kind of being, i.e. it has an identity—whatever that identity may be.

Direct experience also teaches that effects must in some way or degree resemble their cause. A piece of ice will not light a fire in kindling because ice and fire do not share any relevant attributes, namely, heat; a lit match, however, will do so because it also possesses heat and, therefore, can impart heat to kindling. From this, it is only a small logical step to realize that even if other lesser spirits exist, there must be a single supremely powerful being to create the vast complexity of the world. The vastness of the world requires a commensurate cause,⁷⁷ namely, a single all-powerful Being beyond any conceivable limitations.⁷⁸

These necessary attributes of the potter are also the qualities necessary for personhood, thereby making it rational to conclude that the superior non-material power must be a person or, at least, have the attributes of personhood.⁷⁹ For Bahá'ís as well as other theist thinkers, Shoghi Effendi confirms these conclusions about a personal God by stating,

What is meant by personal God is a God Who is *conscious of His creation, Who has a Mind, a Will, a Purpose*, and not, as many scientists and materialists believe, an unconscious and determined force operating in the universe. Such conception of the Divine Being, as the Supreme and ever present Reality in the world, is not anthropomorphic, for it *transcends all human limitations and forms, and does by no means attempt to define the essence of Divinity which is obviously beyond any human comprehension*. To say that God is a

personal Reality *does not mean that He has a physical form*, or does in any way resemble a human being.⁸⁰

Of course, God has these powers in a super-eminent way that I, they are only analogically reflected in human nature. Shoghi Effendi's list of attributes—consciousness, a mind, a will and a purpose—are the necessary and sufficient conditions for possessing personhood. Without these foundational attributes there can be no meaningful moral agency; no love, care or concern; no sense of justice; no freedom of action; no scale of values, obligations or rights; no sense of meaning and no intentional relationships. Impersonal, unconscious forces, processes or machines—not even computers—cannot feel love, concern and self-motivation, demonstrate moral agency, establish a sense of values or initiate and sustain desired relationships. Unconscious, non-personal entities, processes and forces, like computers, can, of course, *imitate* the actions and procedures we *associate* with these attributes⁸¹ but it is a *superficial imitation* insofar as it lacks the attributes listed by Shoghi Effendi.⁸²

The Bahá'í Writings themselves also teach the personhood of God on the basis of a metaphysical argument: God must have the attributes of personhood because these attributes are evident in mankind. As previously noted “Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a *direct evidence* of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God.”⁸³ Mankind—wholly dependent and created—cannot possess spiritual capacities not super-eminently present in the Creator. Otherwise, not only would the created be superior to the Creator but also such capacities in mankind would have arisen from nothingness, i.e. without a sign in God's essence.⁸⁴ Humans can only possess personhood because the foundational attributes of personhood as well as their consequences such as moral agency and the ability to love are present—albeit in super-eminent form—in God. This line of reasoning is confirmed by the Manifestations of God.

Perhaps the most far-reaching consequence of God's possession of the attributes of personhood is that it strengthens humanity with what we may call 'cosmic confidence,' i.e. the conviction that mankind's 'being' or existence is good in and of itself and this good exceeds whatever natural and moral disasters may occur to individuals and/or entire societies.⁸⁵ Given the persistent physical, moral, social, political economic and psychological obstacles that beset our lives, humans would—and do—lose any hope for the future, fall into discouragement and despair about the value, purpose and meaning of life. Too easily they would fall into “the station of the ignorant ones who are as animals, following every croaker and shaken by every wind. ‘Forsake them to play in their shallow waters.’”⁸⁶ If human existence is not considered a good in itself, affectively, conatively and intellectually, then the value of love and care, whether physical, social, moral or spiritual care or whether for ourselves or others is, in effect, denied. Such negative emotions are exacerbated when a society succumbs to a materialist view of humans as electro-chemical machines and/or animals ‘just like the others’ with everyone fighting a feverish ‘war of all against all’ to acquire satisfaction in the material world.

In sharp contrast, in the four global theist religions, cosmic confidence is ‘based on the personhood of God Whose love for humanity is the ultimate reason for our existence. ‘Love’ expressed by an impersonal force or process—like ‘love’ expressed by a machine—would be utterly meaningless and contribute nothing to our confidence in the face of the powerful challenges of the physical world. We exist because we our existence is loved by a personal God. Through Bahá'u'lláh, God reminds us of this basic principle of theism: “I loved thy creation, hence I created thee.”⁸⁷ Since God is “conscious of His creation” and has, among other attributes “a Mind, a Will [and] a Purpose,” it follows logically that creation as a whole and especially humans are intentionally “call[ed] into being”⁸⁸ by a transcendental Being Who wishes mankind's existence. We are not simply “accidental composition[s] and arrangement[s]”⁸⁹ resulting from a long series of random physical processes and coincidences i.e. a long serendipitous sequence of

coincidences no less miraculous than a virgin birth. This heightens humanity's feelings of self-esteem as divine creations.

The Quran shows God's love for mankind when He says, "and behold, We said to the angels: "Bow down to Adam" and they bowed down."⁹⁰ Similarly, Judaism, Christianity and the Bahá'í Writings portray humanity as the spiritual image of God, the *imago dei*. Because our individual and collective existence is an intentional creation of divine personal love, mankind can not only trust God—even when things go wrong as in the story of Job—but can also have full confidence in our own *objective* intrinsic value.

The Bahá'í Writings enlarge the scope of mankind's intrinsic value and purpose by teaching that humankind has a specific place and purpose in cosmic evolution: "*If man did not exist, the universe would be without result, for the object of existence is the appearance of the perfections of God.*"⁹¹ Indeed, God created humanity with a unique nature

Human nature is created with a *special essence*—the capacity to reflect all the names of God—which distinguishes us from all other things and gives humankind a special position in the scale of being. Mankind, i.e. human nature, stands out because ... for each name, each attribute, each perfection which we affirm of God there exists a sign in man.⁹²

Cosmic confidence is supported not only by mankind's special and necessary place in the hierarchy of existence but also by the knowledge that our unique essential nature is created by God and, therefore, "*his species and essence undergo no change.*"⁹³ Even "*education cannot alter the inner essence of a man.*"⁹⁴ We are, so to speak, safe from ourselves! This is important in modern, post-Enlightenment times in which the denial of human nature and the concept of its complete malleability have led to catastrophic experiments to design and create a 'new man' according to the desires of fallible—though fashionable—philosophers and ideologues.⁹⁵ The theist religions agree here as well. This not only

provides confidence in humanity's essential nature but also gives us relief by freeing us from the pressures exerted by the ideological delusions of our time.

Knowing that we are conscious and intentional creations of God, Who gifted us with a purpose in cosmic evolution also gives mankind the courage not to succumb to the intimidation of a vast and overwhelmingly powerful physical universe. We remember that because “Man is, in reality, a spiritual being,”⁹⁶ and that “the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident—that is to say, the body—be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.”⁹⁷ Leaving aside the technical Aristotelian terminology, the gist of this statement is that matter cannot harm the “rational soul.”⁹⁸ This assures not only the ontological superiority of the “rational soul” against overwhelming physical force, but also its immortality. In other words, our feelings of being intimidated and even fatally discouraged by the physical universe and its catastrophes—bodily diseases, droughts, floods, crop failures, earthquakes, genetic disabilities, sheer accidents—are irrational and unjustified. Spiritually, we are not entombed in the world of matter though, of course, our bodies are.

In addition, confidence in ourselves as God's creations strengthens the courage and willingness to actualize our potentialities not only as individual self-improvement but also as societies in establishing education systems for public well-being. The quest for individual self-improvement often begins with an intuition that there is ‘something more’ we feel compelled to do to feel fully ‘at home’ with ourselves, i.e. we are spurred on by what choreographer Martha Graham called a “divine dissatisfaction” with what we are compared to the inner potentialities we feel or intuit within ourselves. Bahá'u'lláh affirms the reality of this feeling, saying, “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”⁹⁹

Not being completely entombed in matter and time generates hope, in other words, a positive attitude or feeling about the future, and,

consequently, a certain enthusiasm and willingness to attain this future by appropriate conduct in the present. Such confidence encourages virtues necessary for survival and growth, as, for example, perseverance, open-mindedness, intellectual and affective flexibility, and a willingness to experiment. Equally important, hope for a better future generates a willingness to engage in self-criticism for self-improvement as well as a willingness to sacrifice for others even if only to receive a just reward beyond the material world. Kantian deontologists may object that acting for a reward is not a virtue but in the case of attaining heaven (however defined), why wouldn't it be? How can we rationally assert it is not a virtue to choose to act in favor of one's own spiritual well-being and progress in the eternal afterlife? Indeed, it would seem to be the only rational thing to do. Nor would doing so lead to outrightly selfish acts because these would hinder our spiritual and moral progress throughout eternity.

However, hope for immortality also engenders a healthy and rational fear—if for no other reason than that no one wants to encounter the consequences of their misdeeds for eternity!¹⁰⁰ In other words, the hope for immortality also helps humans take their moral responsibilities more seriously; they become 'morally engaged' and develop greater willingness to assess their own actions more seriously. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá' points out, disbelief in personal immortality easily leads humans to neglect the acquisition of virtues:

The conception of annihilation is a factor in human degradation, a cause of human debasement and lowliness, a source of human fear and abjection. It has been conducive to the dispersion and weakening of human thought, whereas the realization of existence and continuity has upraised man to sublimity of ideals, established the foundations of human progress and stimulated the development of heavenly virtues; therefore, it behooves man to abandon thoughts of nonexistence and death, which are absolutely imaginary, and see himself ever-living, everlasting in the divine purpose of his creation. He must turn away from ideas which degrade the human soul¹⁰¹

Moreover, the deep convictions allows feelings of hope for ultimate justice, the confidence that even though economic, political and moral criminals may escape justice on earth, their deeds will be judged in the next life. This certainty has tremendous societal implications. In the first place, cosmic confidence and hope make the effort to improve ourselves and society worthwhile despite the trouble that we may have to endure. More specifically, hope for God's justice helps curb the desire for personal revenge that can tear entire families, societies and even countries apart. Such hope helps sustain good order and peace in society.

Without the vital feelings of confidence, hope and courage in the face of overwhelming physical power, it is difficult to see how science could have evolved. 'Abdu'l-Bahá' makes it clear, that humanity

wresteth the sword from the hands of nature, and giveth it a grievous blow ... Man hath the powers of will and understanding, but nature hath them not. Nature is constrained, man is free. Nature is bereft of understanding, man understandeth. Nature is unaware of past events, but man is aware of them.¹⁰²

In other words, mankind's intellectual and scientific progress depends on the feelings of confidence inspired by the theist doctrine that humankind is made in the spiritual image of God. Humanity occupies a special place in the scale of being. Indeed, human nature is the vanguard of the spiritual aspects of the evolutionary process. There is, for example, no common denominator between animal behavior and such human behaviors as writing operas, establishing public schools, engaging in religious services, creating legal systems with codified laws and a charter of individual rights or the systematic pursuit of scientific knowledge.¹⁰³

The cosmic confidence that forms a foundational part of theism is also strengthened by its ability to provide logical and coherent solutions to four fundamental problems in ethics. By 'logical and coherent' we mean solutions that follow from a basic premise—the distinction

between matter and spirit—and suggest certain conclusions by inferential and/or analogical reasoning. In short, the theist solutions form a part of a unified whole.

The first question is, ‘Who—if anyone—has the legitimate authority or the right to lay down moral principles and precepts for the human race?’ Given God’s His knowledge of His creation, it is difficult to imagine who else could have genuine ethical legitimacy since His knowledge is the only reliable guide to ‘the good.’ In addition, it is virtually self-evident that no human and no collection of human beings inherently possess such legitimacy by virtue of their human nature. The reasons are obvious: humans are fallible and fickle, have personal interests, lack absolute independence from all things, i.e. are susceptible to outside influence, interference and coercion. Thus, humans cannot guarantee objectivity and justice. They also lack the unlimited knowledge needed to establish viable ethical and judicial standards. God is unaffected by the aforementioned deficiencies.

The second aspect of authority is the question of power. Without legitimacy, power is tyranny and forceful enslavement but without power, legitimacy remains purely theoretical, i.e. impotent. Thus, to see how legitimacy is actually put into practice we must ask ‘Who—if anyone—has the power necessary to enable people to follow these rules despite their short-comings and weaknesses?’ ‘Who—if anyone—has the power to impose His will and His ethical judgments on humankind? Who—if anyone—can impose both obligations or laws and consequences for committed or omitted acts? The belief in one personal God allows a logically consistent answer to these questions—God alone has that power. He exercises it through the “eternal verities” taught by the Manifestations as well as in the attributes and potentials of human nature. Humans may stray from these for a time, but in the long run, they return to the guidance implicit in their God-given essence. Human powers, at best, are able to violate mankind’s essential nature, but all too

often mainly by violence, legalized oppression and vast amounts of collective self-deception. God-substitutes such as governments, priest-hoods or ideologies lack this power because they are subject to the vicissitudes of ubiquitous change and they lack the legitimacy and the power to make their ethical requirements effective. Inherent human limitations prevent this.

The third aspect of authority is 'universality.' Here, the most fundamental question is, 'Is there such a thing as a universal human nature that underlies personal and societal ethics?' The four theist religions answer this question positively, i.e. that a common human nature allows us to identify and build on our inherent nature that will—in the Bahá'í teachings—lead to a unified federal world state. Such a future is at least possible—if humans choose to follow the guidance of the Manifestations and above all, the 'law of love.' Mankind originated with God's love and so this divine motive is the fundamental feature of our existence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá warns us that "No worldly power can accomplish the universal love."¹⁰⁴

The fourth problem is the traditional problem of moral 'evil,' i.e. consciously chosen and harmful acts against others. How can a beneficent God allow such horrible events to happen? Either He cannot stop them, in which case He is not omnipotent, or He will not stop them, in which case He is immoral by allowing needless suffering to continue. Though this subject has been voluminously debated, in our view, only two points need to be understood.

First, no 'solution' to these concerns can and should ever satisfy us. Satisfaction with any answer encourages a careless attitude, especially towards human suffering. As a result, we would be less determined to mitigate or end suffering and that, in turn, leads to the emotional, intellectual and conative coarsening, demoralizing and animalizing of human existence. However, because there is no satisfying explanation of suffering does not mean that there is no framework to provide at least some degree of understanding. Theism provides such a framework.

The first and most obvious is that unlike God, we do not and cannot know all of the relevant facts about human existence. Therefore, should not rush to judgment that suffering is ultimately meaningless because within the context of the physical world, we can see no meaning in it.

4. Atheism Part I

This paper concerns itself with one form of ‘positive atheism’ which directly asserts that non-material beings, forces and processes do not exist and even more, cannot exist. Positive atheism advocates metaphysical naturalism, claiming that only material nature is real and that any contrary beliefs are false. Consequently, it rejects as false the concept of God found in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá’í Faith. More specifically, it denies the existence of any being that is supposedly supernatural, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, personal and morally good. The concept of such a being is logically self-contradictory and cannot even be properly explained.

At this point it necessary to distinguish ‘atheism’ from ‘anti-theism.’ The so-called ‘New Artheism,’ best represented by Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, and Stenger, is militantly anti-theist. These authors proclaim that God does not exist, that “faith is inherently an enemy of reason and science and no reconciliation between them is possible,”¹⁰⁵ and that religion harms individuals and societies. Hitchens claims religious instruction for children is “child abuse”¹⁰⁶ and Harris questions the validity of religious tolerance, stating that “the very ideal of religious tolerance—born of the notion that every person can believe whatever he wants about God—is one of the principle forces driving us toward the abyss.”¹⁰⁷ They New Atheists agree that religion “must be actively resisted and attacked whenever possible.”¹⁰⁸ Openly ridiculing theists and theism is an important part of their strategy.¹⁰⁹ Of course, the New Atheism far from ‘new. Indeed, it has not added a single new argument against God and religion. Furthermore, it was already in vogue in the late 18th C with the popular writings of Diderot, d’Holbach and D’Alembert who regarded religion itself as a set of vile deceptions and

an obstacle to human progress and maturity. Although Kant himself was not an absolute anti-theist,¹¹⁰ his essay “*What is Enlightenment?*” established the motto of anti-theism, “*Sapere Aude*” i.e. dare to think for yourself. Anti-theists strongly believe that theists are inherently, thoughtless, brain-washed, irrational, intellectually ignorant and easily led. (They have obviously never debated with a Jesuit!) In contradiction to anti-theist biases, Bahá'u'lláh makes this concept one of the foundational teachings of His revelation.¹¹¹

Marxism and its variants are the most wide-spread forms of anti-theism. Marx writes,

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people ... The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness.¹¹²

In the Soviet Union and other Communist nations, religious life was actively, often harshly suppressed and “scientific atheism” courses were mandatory from school to university. The failure of this atheist education program became apparent as soon as Communism failed as a system of government in 1990 and the Russian Orthodox re-emerged as a potent force in Russian society.

The one issue on which atheists and anti-theists agree is the metaphysical denial of God's existence. Metaphysically, they assert that reality is one-dimensional, i.e. strictly material, and that there are no transcendental aspects, levels or planes of reality from which the material world is originated or ruled. All apparently non-physical phenomena such as thought, ‘magical’ powers or paranormal events can be adequately explained in strictly physical terms. The metaphysical denial of God, is, of course, a form of faith in itself since there is no empirical, scientific proof for this view—which invalidates it on the basis of its own principles.

Let us look at atheism in general and then examine particular kinds of atheism. Having stated the essential intellectual principles of atheism, our discussion will examine the affective or emotional aspects of denying God.

One of the most frequently cited affective consequence of disbelief in God is a feeling of relief and freedom from the dictatorial demands of God Who arbitrarily prescribes human nature, mankind's moral obligations and the meaning of our lives. Moreover, He does so without consulting us, the recipients of His 'largesse' and thereby de-values us as unworthy of consideration in matters that concern us more than Him. Fortunately, no such Being exists. We are free, i.e. there are no *a priori* commands requiring universal obedience or worship both of which demean human nature by enslaving us to an ontologically different Being Who does not have our interests in mind. Without this tyrant overshadowing us, we can at last, exercise our freedom to make individual and collective choices as we see fit and can concentrate on being *human* beings instead of puppets trying to dance on someone else's string. Not only that, but we are no longer subject to the humiliating bribery of heaven or threats of eternal torment in hell. As a result, we are free to develop a genuinely human morality based on human standards and choices and not subject to a pseudo-morality based on obedience imposed from the outside.

The freedom of atheism is also used to support the concept of human dignity. We are free to be themselves, albeit within the limits of their society. Humans can finally attain the dignity of taking responsibility for their own actions for good and/or ill. Without that, we remain perpetual children who expect someone else to 'die for our sins,' or to offer us mandatory 'guidance.' Both 'gifts' discourage individual and collective thought and action and, in effect, hold back whatever moral or psychological progress we might make. Why think, when we can 'shift the blame'? Such seemingly well-meaning 'offers' not only demean us by assuming we cannot take responsibility for ourselves but

also infantilizes us by teaching permanent dependence on others for ethical integrity. No society can function with such intellectual laziness since viable societies require individual decisions and responsibility commensurate with the age we live in.

The problem with the idea of human dignity based on the non-existence of God is that it provides no intrinsic reason to draw that conclusion. There is no necessary logical inference leading from the non-existence of God to the concept of human dignity. The atheist view that humans,—like animals and plants—are no more than packages of bio-chemical processes, are “accidental composition[s] and arrangement[s]”¹¹³ resulting from a long series of random physical processes and coincidences.¹¹⁴ Feelings of discouragement and despair about human nature and its value are a far more likely outcome than any feelings of gratitude for existing. Recognizing the intrinsic ‘goodness of being’ has no rational basis in the belief that humanity is the outcome of a long chain of cosmic accidents and mutations.

Consequently, atheist views of human dignity can only be based on personal subjective feelings and beliefs—and these are notoriously unreliable and malleable according to the needs and preferences of the hour. In contrast, theism provides a necessary logical inference from mankind as God’s willful creation to human dignity.¹¹⁵ Because humans are intentionally “call[ed] into being”¹¹⁶ by God, theism provides an objective i.e. not a purely subjective basis for the intrinsic dignity of mankind.

Pride and courage are two other liberating emotions encouraged by atheism. When we are free to stand up for ourselves, especially against an overwhelming but unworthy power, we tend to feel a need to be true to ourselves and live ‘at our best’ for the obvious reason that doing so is the only available—and rational—choice. Few people wish difficult lives on themselves, and those who for medical or anti-social reasons ‘go too far’ are restrained by society. Positive atheism frees us from needlessly demeaning human dignity by replacing divinely mandated ‘sin’ with socially legislated ‘crime.’

Pride and courage also inspire a passion for cosmic justice. Why should humankind be burdened with demands not imposed on the rest of nature? We are, in fact, animals like the others, i.e. simply a part of nature; our seemingly special brain powers have traceable roots in the animal world and make us different in degree but not in kind. Imposing ‘spiritual’ rules on us and requiring us to ‘live up to’ our spiritual destinies is simply rank injustice. Humans neither asked for nor were asked about these impositions and there is no reason we should accept them. Like Lao Tzu or Henry David Thoreau, we can draw our moral guidance from nature without the help of divine Manifestations, and make adjustments due to human peculiarities as necessary. Finally, we must accept that, like all species, we will eventually be superseded by other kinds of being that—see the dinosaur-bird connection—may be totally different from us.

However, there are also problematic intellectual affective and conative consequences of positive atheism. While Judaism, Christianity and Islam implicitly teach that morals ultimately originate with God and are not from nature, the Bahá’í Writings explicitly explain why this is so. The natural world is essentially different from humankind:

Man hath the powers of will and understanding, but nature hath them not. Nature is constrained, man is free. Nature is bereft of understanding, man understandeth. Nature is unaware of past events, but man is aware of them. Nature forecasteth not the future; man by his discerning power seeth that which is to come. Nature hath no consciousness of itself, man knoweth about all things.¹¹⁷

In other words, nature’s lack of a “rational soul” and its lack of spiritual capacities make it an unreliable guide for human morals. Lao Tzu, Thoreau and other ethical naturalists select the aspects of nature carefully to exclude the life and death struggles for survival and nature’s carelessness about human well-being. Interestingly enough, these ‘negative’ attributes of nature is precisely what other ethical naturalists—National Socialists in Germany—take as their models.

The most basic of these is that, despite protestations to the contrary, atheism is out of step with or contrary to human nature as encountered by historians, archeologists, sociologists and anthropologists. None of these academic disciplines have ever found a society at any level of development without beliefs about a spirit world distinct from the material world, or without belief in God or gods or spiritual beings of some kind. It is clear that societies and cultures operate on certain religious premises. The persistent and globally pervasive presence of religion would not be the case if cultures and societies did not find such beliefs congruent to human needs and, thereby, successful in ordering individual and collective life.

This conclusion is supported by the resurgence of religious belief—not necessarily church attendance—in Russia despite seventy years of programmatic education in “scientific atheism” throughout the Soviet school and university system.¹¹⁸ Developments in Eastern Europe are similar but not so in parts of Western Europe where explicit atheism reaches levels as high as 15% in the Czech Republic.¹¹⁹ Research seems to show that in the United States at least, the number of people who explicitly identify as atheists, i.e. deny the metaphysical existence of God, has moved from 2% to 4% by 2019.¹²⁰ In Canada, 8% identify as atheists.¹²¹ However, it should be noted that there is some fluidity in the concepts of atheism, agnosticism, and ‘spirituality.’ Beliefs are not always consist, as shown by the fact that some who claim to be atheists also believe in ‘spirituality’ or a ‘higher power’ that is not personal.

The pervasiveness of religion in societies and cultures does not require every individual to be a *bona fide* believer. However, it does mean that societies find the prevalence of and adherence to religious belief to be necessary for stability and well-being. For this to be viable—and societies find it so—religion must meet genuine needs of the vast majority of its members and of society itself. ‘Obedience’ is a case in point. Societies of all sizes from families to multicultural nation states require a certain amount of ‘obedience’—otherwise known as ‘co-operation,’ ‘team spirit,’ ‘unity,’ ‘self-discipline’ and ‘family loyalty.’ This need is

undermined by the atheist emphasis on personal freedom, i.e. its essentially atomistic and antinomian nature with its stress on the priority of personal choice in matters of morals (both private and public), and societal, cultural and legal norms. In other words, positive atheism encourages a feeling of rightful self-confidence and independence to the point where it can become anti-social and feels fully justified in being so. Such behaviors can range from eccentric to revolutionary or even criminal in nature.¹²² As a result of encouraging such feelings, societies face the challenge of overcoming fragmentation by viable ways of creating unity. In both individuals and societies, too much diversity is as destructive as too little.

The intrinsic antinomianism of positive atheism encourages hubris, an overwhelming and unchecked self-confidence, a seemingly limitless feeling of empowerment, a feeling that ‘anything goes’ without any inherent limits. ‘Limits are made to be broken’ expresses this feeling. The theist religions, and especially the Bahá’í Writings, recognize that limits on human behavior are necessary for the well-being of individuals and societies. For example, Bahá’u’lláh teaches that

To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.¹²³

These virtues require a willingness to practice self-discipline, i.e. self-limitation because of the human nature and the guidance given by God through His Manifestations. Overweening pride leads us to “disregard [] the complexity of human nature”¹²⁴ and think that we can ‘tamper with’ or engineer human nature physically, mentally and spiritually. This unlimited feeling of self-confidence is reinforced by atheism’s denial of a life after death. This leads to human “degradation”¹²⁵ because there is no need to take responsibility for our actions. In that way, the atheist pride in taking responsibility is severely undermined.

The intrinsic antinomianism of atheism helps us to understand one of Bahá'u'lláh's most enigmatic statements:

Know thou for a certainty that whoso disbelieveth in God is neither trustworthy nor truthful. This, indeed, is the truth, the undoubted truth. He that acteth treacherously towards God will, also, act treacherously towards his king. Nothing whatever can deter such a man from evil, nothing can hinder him from betraying his neighbor, nothing can induce him to walk uprightly.¹²⁶

This statement is a general principle that applies to more than Sultan Abdu'l-'Aziz's potential government appointees. Offensive as it may sound to some, Bahá'u'lláh raises a crucial point about ethics, namely that unless they have a divine foundation, morality, human ethical principles are merely subjective preferences. These may vary greatly among individuals. The antinomian nature of atheism, its rejection of socially or religiously based ethics, gives priority to individual choices, i.e., to subjective preferences which can easily change with time, social and political situations. In short, we cannot rely on them, or as Bahá'u'lláh states, they are "neither trustworthy nor truthful" because they have no fear of God's justice. Bahá'u'lláh's teaching is hard, but it is grounded in reason and common sense, and, therefore, is not a matter of irrational prejudice.

5. Atheism Part II

Atheism comes in various forms. One of the most common is *evidentiary atheism*¹²⁷ whose proponents argue that there is no evidence for God's existence. Usually, their arguments are based on science, i.e. the claim that there is no genuinely *scientific* evidence that a non-material, supernatural Being exists. For evidence to be considered genuinely scientific, it must be sensible, observable, measurable and quantifiable, verifiable by others, consistently replicable and allow testable predictions. Events and claims that cannot meet these standards are not recognized as sources of evidence. Because science can only use physical

tests for physical phenomena, the existence of a *spiritual* Being is not a 'testable hypothesis. Therefore, science can—at most—conclude that there is no evidence for a *material* God-like Being—something which all theistic religions concede as a matter of principle.

While the other theistic religions also reject evidentiary atheism—obviously, since they believe in non-material God—the Bahá'í Writings are unique in confronting this issue directly and explicitly. 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds a cautionary note to this debate by pointing out that sense knowledge is not always reliable; "One cannot ... rely implicitly upon it."¹²⁸ The senses cannot be automatically taken at face value. He uses simple examples—double suns, desert mirages, the apparent immobility of the earth—to make a telling point: all physical instruments whether natural or man-made have inherent limitations and, therefore, only provide one view of reality—which may not always be sufficient to our purpose. This mistake is actually subject of a witty but profound joke about a confused man looking for his lost car keys at night but limiting his search to the area around the streetlamp because he cannot see anywhere else. In short, the intrinsic limitations of the scientific method are *not sufficient* to find answers about God's existence. Dogmatically insisting that they are sufficient assumes that our knowledge of reality is enough to absolutely exclude the possibility of non-physical aspects of reality and other ways of knowing needed to recognize them. Instead of dogmatizing we must "investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found."¹²⁹

In our understanding, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes this point not to encourage us to ignore scientific findings, but rather, to open our minds to the possibility of 'other ways of knowing.' Since all forms of theism believe that there is more to reality than matter and material phenomena, such encouragement is logically appropriate; otherwise, we would be cutting ourselves off from a vital source of knowledge and wisdom. Among these are such practices as yoga which sensitizes one to non-material realities,¹³⁰ intuition, dreams, mystical experiences and visions. These 'other ways' may or may not always be suitable for discovering scientific

knowledge—as we currently understand it—but that does not mean that ‘other ways of knowing’ cannot also deliver valuable empirical knowledge. He says, for example, “In the world of sleep, too, one may have a dream which exactly comes true, while on another occasion one will have a dream which has absolutely no result.”¹³¹ Clearly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recognizes that ‘other ways of knowing’ can lead to empirical, i.e. experiential proof. Of course, he recognizes that these ways are not always reliable but he does not leap to the false logically conclusion that because other ways of knowing are not easy to evaluate, they are never evidence at all.

Logical atheism is based on the claim that there can be no logically valid ‘proofs’ of God’s existence.¹³² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, summarises the contrary theist belief, stating that “The utmost one can say is that [God’s] existence can be proved, but the conditions of [God’s] existence are unknown.”¹³³ Indeed, he re-affirms Aristotle’s First Mover argument on the grounds that without God, the First Mover, the “process of causation goes on, and to maintain that this process goes on indefinitely is manifestly absurd.”¹³⁴ He also re-affirms the cosmological arguments for God’s existence by stating that “throughout the world of existence the smallest created thing attests to the existence of a creator. For instance, this piece of bread attests that it has a maker.”¹³⁵ Obviously the accounts of creation in Jewish, Christian and Islamic scriptures agree.

Kant’s fourth antinomy is probably the strongest logical argument atheism has in denying a God as the Creator of reality. God, a “necessary being,”¹³⁶ cannot be invoked by theists because doing so requires a ‘leap’ from evidence from physical creation to the existence of a transcendental Creator, i.e. from physical, sensible evidence to a transcendent plane of reality.¹³⁷ The physical evidence—according to Kant and his atheist acolytes—cannot logically justify such a leap. In other words, *a posteriori* cosmological proofs based on inferring the Creator’s existence from physical creation are invalid. Many have regarded this argument as the logically decisive refutation of the existence of God and any non-physical reality.

Theism, by implication of God as Creator and the Bahá'í Writings explicitly reject this argument: “throughout the world of existence the smallest created thing attests to the existence of a creator. For instance, this piece of bread attests that it has a maker.”¹³⁸ In this simple but potent analogy, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shows why Kant’s argument fails on the basis of universal empirical experience. It assumes that things can bring themselves into existence—something which has never been observed or experienced. He gives no reason why we should suddenly, without supporting evidence and contrary to all human experience assume the opposite in regards to the creation of the universe. “Similarly the wise and reflecting soul will know of a certainty that this infinite universe with all its grandeur and perfect order could not have come to exist by itself.”¹³⁹ The reason is obvious: for a thing to bring itself into existence would logically require that it exists before it came into existence.

Other logical atheists assert that the theist concept of a non-material, omnipresent, omniscient, i.e. infallible, and omnipotent God is logically incoherent and, therefore, cannot even be explained without falling into disqualifying self-contradiction. For example, can an omnipotent God make a rock so heavy He cannot lift it? Can He will himself out of existence? Can He make square circles or make $1 + 1 = 3$? Positive atheists reject any attempts to define ‘omnipotence’ as anything but its (apparently) obvious meaning. Again, the Bahá'í Writings state explicitly what is left implicit in other theist scriptures. Precisely because God is omnipotent in the obvious sense, He can do anything, but just because God *could* do these things, does not mean He *would* choose to do them. Indeed, He “ ‘doeth as He pleaseth and ordaineth as He willeth’ ”¹⁴⁰ but the nature of His creation shows that He choice is for order and rationality:

This composition and arrangement arose, through the wisdom of God and His ancient might, from one natural order. Thus, as this composition and combination has been produced according to a natural order, with perfect soundness, following a consummate

wisdom, and subject to a universal law, it is clear that it is a divine creation and not an accidental composition and arrangement.¹⁴¹

God's emphasis on reason also supports this suggestion.¹⁴² That is also why "Religion must stand the analysis of reason."¹⁴³

Another type of atheism is *ethical atheism* which asserts that the notion of a God Who chooses to create this world would never allow His creations to suffer and/or perpetrate the horrors of natural disasters and the sickening variations of man-made evils.¹⁴⁴ Since there is no sign of such intervention—even with the extreme provocation of childhood suffering—the morally good God we thought created us does not exist and there is nothing to be achieved by pretending He does.

Most obviously, this argument is logically invalid. God's nature and God's existence are two completely different issues, one is metaphysical, the other is ethical. It is a category mistake to infer something does or does not exist metaphysically on the basis of ethical judgments. For example, just because a bully is nasty to me doesn't mean s/he does not exist.

In our understanding, ethical atheism seems to be rooted in feelings of discouragement and despair about human nature. Ethical atheists expect a high standard of behavior from humans and are disappointed that the infliction of cruelty is too easy for a significant portion of humanity. Such expectations may encourage hope that people can do better, but at best, it is likely to be a muted, desperate hope because pessimism about human nature is confirmed all too often.

Consciously or unconsciously, atheism inevitably encourages a deep disappointment about justice insofar as the metaphysical materialism cannot provide any provision for justice either in this world or the next. If there is to be any justice or, indeed, any morality, it must man-made and/or based on nature. Both are disappointing. There many conflicting opinions about what constitutes justice and how to enforce it. Nor

is there agreed upon way of overcoming these concepts. Consequently, some degree of disappointment and in human nature are likely.

Indeed, atheism also sets the condition for intellectual scepticism and feelings of bewilderment and turmoil vis-s-vis ethical issues in general. Without God as a basis for moral principles, only nature and human desires remain as a foundation for ethics. What makes nature unsuitable as a ground of ethics is illustrated in Sam Harris's "*The Moral Landscape: How Science can determine Human Values*."¹⁴⁵ As Hume's 'Guillotine' decisively shows, a *descriptive* statement about what actually happens in nature and/or what people actually do is not and, logically, *cannot be a prescription* of what we *should* do. Just because Jenny has always cooked supper—a factual description—cannot be used as a prescription that she *should* always cook dinner, i.e. that she is morally obligated to do so. No scientific experiment can establish that giving to the poor is morally good. Doing so (or not) is a physically describable fact with physically describable results that science is equipped to study. However, only human choice can decide this act is good. As Hume pointed out, facts and prescriptions are not logically related.

Only human choice can relate them, give positive value to helping them and negative value to hurting them. At this point four new problems arises: (1) what facts shall we select? (2) who selects them? (3) for what purpose? (4) why should we accept the authority of the one (or more) who chooses? Without God, there is no final arbitrator. These problems are precisely why Kant, who 'disproved' all proofs of God's existence,¹⁴⁶ re-introduces Him as a necessary "regulative principle"¹⁴⁷ for the foundation of any coherent ethical system. For example, if we choose to base our ethics on nature, which aspect will we choose? Social Darwinism, focussed on the harshly competitive aspects of nature and built a biologically based morality on the struggle for existence. Lao Tzu and his modern ecologically-minded successors focus on the co-operative, 'communitarian' aspects of nature. Even if we choose to recognize both aspects of nature, on whose authority shall this choice be imposed? In the Bahá'í Writings our choice is based on

God's authority, but atheism has no such recourse and thereby ultimately fosters confusion and inner turmoil that can easily lead to an indifferent relativism about competing moral systems.

Often correlated with this disappointment in human nature is a resentment against a 'God Who failed.' Because God does not meet our ethical expectations we feel He, does not or should not exist, or is not worth worshipping, or should be ignored. This resentment easily spills over onto those who—supposedly—belittle the pain of others by offering a theodicy, i.e. "a defense of the justice or goodness of God in the face of doubts or objections arising from the phenomenon of evil in the world."¹⁴⁸ The most famous of these accusations comes from Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, who "respectfully return[s] Him his ticket"¹⁴⁹ because he does not want to live in peace with unjust suffering. God's ability to compensate fully for the suffering of a child does not justify the occurrence of suffering in the first place. He chooses to be disturbed, outraged and completely defiant on this matter.

In response to Ivan's argument, the Bahá'í Writings explicitly state the usual theistic teaching that the

knowledge of a thing is not the cause of its occurrence; for the essential knowledge of God encompasses the realities of all things both before and after they come to exist, but it is not the cause of their existence.¹⁵⁰

In other words, because God does not exist in time, the concepts of past, present and future do not apply to Him, and therefore, the term 'foreknowledge' is accurate only from a human point of view. Consequently, claims that God's 'foreknowledge' causes an event are logically false since there no 'before' and 'after' with God. It is obvious that since God is timeless, He is in a totally different frame of reference so the 'foreknowledge is causation' argument is logically invalid. The 'problem'

itself is a chimera. A human analogy for this situation is a woman on a mountaintop observing a man walking down a forest road in the valley below. Because she is in a different frame of reference, i.e. her altitude, she can foresee all the possible routes the man may take and more explicitly, she can foresee with absolute certainty that if he continues as he has been going so far, he will be blocked by a raging river. Nevertheless, her ability to foresee does not cause the hiker's choices.

Unlike the Bahá'í Faith and the other theisms, Ivan Karamazov fails to realize that there is no necessary connection between belief in God's healing powers and human callousness to suffering. Intellectual understanding that God's mercy will compensate unjust suffering does not authorize a lack of compassion towards the unfortunate victims of man-made and/or natural afflictions. Indeed, in my understanding, extreme discomfort and compassionate sympathy with the suffering of others is *necessary* to prevent us from becoming blunt and coarsened to their pain. If we are not disturbed by human misery and distress, individual and societal spiritual progress will be held back. The Bahá'í Writings summarise in specific detail, the theist teachings on this issue:

Be ye a refuge to the fearful; bring ye rest and peace to the disturbed; make ye a provision for the destitute; be a treasury of riches for the poor; be a healing medicine for those who suffer pain; be ye doctor and nurse to the ailing; promote ye friendship, and honour, and conciliation, and devotion to God, in this world of non-existence.¹⁵¹

These words remind us of our obligation to act for the good of others just as God acted for our good by bestowing the gift of 'being' on us. Since God expects us to ease the suffering of others, He is unlikely to have subverted the good of being by devising a system of creation that imposes needless and pointless suffering. God tells us "I loved thy creation, hence I created thee."¹⁵² From a theist perspective, a God Who bestows the good of 'being' upon us, will enable us to transcend unjust suffering as we progress through the spiritual planes of being after we die.

It should also be noted that irremediable anxiety and mistrust about human nature and humanity's future play a significant role in ethical atheism. The cause is clear: there is no intrinsic reliable basis for hope in human nature and the alleviation of suffering. Our subjective feelings about right and wrong are the only foundation we have—and the history of the 20th C alone shows how extremely fluid these can be especially when ideologies and politics are involved.

The globally influential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argues that even if God exists, His existence is unworthy of recognition and/or worship. He advocates a "*postulatory atheism*."¹⁵³ Whether or not God actually exists is not relevant to this view which is more epistemological than metaphysical in nature. For Sartre Even the idea of God's existence is an offense to human freedom, value and dignity because it surrenders human free will, dignity, and self-confidence to a Being—or an idea—that has no legitimate authority over us. Why should we accept the human nature God has supposedly given us? Did He consult with us about what we wanted? What gives Him the right to decide what is good or evil? "Postulatory atheism" insists on the primacy of individual human choice especially in ethical matters as long as people are prepared to "live in good faith," i.e. accept responsibility for their own actions.

Postulatory atheism often imagines God a tyrant, as an omniscient, a universal 'stalker' of our thoughts, feelings and actions. Not only does He arbitrarily impose the human essence on us, but His very existence makes privacy—a necessary aspect of personal integrity—impossible. Under His watchful eye—like the ubiquitous telescreens in Orwell's *1984*—even our most intimate relationships are exposed to the view of this cosmic 'peeping Tom.' The situation is no different with omnipresence and omnipotence. Here too, in atheist thinking, we do not even own ourselves. We are imprisoned in our own lives, and, in the teaching of immortality, even death is not an escape. We have to answer for our actions in what amounts to a kangaroo court—since God already knows all our answers and knows His judgment. This too degrades us, turning us into play things of an arbitrary super-power.

In our understanding, the defining emotion of postulatory atheism is defiance, a rebelliousness and emphatic rejection of any authority but the individual will. It encourages a fierce sense of personal independence and is, thereby, an ethical version of the contract theory of government: rules must be based on the agreement of free individuals and cannot legitimately imposed without personal consent. This principle applies to God above all. Therefore, in postulatory atheism, we withdraw our consent and live on the basis of our personal will. Almost inevitably correlated with this defiant attitude is a profound sense of isolation and loneliness. Each of us is alone and totally responsible for our own actions—if we live in “good faith” with ourselves, i.e. if we don’t lie to ourselves about having no other choices and the nature of what we have done. For example, a thief should be honest, recognizing that he could have become a policeman and is now someone who is ‘happy’ while choosing to steal.

From a Bahá’í perspective, attractive in literary and philosophical works as it might be, the intrinsically atomistic and antinomian nature of “postulatory atheism” cannot meet the needs of individuals and societies for unity and a unifying power. Without unity, no society of any kind can exist.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the primary mission of God’s Manifestations is to bring unity to mankind. A society in which individuals develop their personal ethical standards and are only subject to restrictions to which they agree would not survive long. Imagine such a principle applied to vehicle traffic or airlines! Such notions may be fine sounding ideals but they lead to disaster if applied. More directly, such notions are immature. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out, “There is indeed an abundance of lofty ideals and sentiments that cannot be put into effect. Therefore we must confine ourselves to that which is practicable.”¹⁵⁵

It is clear... that opinions and perceptions vary, and that this divergence of thoughts, opinions, understandings, and sentiments among individuals is an essential requirement... We stand therefore in need of a universal power which can prevail over the thoughts, opinions, and sentiments of all, which can annul these

divisions and bring all souls under the sway of the principle of the oneness of humanity. And it is clear and evident that the greatest power in the human world is the love of God.¹⁵⁶

Finally, there is *psychological atheism* which regards religion as a symptom of childish fears of being alone in the universe or an irrational fear of the inevitability of death. Theism portrays God as a strong Father figure Who can protect us from what we fear most—death. Human maturity requires that we overcome both of these futile fears because we cannot change our cosmic isolation or biological death. These views are most famously promulgated by Sigmund Freud in *The Future of an Illusion*.

Whether belief in God is an illusion or not, anthropology along with the resurgence of theism in former Communist states relegate Freud's theory to the sidelines for one reason: intellectual arguments have little or no effect on genuine needs. Indeed, that fact that religion is a ubiquitous feature of human existence strongly suggests that it is a genuine need for human well-being. Outgrowing it may be an ideal but as mentioned above, given the human need for religion, there is no prospect of that happening.

6. Agnosticism

Agnosticism is “the view that human reason is incapable of providing sufficient rational grounds to justify the belief that God exists or the belief that God does not exist.”¹⁵⁷ ‘Soft’ or ‘weak’ agnosticism is a suspension of judgment on the issue of God's existence and is open, in theory at least, to new evidence if that should become available. In contrast, ‘hard’ or ‘strong’ agnosticism asserts that the inherent limitations of the human mind make it absolutely impossible to prove or disprove God's existence. It regards the issue as permanently settled. There can be no new evidence because humanity's epistemological capacities cannot change and its limits have been firmly established by the scientific method.

We shall examine the different types of agnosticism and their intellectual and affective consequences in turn.

First appearances to the contrary, soft agnosticism is aptly named because it potentially overlaps with some kinds of theism. The rejection of logical or empirical arguments for the existence of God does not necessarily preclude belief gained by other ways of knowing such as intuition or experiences of the transcendent aspect of reality through various spiritual practices. Theism and most explicitly, the Bahá'í Writings recognize the partial truth of soft agnosticism, namely, the possibility of gaining decisive knowledge in various ways. The fact that such knowledge is not regarded as 'scientific' does not mean that it is not true knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides rational proofs of immortality and then adds,

But if the human spirit be rejoiced and attracted to the Kingdom, if the *inner eye* be opened and the spiritual ear attuned, and if *spiritual feelings* come to predominate, the immortality of the spirit will be seen as clearly as the sun¹⁵⁸

In short, soft agnosticism may be described as 'open.' Unlike hard agnosticism, soft agnosticism is not necessarily dependent on a materialist metaphysic which rejects all 'other ways' of knowing. We shall explore this in greater detail below when dealing with fideistic agnosticism.

However, until such non-scientific evidence is recognized and admitted, it seems clear that soft agnosticism, like hard agnosticism, leaves its advocates in the position of Buridan's Donkey.¹⁵⁹ The poor beast was suffering severe starvation and thirst and died because it could not decide which it should do first—eat some fresh hay or drink some fresh water. In other words, both soft and hard agnostics live in a perpetual state of uncertainty about the basic 'life issues' that virtually all humans ask in one way or another. Are there non-material

realities? Am I immortal? Are there afterlife consequences? What can we know for sure? How did this universe come into being? What do mean by right and wrong? ¹⁶⁰ The answers to all such 'life questions' are derived from our conscious or unconscious metaphysical assumptions about God's existence or non-existence. This is because the first question in metaphysics concerns the existence or non-existence of a transcendental reality. Until this question is answered decisively—by whatever means—the answers to most other important 'life questions' tend to be confused and haphazard, i.e. self-contradictory, unclear and vague, and not consistently held. We confuse and disappoint ourselves because answering the 'life questions' that inevitably come our way become more difficult.

Both hard and soft agnosticism bring with it still more uncertainty and anxiety about social and cultural issues. If an individual or a society is not sure about God's existence, it becomes extremely difficult to obtain public agreement on issues of morality; criminal punishment; the nature and role of government; sexual conduct; the limits of art; and fair business practices. This is because the existence or non-existence of God decides the horizon of our choices. Are we thinking in terms of the physical world only or do we have to consider God's guidance and the after-life? Caught between these two possibilities leaves us in a state of perpetual inner conflict which fragment both agnostic individuals and societies.

One example of this is the debate about how best to treat alcohol and drug addiction. Should religion and faith have a role in publicly funded programs even though they can be very effective.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, such conflicts encourage needless divisions in society and can even generate a climate of scepticism and cynicism that undermines the basic cohesion societies need to function effectively. Individuals conflicted in this way may, of course, choose answers as an act of will, i.e. force themselves to believe certain ideas or simply side with the majority. However, doing so makes it difficult to assert our answers with any conviction because of the constant presence of caveats, doubts and anxieties. Only

two choices remain—apathetic agnosticism, an emotional “I don’t care” response or the defiant atheism of Sartre.

The first sub-type of agnosticism is apatheic agnosticism’ which finds the issue of God’s existence or non-existence as irrelevant to human life and pays it no further heed. Since we don’t or can’t know the answer, why bother about it? We might describe this position as theoretical in concept but atheistic in practice. It is not necessarily a consequence of a failure to understand the depth and importance of the issue. Rather, its most likely cause is intellectual and emotional frustration with the inability to decisively resolve the issue of God’s existence. Its basic flaw is that ignoring the issues does not make them go away nor does it prevent society’s debates about them leave individuals unaffected.

From a Bahá’í (and theistic) perspective, apatheism is a dangerous strategy. As Kant realized in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, without God—even if only as a regulative principle—our ethical views will be purely subjective and, therefore easily changeable according to our situation and/or convenience. As a result, it becomes increasingly easy to slacken our moral standards and behavior in favor of our lower animal nature.

To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.¹⁶²

This is not to say this will necessarily happen to everyone—remnants of religious influence still influence society—but the inner drift towards lower, more convenient or socially acceptable standards is clearly evident in increasingly secular and anti-religious societies. The growing use of drugs that weaken human consciousness and willpower; the ever more obvious sexualization of children, especially girls; and the exponential increase of glorified violence in popular films are all signs of this downward trend towards animal standards.

Another subtype of agnosticism may be called 'theistic' or even 'fideistic' agnosticism which argues that science and reason cannot prove God's existence but believe in Him anyway. The epistemological basis for doing so is the conviction that the extent of mankind's thought is not necessarily the extent of reality itself. Such agnostics agree with Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."¹⁶³ They are sceptics vis-s-vis the claims of strict empiricism because the idea of using physical evidence to prove or disprove a spiritual God is *ipso facto* logically ridiculous. They may also rely on other ways of knowing that are not irrational but trans-rational such as intuitions, dreams, 'mystical' experiences or practices like yoga which are designed to sensitize us to transcendent realities. In some cases, fideistic agnosticism is an example of faith as an act of will.

In our understanding, the Bahá'í Writings do not support fideism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings demonstrate that for the optimum progress in individual and societal spiritual evolution both reason and our spiritual faculties are necessary. God's existence can be logically proven and he provides various examples of such proofs. He states that "the existence of the Divine Being hath been established by *logical* proofs."¹⁶⁴ In addition to logical arguments, he also uses two cosmological proofs. He uses the 'first mover' argument to show that a non-contingent being is necessary to explain motion since an infinite regress of movers is "absurd."¹⁶⁵ He also employs cosmological argument that a contingent creation requires a non-contingent Creator. "[T]hroughout the world of existence the smallest created thing attests to the existence of a creator. For instance, this piece of bread attests that it has a maker."¹⁶⁶ From this we may conclude that from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's perspective, the existence of God is not legitimately a merely subjective matter. In Bahá'u'lláh's new revelation, all humans are expected to use their free will and spiritual capacities to recognize God's existence. This is illustrated by Bahá'u'lláh's statement that we cannot blame our disbelief in God on others because "the faith of no man can be conditioned by anyone except himself."¹⁶⁷ Finally, as

noted above, he recognizes that direct insight can show that God exists. Speaking of immortality, he states,

But if the human spirit be rejoiced and attracted to the Kingdom, if the *inner eye* be opened and the spiritual ear attuned, and if *spiritual feelings* come to predominate, the immortality of the spirit will be seen as clearly as the sun¹⁶⁸

A third subtype of agnosticism is Pascalian agnosticism which admits that neither reason nor evidence can prove God's existence but asks us to gamble that God exists. A bet is not knowledge. We bet that God exists and act accordingly. If we are right, we will 'go to heaven' because we have lived a morally good life. If we are wrong, nothing is lost because in the grave will not be aware of the fact—and we still leave the legacy of a good life behind us. This view is sometimes derided as hypocritical but that criticism is weak. Pascal's argument honestly recognizes our predicament vis-s-vis God's existence. It then advises a prudential response which does not contradict its underlying premise—namely that we do not know whether or not God exists. Nor is it hypocritical to want to attain a good afterlife. No one except, perhaps, Sartre and his followers in 'defiant atheism' would want to do the opposite.

From our perspective, the Bahá'í Writings present no objection to Pascalian agnosticism at least as a first step to recognizing the existence of God. Betting on God's existence shows recognition of the existential importance of God and our personal destiny in the transcendental planes of being. On this basis we can see the possibilities of further spiritual growth.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we have surveyed some of the intellectual and affective consequences of theism, atheism and agnosticism and how these consequences influence one another in the commitment to one of these

beliefs. Together they constitute our world-view, i.e. the paradigm by which we interpret reality and on which we consciously or unconsciously base our attitudes and actions. Of course, we do not expect that every individual represents these viewpoints in a perfectly consistent way and so may deviate somewhat from the logically based descriptions we have attempted to outline. The absolute denial of God's existence, for example, logically requires us to abandon the idea of divine justice or compensation in the Abhá Kingdom. This, in turn has inescapable consequences for our feelings about the world and our actions. However, inconsistency is still possible; a person may claim to be an atheist yet still believe (or hope) that 'somehow' justice will be done. Bahá'í teachers should follow up this opportunity for further exploration.

Our exploration has also outlined what the Bahá'í Writings teach about the intellectual and affective issues arising from a commitment to theism, atheism and agnosticism. In regards to the question of God's existence or not existence the Bahá'í Writings agree with Judaism, Christianity and Islam about a single personal Creator but have an advantage over preceding revelations insofar as it is a later dispensation. It is specifically intended for our time and deals with most of these issues explicitly. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

The superiority of the present in relation to the past consists in this, that the present can take over and adopt as a model many things which have been tried and tested and the great benefits of which have been demonstrated in the past, and that it can make its own new discoveries and by these augment its valuable inheritance.¹⁶⁹

The ultimate aim of this paper is to show, and help Bahá'í teachers to show that ideas have consequences. Vis-à-vis these three main answers to the question of God's existence, our choice is not a matter of indifference because any one of these will shape our lives.

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NOTES

- 1 Shoghi Effendi, From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 19, 1945 in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 542, # 1842; emphasis added.
- 2 The Cambridge English Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cynicism>
- 3 This is the case because the times and conditions of the earlier revelations did not require guidance on these issues.
- 4 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 113.
- 5 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 9.
- 6 H.A. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 13.
- 7 H.P. Rickman, “Wilhelm Dilthey” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, p. 404.
- 8 James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, p 16.
- 9 Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*.
- 10 The Bahá’í Writings explicitly discourage this: “The first is the independent investigation of truth; for blind imitation of the past will stunt the mind.” *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 248.
- 11 Katherine Rose Hanley and Donald J. Monan SJ, *A Prelude to Metaphysics*, p. 23.
- 12 J. Bohman, “Verstehen” in Robert Audi, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 954.
- 13 Wilhelm Dilthey, “Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik” (1900) <http://www.schmidt.hist.unibe.ch/semester/ws0102/GeschichtstheorieSozialgeschichte/Dilthey.htm>
- 14 The universality of human nature taught by the theist religions is a direct challenge to one of the most dangerous trends in modern politics—identity politics which tends to place insurmountable barriers between different groups and subsumes every individual in the characteristics of his/her group. Nazism (German vs Jew), Communism (bourgeois vs proletariat or peasant), Feminism (women vs men) and Liberalism vs illiberalism exemplify the danger of identity politics.
- 15 A. H. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 12.
- 16 A. H. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 12.

- 17 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 248.
- 18 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, VI, p. 191 in Hodges, Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction, p. 15.
- 19 Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 10
- 20 Terence, in the play "Punishing Himself."
- 21 Linda, Trinkaus Zogzebski, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 22.
- 22 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 8.
- 23 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.
- 24 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.
- 25 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.
- Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.
- Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 28.
- 26 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 32.
- 27 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 94.
- 28 John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Chp. 1: In the Similitude of a Dream
- 29 *The Universal House of Justice in Wellsprings of Guidance*, p. 79—80.
- 30 Shoghi Effendi, Letter written on His behalf, March 19, 1945 in *Lights of Guidance*, # 1842, p. 542.
- 31 Shoghi Effendi, Letter # 55, September 5, 1931 in *Extracts from the USBN*, p. 6.
- 32 Agatha Christie, *Murder at the Vicarage*, p.
- 33 Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 108.
- 34 Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah, 2:30. Yusuf Ali translation.
- 35 Genesis, 1:27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 279.
- 36 Edward Feser, *Aristotle's Revenge*, p. 3.
- 37 In Bahá'í metaphysics of emanation, creation 'flows out from' God's "Primal Will" (SAQ, 53: 5; p. 235). Closest to God are the spiritual levels of reality and the lower, less spiritual i.e. material levels are further away. There is sameness i.e. both parts originate with the Primal Will but there is also difference. See *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 140.
- 38 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 74: 2 p. 303.
- 39 KJV, John 3: 6

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- 40 Rachel Elinor, "Jewish Spirituality and The Soul," in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, edited by Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-spirituality-and-the-soul/>
- 41 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 16: 3, p. 93—94. They can be known but not by the physical senses.
- 42 One dimensional, i.e. explaining reality in terms of strict materialism or strict idealism.
- 43 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*,
- 44 *The Baha'i "Noonday Prayer."*
- 45 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 12.
- 46 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 12.
- 47 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 12—13.
- 48 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.
- 49 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 13.
- 50 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 17.
- 51 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 17.
- 52 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 20—21.
- 53 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.
- 54 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 76.
- 55 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.
- 56 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 55: 4; p. 241.
- 57 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 50.
- 58 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 11. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes intuition as the "second sort of knowledge, which is the knowledge of being, is intuitive it is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself." It is not knowledge gained by inferential, discursive reasoning—although intuitions may lead to ideas developed by reason and inference. In other words, intuition allows immediate perception of "intelligible realities which have no outward existence" and do not rely on physical sensation or inferential reasoning for support.
- 59 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 74: 2 p. 303.
- 60 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CIX, p. 214.
- 61 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 31.
- 62 A. A. H. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 12.

- 63 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 316.
- 64 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 7.
- 65 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 22.
- 66 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 175.
- 67 Blaise Pascal pointed out that although the universe can easily kill us, our consciousness of this fact, our being a thinking reed” makes us greater than material creation. *Pensées* # 347.
- 68 Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, translated by F.A. Storr. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/31/31-h/31-h.htm#linkcolonus>
- 69 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 10.
- 70 Shoghi Effendi, From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 26, 1932 in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 479.
- 71 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 29
- 72 The correspondence theory of truth is embedded in this statement which also includes the obligation to accept the truths we find. We must “discover the truth” and “accept” it and not try to interpret it according to our individual and/or collective wishes.
- 73 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 291; emphasis added.
- 74 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CXIV, p. 236.
- 75 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, III, p. 5.
- 76 This is not an example of the fallacy of composition which does not apply to existentially constitutive parts. We cannot say that the whole plant continues to exist even though we have destroyed all of its cells and that my house continues to exist after the wreckers have hauled all its parts away.
- 77 The principle of sufficient reason (PSR) which with the law of non-contradiction is the basis of rational thought—including science—states that causes and effects must be directly or indirectly commensurate. Both principles are essential to the philosophical arguments presented in the Bahá'í Writings. See Ian Kluge, “Reason and the Bahá'í Writings,” in *Lights of Irfan*, 14 (2013).
- 78 It should be noted that the most obvious attribute that God and His creation share is the fact of being, i.e. existence, which God bestows on the phenomenal world. Given the dependence of our being with God's, it is clear that the similarity is strictly analogical and not literal. ‘Being’ is not univocal. Phenomenal being is relative whereas God's being is absolute.

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- 79 'Personhood' is used here in the simple sense of possessing unique individual traits based on consciousness, "the rational soul," will and intention, and purpose.
- 80 Shoghi Effendi "from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 21, 193" in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 477.
- 81 Machines may be programmed to imitate the actions we associate with these attributes but an imitation of an action is not a consciously self-motivated action. The difference between an actor and a machine is that the actor consciously knows s/he is imitating action and the machine does not. Recognition of this difference is the key to understanding novels and movies (2001: *A Space Odyssey*) in which robots, computers or toys become self-motivated—usually vicious—'persons.'
- 82 It is understood, of course, that God has the attributes of personhood in a super-eminent sense and that mankind only has these attributes analogically. Similarly machine imitations of human behavior are, at best, analogs and not the original, just as human consciousness is an analog of the divine super-eminent attribute of consciousness.
- 83 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- 84 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 60: 5; p. 259. "For absolute nothingness cannot find existence, as it has not the capacity of existence." Hence the need for God to provide a sufficient reason for the existence of the phenomenal world. Russell's view that the universe has 'just always existed' assumes that which needs to be explained.
- 85 The Third Reich, the Soviet Union and institutions like slavery are societal moral disasters that violate(d) the most fundamental teachings of all Manifestations in a programmatic, i.e. conscious and deliberate way.
- 86 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, volume 1, p. 176.
- 87 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, # 4.
- 88 Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 48.
- 89 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 47: 5; p. 209.
- 90 *The Quran*, Yusuf Ali translation, Surah 2: 34.
- 91 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196; emphasis added.
- 92 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196. The "scale of being" refers to the increasing inclusive hierarchy: minerals, plants, animals, humans. Each level contains and surpasses the powers of the previous level.
- 93 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 184; emphasis added.

- 94 'Abdu'l-Bahá', Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá', p. 132; emphasis added.
- 95 Communism, Facism, and Nazism had goal of creating 'new' men and women. Postmodernism denies the reality of human nature and, thereby, opens the way for 'engineering' souls to suit man-made philosophical and/or ideological criteria. See Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Baha'i Writings" in Lights of Irfán, Volume 9, 2008.
- 96 'Abdu'l-Bahá,' Paris Talks, p. 73.
- 97 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 66: 2; 276.
- 98 Shoghi Effendi points out that "physical ailments, no matter how severe, cannot bring any change in the inherent condition of the soul." # 1061 The Compilation of Compilations, Volume 1, p. 477.
- 99 Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214.
- 100 Need there be any other notion of 'hell' than that? External, physical pain may be relatively enduring compared to the pain the soul can inflict on itself. Maybe that's what those devils symbolize in the paintings of hell—the soul tormenting itself in the fires of insight into and regret for its deeds. Moreover, the Writings reflect basic human psychology very realistically: the need for carrots and sticks in an effective re-enforcement program to change behavior and thinking.
- 101 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 88.
- 102 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to August Forel, p. 10.
- 103 Such a fundamental difference between human and animal is a difference in kind, i.e. a difference that cannot be reduced to a common factor in the way ice, steam and water can all be reduced to water.
- 104 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 37.
- 105 Dawkins, The God Delusion, p. 232.
- 106 Christopher Hitchens, god Is Not Great, p. 217.
- 107 Sam Harris, The End of Faith, p. 15.
- 108 Austin Cline, "Theism and Anti-Theism: What's the Difference?" in Other Religions, Atheism and Agnosticism, <https://www.learnreligions.com/atheism-and-anti-theism-248322>
- 109 See Hitchen's god Is Not Great, Dawkins' The God Delusion and Harris's The End of Faith for examples of their contempt for believers.

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- 110 Kant rejects all logical proofs of God in *The Critique of Pure Reason* but admits the idea of God is a 'practical necessity' for the foundation of a coherent ethical systems in *The Critique of Practical Reason*.
 - 111 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 248.
 - 112 Karl Marx, "Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right,'" <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>
 - 113 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 47: 5; p. 209.
 - 114 In the author's view, the materialist concept of evolution requires a long serendipitous sequence of coincidences no less miraculous then a virgin birth, a Red Sea crossing or the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mohammed.
 - 115 The fact that people do not always live up to their theist beliefs does not disprove the logical inference from being a creation of God to intrinsic human dignity.
 - 116 Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 48.
 - 117 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 12.
 - 118 "Russians Return to Religion But not To Church," Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church/> New research in 2018 supports the PEW numbers: Gene Zubovich, in *Religion and Politics*, "Russia's Journey from Orthodoxy to Atheism and Back Again," October 16, 2018, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/10/16/russias-journey-from-orthodoxy-to-atheism-and-back-again/> See also Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta, *Religion and Modernity: An International Comparison*, Chapter 7; <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198801665.001.0001/oso-9780198801665-chapter-11>
 - 119 Michael Lipka, "10 Facts About Atheists," PEW Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/06/10-facts-about-atheists/>
 - 120 Michael Lipka, "10 Facts About Atheists," PEW Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/06/10-facts-about-atheists/>
 - 121 Michael Lipka, "5 Facts about religion in Canada," PEW Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/01/5-facts-about-religion-in-canada/>
 - 122 See Sartre's Saint Genet for an example of admiring the 'independence' of a career criminal. The entire culture of presenting criminals in a heroic light is a consequence of antinomian attitudes.
 - 123 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CIX, p. 214.
 - 124 Baha'i World, Volume 4, p. 352.

- 125 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 180.
- 126 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CXIV, p. 232.
- 127 Richard Dawkins, Richard Stenger, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris are among the best known.
- 128 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 83: 2; p. 343.
- 129 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 30.
- 130 The source is my daughter Emily who is a certified yoga instructor and has heard this from many students.
- 131 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 71: 8; p. 293.
- 132 Among the traditional proofs of God's existence are Aristotle's "First Mover" argument; the "five ways of Aquinas," Avicenna's *kalam* argument and its modern revival by William Lane Craig; Anselm's "ontological argument and its modern revival by Kurt Goedel; William Hatcher's "relational proof."
- 133 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 54.
- 134 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18. He seems to have accepted Aristotle's distinction between theoretical and actual infinities. We can think of an infinite series of numbers without contradiction, but an actual line of physical things or events leads to paradoxes that show such a real series is impossible. See Hilbert's Hotel.
- 135 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2: 6; p. 6.
- 136 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen E. Wood, p. 490.
- 137 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen E. Wood, p. 492.
- 138 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2: 6; p. 6.
- 139 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 19.
- 140 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 183.
- 141 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 47: 5; p. 208—209.
- 142 See Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings" in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 14, 2013.
- 143 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 175.
- 144 Man-made atrocities such as the Holocaust, the Holodomor, the Gulag archipelago or the Laogai; natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina or the increasing desertification of Sub-Saharan Africa.

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- 145 Ian Kluge, "Review of Udo Schaefer, Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture," in *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* vol. 25, no. 1-2 (2015).
 - 146 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, "The Antinomy of Pure Reason." p. 490.
 - 147 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Part II, I, V, "The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason," p. 100.
 - 148 Roderick M. Chisholm, "Theodicy," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 911.
 - 149 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. 5, Ch. 4, https://www.google.com/search?q=ivan+karamazov&rlz=1C1DIMA_enCA705CA705&oq=ivan+karamazov&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5j46j0.5498j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8
 - 150 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 35; 4, p. 156—157.
 - 151 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 72.
 - 152 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, # 4.
 - 153 James Collins, *The Existentialists*, p. 40.
 - 154 The current over-emphasis on diversity without adequate and clear considerations given to unity is one of the causes of today's fragmenting societies as seen in the rise of 'identity politics.'
 - 155 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 77: 4; p. 310.
 - 156 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 84: 4; 347.
 - 157 William Rowe, "Agnosticism," in *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p.17.
 - 158 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 60: 7; p. 260.
 - 159 "Buridan's Ass" in Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buridan%27s_ass This illustration goes as far back as Aristotle who described the frustration of a man who was equally hungry and thirsty; by Jean Buridan whose example we use in this essay; and Al-Ghazali's example of a man trapped between two bundles of equally delicious dates.
 - 160 Over thirty years of high school teaching (more than 6,600 students) have shown me that with rare exceptions, teenagers are very interested in these topics. Harnessing their interest and energies was foundation of my teaching career. I would describe virtually all teens as 'natural born philosophers' and that, as Mortimer Adler's says, "Philosophy is everybody's business." With P4K methods (Philosophy for Kids) the philosophic nature of even primary students can be harnessed.

- 161 See the work of Bahá'í psychiatrist and professor emeritus of psychiatry at McGill University, Dr. Abdul Missagh Ghadirian: In Search of Nirvana; "Alcohol and Drug Abuse: A Psychosocial and Spiritual Approach to Prevention."
- 162 Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214; emphasis added.
- 163 William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act. 1, Sc. 5.
- 164 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 46.
- 165 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 82: 5; p. 336.
- 166 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 2: 6; p. 6.
- 167 Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXV, p. 143.
- 168 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 60: 7; p. 260.
- 169 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 113.

The Invocation “Is There Any Remover of Difficulties Save God...”

Muhammad Afnan

trans. Adib Masumian

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There is an ancient precedent for invocations in the divine religions. In the Bahá’í Faith, too, numerous invocations have been revealed for various occasions, among them “Is there any Remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants, and all abide by His bidding!” Although this invocation has yet to be found in the available manuscripts of the Báb’s Writings, there are references to it in historical texts, and it is on the basis of the credibility of these references that it has been translated and included in the compilation *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

The information we have at our disposal concerning this invocation comes from the letters of Mírzá Áqá Ján, who was among the first to recognize the Promised One of the Bayán in Baghdád (*God Passes By*, p. 119). The gist of the matter, as Mírzá Áqá Ján has described it, indicates that the aforementioned invocation was commonly known to the first Bábís in Baghdád, including Bahá’u’lláh, Who emphatically instructed that it be repeatedly recited by day and by night—and in reality, this practice should be regarded as a reminder to the faithful, especially if we bear in mind that Bahá’u’lláh enjoined it before He withdrew to the Kurdish mountains of Sulaymáníyyih, and that He had not yet written or otherwise disclosed anything whatsoever about His blessed Cause at the time. In those days, the authority of Mírzá Yahyá was

unquestioned, and the strengthening support which Bahá'u'lláh lent him was given unconditionally. Yet it was at that very time that, due to various reasons, the Bábís were plundering the wealth and stealing the possessions of pilgrims to the holy *Shí'ih* shrines in 'Iráqand the residents of their cities. It can be inferred from Bahá'u'lláh's remarks to Mírzá Áqá Ján that He disapproved of the behavior of the Bábís, and reminded them that divine relief was contingent on the advent of the Promised One of the Bayán. It is not necessary to explain that, according to *Shí'ih* belief and the promises of the holy Imáms, the relief of the family of the Prophet Muḥammad is none other than the appearance of the Qá'im, and it is for this reason that the mention of such relief and the supplication that it be granted are especially relevant to entreaties for the Promised Advent to occur.

With this preliminary context in mind, we might consider that, if there had not been any precedent for this invocation, Bahá'u'lláh—Who in spite of all His renown and centrality among the Bábís was not regarded by them in those days as a possessor of authority or a Manifestation of God—would not have placed such great emphasis on it. It is probably the case that the revelation of a new invocation or prayer [from Bahá'u'lláh] would likewise not have been accepted or implemented, and consequently Bahá'u'lláh would have naturally refrained from so insistently and emphatically instructing that it be adopted.

At any rate, this invocation has gained currency in the Cause of God, and with it the Bahá'ís derive assistance and spirituality in all kinds of situations.

The Potent God and the Attracting God: Metaphysics and its Social Consequences

Moojan Momen

Abstract

This paper examines two conceptual frameworks that have been used in relation to God. The orthodox and normative view of God in the religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism is based on the concept of God derived by theologians such as St Thomas Aquinas from Aristotle's notion of the Unmoved Mover as the first cause of all subsequent chains of cause and effect. This then produces the image of God as the Creator of the world and the unseen force that controls and directs the events that happen in the world (the Potent God). This image of God as the Omnipotent King was very attractive to medieval rulers who could then point to the structure of the spiritual world (with an Omnipotent Ruler at its head) as justifying a similar social structure on earth with themselves as the symbol and image of the Divine ruler. There is however an alternative view of God that may be the view that Aristotle originally intended by his Unmoved Mover and which creates an entirely different view of God. This conceptual framework sees God as the cause of all that occurs but in the sense that God is the ultimate aim or goal of all events—that God is attracting all of Creation towards Him/It. Thus God acts on the universe not through a rigid cascade of cause and effect but rather through the attraction of love (the Attracting God). This view of God has a profound consequences not just in theology but also in our structure of thought and our social structure. It dissolves the ground from under questions that have caused many to turn away from God (for example, why an omnipotent God would allow the Holocaust to occur) and leads to social interactions that are more cooperative and collaborative rather than coercive and hierarchical. This paper examines the evidence that

this second view of God (the Attracting God) is given priority over the first view (the Potent God) in the Baha'i scriptures.

Religion in the West has derived its conceptual universe, its structure of Reality, from a certain view of God. This view was constructed by Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians and philosophers based on a variety of texts from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Qur'an. However the philosophical foundations of this view go back to the concept of the "Prime Mover" or "Unmoved Mover" of Aristotle, which he developed in Book 12 of his *Metaphysics*.

There is, then, something which is always moved with an unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle; and this is plain not in theory only but in fact. Therefore the first heaven must be eternal. There is therefore also something which moves it. And since that which moves and is moved is intermediate, there is something which moves without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality.¹

As developed in Western philosophy (especially St Thomas Aquinas), this concept of the Unmoved Mover or the Prime Mover became equivalent to the concept of God as the Prime Cause of every motion, every effect, every event that occurs in our world. The problem of how to reconcile Aristotle's idea that motion (causation) has existed for all time and the idea that the Prime Mover initiated motion was resolved by St Thomas Aquinas' assertion that God's creation of the universe occurs outside time; it does not imply that the universe had a beginning.

It is necessary, however, to examine Aristotle's concept of causation further. Aristotle defined four types of causation for everything that occurs. The material cause of a chair is the wood out of which it is made. The formal cause is the design or structure of the chair that existed in the mind of the carpenter before beginning to work on the creation of the chair. The efficient cause is that which acts on the wood in order to create the table: the carpenter, the saw and the plane. The final cause is the purpose for which the chair was built: for sitting upon and resting.

In Western philosophy, the concept of causation that has been applied to the Prime Mover has tended to be that of being the efficient cause of all that occurs in the world. In other words that God sets in motion all the change that occurs in the world and is thus ultimately responsible for everything that occurs through a cascade of cause and effect. This understanding of the Prime Mover and the consequent conceptualization of God can be named, insofar as it concern God in Himself/Itself, as the Potent God; and insofar as it concerns God's relationship to human beings as the Compelling/Coercive God. It is epitomized by calling God by names such as the Sovereign Lord and the Lord of the World and by attributes such as the All-Powerful and the Almighty. Perhaps the primary manifestation of this way of seeing God is the concept of God as the Creator. With the act of Creation, God set everything into motion. From that act of Creation, the sequences of cause and effect led down through time to the world that we have today and the events that occur in it. Most conceptualizations of God consider that He continues to intervene in the world causing new chains of cause and effect.

The Potent/Compelling/Coercive God has caused a number of theological problems for Western religions. These became most troublesome in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when most Western intellectuals turned away from religion. Events such as the Holocaust caused people to become more aware of a long-standing problem with such a conceptualization of God. If there is a God, who is all-powerful and loving and is the cause of all that occurs, how does it come about that He allows the Holocaust (injustice, the suffering of children, famines, etc) to occur?

An alternative way of viewing Aristotle: the Attracting God

Although this conceptualization of the Compelling/Coercive God is the one that has predominated in Western thinking, it is not the only conceptualization that emerges from a study of Aristotle. Many who have studied Aristotle closely have come to the conclusion that when

Aristotle writes of the Prime Mover or Unmoved Mover as the cause of every occurrence that subsequently occurs, he is not in fact thinking of the Prime Mover as the efficient cause but rather as the final cause. In other words rather than compelling or pushing everything that occurs through cascades of cause and effect, events occur because they are drawn by attraction towards the Unmoved Mover as their goal. The Unmoved Mover is described in Book 12 of the *Metaphysics* as “the object of desire and the object of thought” thus:

And the object of desire and the object of thought move in this way; they move without being moved. The primary objects of desire and of thought are the same. For the apparent good is the object of appetite, and the real good is the primary object of rational wish.²

And so the Prime Mover or Unmoved Mover is not an efficient cause of all actions that occur but rather the goal towards which actions aim, towards which they are drawn by love. Aristotle wrote:

That a final cause may exist among unchangeable entities is shown by the distinction of its meanings. For the final cause is (a) some being for whose good an action is done, and (b) something at which the action aims; and of these the latter exists among unchangeable entities though the former does not. The final cause, then, produces motion as being loved, but all other things move by being moved.³

Indeed, it is Aristotle himself who then takes this idea of the Prime Mover as acting through love and attraction and applies it to the concept of God. Immediately after the above passage, he goes on to say:

If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore

that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God.⁴

Paul Humphrey summarizes this conceptualization of God thus:

The universe has no beginning in time, no temporal first cause, so Aristotle is obviously not seeking an efficient cause in the sense of “what set it all off?” Aristotle’s unmoved mover acts as final cause, as the good toward which all things strive. That is, it acts as an object of desire: “The object of desire and the object of thought move without being moved”.⁵

Roland Faber has expressed this thus:

What Aristotle means, here, is not any efficient cause that creates an effect by coercion, by pull and push, by external setting or influencing, but what he called a final cause. This means a cause that operates from the front, from the future, from the ideal; its power is persuasion, seduction, creating desire for fulfillment. This is an internal cause that awakens that which happens to its best possibilities, luring it to their realization and to become the best it can be at any moment and in any situation. God as Prime Mover is not at the beginning, not a ground of creation, not in the past as pusher, not a powerful tyrant who crushes, but the attractor, the aim, the goal of fulfillment and satisfaction.⁶

Evidence from the Baha’i scriptures: the Potent God

It is clear that quotations can be found in the Baha’i scriptures that support both conceptual frameworks. We will first briefly review this evidence.

God is called by such names as “the Creator”, “the Sovereign Lord”, “the King”, and such attributes as being All-Powerful, Almighty and Omnipotent; they refer to God causing events that occur either in heaven

or on earth. See for example this quotation from the Kitab-i Aqas:

O kings of the earth! He Who is the sovereign Lord of all is come. The Kingdom is God's, the omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting. Worship none but God, and, with radiant hearts, lift up your faces unto your Lord, the Lord of all names. Wash from your hearts all earthly defilements, and hasten to enter the Kingdom of your Lord, the Creator of earth and heaven, Who caused the world to tremble and all its peoples to wail, except them that have renounced all things and clung to that which the Hidden Tablet hath ordained.⁷

And:

All praise to the unity of God, and all honor to Him, the sovereign Lord, the incomparable and all-glorious Ruler of the universe, Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all thing....⁸

Similarly in the writings of the Bab:

In the Name of Thy Lord, the Creator, the Sovereign, the All-Sufficing, the Most Exalted, He Whose help is implored by all men. SAY: O my God! O Thou Who art the Maker of the heavens and of the earth, O Lord of the Kingdom!⁹

God as the Prime Mover and as the initiator of cascades of cause and effect are also implied in a number of passages such as the following from the Lawh-i Hikmat, the Tablet of Wisdom:

Such as communicate the generating influence and such as receive its impact are indeed created through the irresistible Word of God which is the Cause of the entire creation, while all else besides His Word are but the creatures and the effects thereof.¹⁰

The ethos of obedience to the Divine law can be found in passages such as:

Whenever My laws appear like the sun in the heaven of Mine utterance, they must be faithfully obeyed by all, though My decree be such as to cause the heaven of every religion to be cleft asunder.¹¹

Evidence from the Baha'i Scriptures: The Attracting God

There is also much evidence in the Baha'i scripture for the view of God as operating primarily through love and attracting human beings towards Him/It rather than compelling them.

Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul. Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 27)

If love did not exist, what of reality would remain? It is the fire of the love of God which renders man superior to the animal. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 112)

In the Baha'i scriptures, the purpose of human life is stated to be draw nearer to God (reunion with God, attainment to the Presence of God, the Divine Seat, the Seat of Sanctity, etc.)—nearness to God can be said to be the Baha'i concept of salvation and can be seen to be a part of this concept of the Attracting God.

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 70)

The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth.

The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High. (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 156)

Draw them nearer, O my God, unto the scene of Thine effulgent glory, and enrapture their hearts with the sweet savors of Thine inspiration... (Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 201)

Describing the [true] seeker, Baha'u'llah writes:

At every moment his love for his Lord increaseth and draweth him nearer unto his Creato... (Baha'u'llah, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, p. 75)

From a prayer:

I beseech Thee, O my God, by Thy most sweet Voice and by Thy most exalted Word, to draw me ever nearer to the threshold of Thy door (Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 288)

And:

O Son of Man! Sorrow not save that thou art far from Us. Rejoice not save that thou art drawing near and returning unto Us. (Baha'u'llah, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, no. 35)

Whensoever the light of the revelation of the King of Oneness settleth upon the throne of the heart and soul, His radiance becometh visible in every limb and member. At that time, the mystery of the famed tradition gleameth out of the darkness: "A servant is drawn unto Me in prayers, until I answer him. And when I have answered him, I become the ear wherewith he heareth. ..." For thus the Master of the house hath appeared within His home, and all the pillars of the dwelling are ashine with His light. And as the action and effect

of the light are from the Light-Giver, so it is that all move through Him and arise by His Will. (*Seven Valleys*, new edition, pp. 31-2)

Not only is this drawing near to God the purpose of human life, it is the purpose of the Creation itself.

And when the sanctified souls rend asunder the veils of all earthly attachments and worldly conditions, and hasten to the stage of gazing on the beauty of the Divine Presence and are honoured by recognizing the Manifestation and are able to witness the splendour of God's Most Great Sign in their hearts, *then will the purpose of creation, which is the knowledge of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, become manifest.* (Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 175, italics added)

O Son of Bounty! Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of My command I made thee to appear, and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence of all created things. Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother's womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee. Out of My loving-kindness, 'neath the shade of My mercy I nurtured thee, and guarded thee by the essence of My grace and favor. *And My purpose in all this was that thou mightest attain My everlasting dominion and become worthy of My invisible bestowals.* And yet heedless thou didst remain, and when fully grown, thou didst neglect all My bounties and occupied thyself with thine idle imaginings, in such wise that thou didst become wholly forgetful, and, turning away from the portals of the Friend didst abide within the courts of My enemy. (Baha'u'llah, Persian Hidden Words, no. 29)

Attribute of God	Potent God	Loving God
Interaction with humans	Compelling God	Attracting God
	Kingly authoritarian God	Loving God
	running the world through cause and effect, reward and punishment, rules and systems	compassionate, merciful, loving Operates through educating and enabling
	Compels obedience through the fear of God	Invites alignment with the Will of God out of love
	Humans must obey the laws of God	Humans are invited to draw near to God

The Priority of the Attracting God over the Potent God

So what is the relationship of these two seemingly opposing concepts of God: the Compelling God and the Attracting God? There are several indications in the Baha’i scripture that the concept of the Loving/Attracting God precedes or has priority over the concept of the Potent God.

‘Abdu’l-Baha wrote a commentary on the Islamic Tradition “I was a Hidden Treasure and desired to be known therefore I created the Creation in order in order that I might be known.” In this commentary, he states that in this Tradition, the Hidden Treasure refers to the unknown and unknowable Essence of God which is unchanging, the stage of Absolute Unity [*ahadiyya*]. Then he says that the first “stirrings of Lov.... necessitated the Perfect Burnishing [*jala*] and Clarification [*istijla*]” resulting in the Essential Dispositions [*shu’unat dhatiyya*] which through the Divine Outpouring [*Fayd aqdas*], “manifested themselves out of the station of Essence into the station of Divine Knowledge [*hadrat-i`ilm*]. This is the first manifestation of the Absolute from

the Hidden Treasure in the Divine Knowledge. And from this manifestation the Eternal Archetypes [*a'yan thabita*] came into intellectual existence [*Wujud-i 'ilmi*]. And each one according to its inherent capacity, is distinguished from the others in the mirrors of the Divine Knowledge.”¹²

The *a'yan thabita* are the eternal archetypes of everything in existence and thus the sequence continues until it reaches the point that the Creation comes into being. We need not concern ourselves here with the intermediate stages but just note that the “stirrings of Love” precede the Creation in this sequence. Thus the attribute of the Attracting God precedes and thus is the cause of the attribute of the Potent God in the sequence. Thus the prime movement was that of love and the Creation is secondary and a product of that Love. This would indicate the concept of the loving/attracting God is primary and the compelling Creator God is secondary.

Baha'u'llah summarizes this idea succinctly in two of the Hidden Words:

O Son of Man! Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, *I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee*, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.

O Son of Man! *I loved thy creation, hence I created thee*. (Baha'u'llah, Arabic Hidden Words, nos. 3 and 4; italics added)

In both of these passages, it is the movement of love that precedes and gives rise to the Creation.

A Word about Time and Language

A cautionary note is needed at this point. The use of such words as “first stirring of Love”, “Love precedes Creation”, “stages leading to

Creation” all imply a sequence of events and thus the passing of time. The picture that emerges is of some event that occurred in the dim distant past whereby Creation came into being and everything else has flowed down over the course of time from this.

But “time” only comes into being with the Creation. Time is just a dimension of space, not an independent reality. This has been known in science since the early twentieth century when Albert Einstein demonstrated that Time cannot exist independent of the physical world. Thus the events that we are describing as occurring before the coming into being of the physical world occur outside of time. When we are talking about events that occur outside time, we are reaching the limits of human language and of the ability of human beings to conceptualize. Human minds are so structured to think in terms of events occurring in a sequence in time that it is almost impossible to conceptualize what it means to say that events occur outside of time. In fact everything in the spiritual world occurs outside time. ‘Abdu’l-Baha refers to this in relation to the Covenant.

As for the reference in The Hidden Words regarding the Covenant entered into on Mount Paran, this signifieth that in the sight of God the past, the present and the future are all one and the same – whereas, relative to man, the past is gone and forgotten, the present is fleeting, and the future is within the realm of hope. And it is a basic principle of the Law of God that in every Prophetic Mission, He entereth into a Covenant with all believer...Covenant that endureth until the end of that Mission, until the promised day when the Personage stipulated at the outset of the Mission is made manifest. Consider Moses, He Who conversed with God. Verily, upon Mount Sinai, Moses entered into a Covenant regarding the Messiah, with all those souls who would live in the day of the Messiah. And those souls, although they appeared many centuries after Moses, were nevertheless – so far as the Covenant, *which is outside time, was concerned* – present there with Moses. The Jews, however, were heedless of this and remembered it not, and thus they suffered

a great and clear loss. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections*, p. 207)

The Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade has attempted to describe this by writing of sacred time as being an eternal now that exists in parallel with profane time.¹³ These events such as the “first stirring of Love in the Hidden Treasure” did not happen in the distant past, they are outside time and therefore an ever-present now. So words that imply “priority” – such as that the movement of Love precedes the Creation – should not be taken to mean a priority in time, but a priority in the hierarchy of being or of becoming.

A Word about Loving God

One aspect of the Loving God is that the flow of love must be mutual. It is the love of God that brought Creation into being but human beings are also enjoined to love God in return:

O Son of Being!

Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant. (Baha'u'llah, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, no. 5)

But it is also part of the Baha'i teachings that God is unknowable and any concepts that we form of God are our own imaginings.

All the people have formed a god in the world of thought, and that form of their own imagination they worshi.... All the sects and peoples worship their own thought; they create a god in their own minds and acknowledge him to be the creator of all things, when that form is a superstition. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Baha'i World Faith*, p. 381)

So the question arises how is it possible for a human being to love an entity about which they know nothing. One important aspect of this question concerns the relationship between Beauty and Love.

According to Plato, it the recognition of Beauty that causes love to arise within the human heart. This recognition can be of physical and bodily beauty or it can relate to the beauty of a person's soul or mind. It can also relate to laws, institutions and to knowledge and science. How is it possible for love to arise through recognition of the Beauty of God when human beings cannot know anything about the Beauty or any other of the attributes of God. If they are loving God, then are they not loving a creation of their own imagination, which 'Abdu'l-Baha calls superstition.

A clue as to how this conundrum can be resolved can be found in the following quotation from Baha'u'llah regarding the Manifestations of God:

Thus, viewed from the standpoint of their oneness and sublime detachment, the attributes of Godhead, Divinity, Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence, have been, and are applicable to those Essences of Being, inasmuch as they all abide on the throne of Divine Revelation, and are established upon the seat of Divine Concealment. Through their appearance the Revelation of God is made manifest, and by their countenance the Beauty of God is revealed. (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 53)

And so since it is through these Manifestations of God that the Beauty of God can be seen.

A Word about Love, Beauty and Attraction

Thus since it is through these Manifestations of God that the Beauty of God can be seen, it is through the recognition of beauty in these Manifestations (which the above quotation says is the Beauty of God) that love arises in the individual. This love that arises in the heart of the individual through the recognition of beauty in these Manifestations is love for God because Baha'u'llah asserts that belief in the oneness of God consists in regarding God and the Manifestations of God as one

and the same.

The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same...This is the loftiest station to which a true believer in the unity of God can ever hope to attain. Blessed is the man that reacheth this station, and is of them that are steadfast in their belief. (Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 167)

As for the ultimate goal and purpose of human life which, as stated above, is to draw near to and to attain the presence of God, the Bab asserts that this is nothing other than drawing near to and attaining the presence of the Manifestation of God:

There is no paradise more wondrous for any soul than to be exposed to God's Manifestation in His Day, to hear His verses and believe in them, to attain His presence, which is naught but the presence of God, (The Bab, *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, p. 77)

Among the most common titles used to refer to Baha'u'llah are the Ancient Beauty and the Blessed Beauty. Thus the love that arises in the heart of the believer for Baha'u'llah is as a result of the recognition of His Beauty. And of course it is this love which then attracts the believer and draws him or her closer to Baha'u'llah.

In summary, since human beings can know nothing of the Essence of God, they cannot see Beauty there nor can love arise for the Essence of God. It is the Names and Attributes of God that causes this love to arise in human hearts. Although the Names and Attributes of God can be seen in all of God's Creation (and the Baha'i scriptures do call upon human beings to reflect upon the Divine as manifested in our own human natures and in the natural world¹⁴), nevertheless these Names and Attributes are seen most perfectly reflected in Baha'u'llah

and the other Manifestations of God. In other words, it is only through these Manifestations of God that human beings can see the Beauty of the Loving/Attracting God. The God to whom human hearts are attracted is Baha'u'llah and the other Manifestations of God.

Consequences of the Concept of the Potent/Compelling God

Regardless of what Aristotle did or did not mean by his concept of the Unmoved Mover, the understanding of it as leading to the Potent/Compelling/Coercive God was developed by Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologians and philosophers into a conceptualization of God and of how God interacts with the world. Apart from the theological consequences of this that has been described above, this conceptualization of God then set up normative structures of thought which affected social realities.

The structure of thought that was produced by the Potent/Compelling God had consequences in many areas of thought. This became most marked in Western science, which came to consider the material and efficient causes as the only valid forms of causation, allowing rational and empirical explanations of the natural world. Any other form of causation became classed as mythological, magical or superstitious and relegated to being invalid as a source of knowledge. During the 20th Century, however, it became clear to scientists that this “Aristotelean” view of the natural world where every event occurs as a result of a cause is an insufficient view. The world of quantum physics is not governed by cause and effect and so a more expansive view is needed – one that is not driven by cause and effect but rather one where sequences of events occur that would not have been considered scientific in the old paradigm: chance and probability, emergent properties, particles that come into existence out of nothing, entities that are both particles and waves at the same time, Heisenberg’s Uncertainty principle, chaos theory, etc. While physicists are now comfortable with this new view of the natural world, and other areas of science such as chemistry and biology are starting to accommodate it, it has yet to permeate the

social sciences or indeed the thinking of those who advocate scientific atheism, the New Atheists.

The Potent/Compelling God also has major social consequences since it was thought that the earthly social structure would be most perfect when it most closely resembled the Divine structure of having a Potent God at the apex. This image of God as the Omnipotent King was very attractive to medieval rulers who could then point to the structure of the spiritual world (with an Omnipotent Ruler at its head) as justifying a similar social structure on earth with themselves as the symbol and image of the Divine ruler; it was a justification of their own absolute rule. It encouraged the idea that hierarchies of power were the natural order and became the justification for keeping the vast majority of human beings (women, racial groups, religious minorities, the lower classes and castes, etc.) suppressed and subjected to the norms of the ruling hierarchy. The normative views of this ruling elite became imposed on all. This social structure became viewed as the natural order, common sense, reality itself. And so to try to change the social structure or to question the authority of the rulers was, in a sense to go against this natural order, to go against reality (madness) and indeed to go against God (blasphemy and heresy). This social aspect of the conceptualization of God as the Potent/Compelling God is also now slowly breaking down. Those at the bottom of social pyramid of power are no longer willing to remain in that position, nor increasingly to allow their thoughts and opinions to be dictated to them by the social and political elite. Developments such as the Internet and social media have allowed them to bypass the controls that the elite had over access to knowledge and communication. The intellectual and social structures created by the conceptualization of God as primarily the Potent God) are crumbling (albeit slowly and with setbacks along the way).

However, according to the Baha'i scriptures, there are aspects of this worldview of the the Potent God that are correct. At the social level, the hierarchical structure of society is confirmed and justified by passages

that enjoin obedience to kings and rulers and liken the position of the king on earth to that of God in heaven:

This Wronged One pledgeth Himself, before the Divine Kaaba, that, apart from truthfulness and trustworthiness, this people will show forth nothing that can in any way conflict with the world-adorning views of His Majesty. Every nation must have a high regard for the position of its sovereign, must be submissive unto him, must carry out his behests, and hold fast his authority. The sovereigns of the earth have been and are the manifestations of the power, the grandeur and the majesty of God.¹⁵

'Abdu'l-Baha writes to the Baha'is in a similar vein:

O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon you to be submissive to all monarchs that are just and show your fidelity to every righteous king. Serve ye the sovereigns of the world with utmost truthfulness and loyalty. Show obedience unto them and be their well-wishers. Without their leave and permission do not meddle with political affairs, for disloyalty to the just sovereign is disloyalty to God himself.¹⁶

And Shoghi Effendi also states:

...the considered judgement and authoritative decrees issued by their responsible rulers must... be thoroughly respected and loyally obeyed.¹⁷

Furthermore, the Baha'i administrative framework also exhibits a hierarchy and obedience is also expected towards this. The following was written by Shoghi Effendi's secretary regarding the North American National Spiritual Assembly:

...the Guardian wishes me to again affirm his view that the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly is undivided and

unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith throughout the United States and Canada, and that, therefore, the obedience of individual Bahá'ís, delegates, groups, and Assemblies to that authority is imperative, and should be whole-hearted and unqualified.¹⁸

Consequences of the Concept of the Loving/Attracting God

As described above, the Potent/Compelling God has had a great influence, not just on theology and religious philosophy, but on our very structures of thought leading to profound consequences in how human beings see the world (science), how they interact with others (sociology) and how they construct their communities (governance). So if the conceptualization of how God interacts with the world changes, this would also necessitate new ways of thinking about these intellectual and social matters. It would alter how human beings see reality itself – it would alter their reality.

Of course adopting the concept of the Loving/Attracting God alters our theology in important ways. Instead of conceptualizing God as the Divine King, a remote figure who sends down decrees that have to be obeyed or else punishment will ensue, God become a close figure, a Friend who assists and enables human beings to progress so that they can become ever closer to Him/It by becoming ever more like Him/It—by realizing the spiritual capacities within every individual, by acquiring the Divine Names and Attributes. This is summed up in one passage in the writings of Baha'u'llah, where the first two sentences describe the possibilities of the way a Potent/Compelling God would work, but this is then rejected in the next sentence in favour of the operation of the Loving/Attracting God:

He Who is the Day Spring of Truth is, no doubt, fully capable of rescuing from such remoteness wayward souls and of causing them to draw nigh unto His court and attain His Presence. “If God had pleased He had surely made all men one people.” His

purpose, however, is to enable the pure in spirit and the detached in heart to ascend, by virtue of their own innate powers, unto the shores of the Most Great Ocean, that thereby they who seek the Beauty of the All-Glorious may be distinguished and separated from the wayward and perverse. Thus hath it been ordained by the all-glorious and resplendent Pen...

(Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 70)

God is still the All-Powerful Potent/Compelling God but this power is now expressed not as a dominating “power over” but as an enabling “power to”. An interesting slant on this is the fact that the enactment and enforcement of religious law, which are one of the symbols of the Potent God, is turned by Baha'u'llah from being an expression of domination and power into an expression of love:

Observe My commandments, for the love of My beaut.... Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.”

(Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, verses 4-5, p. 20-21)

At the social level, although Baha'u'llah does, as described in the quotations given above, enjoin obedience to kings and does appear therefore to give support to the existing hierarchical power structure, in fact however he then tempers this by stating that kings should exist merely as symbols of Divine Power, not as executors of earthly power:

Although a republican form of government profiteth all the peoples of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should remain deprived thereof. If the sagacious combine the two forms into one, great will be their reward in the presence of God.

(Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 28)

The system of government which the British people have adopted in London appeareth to be good, for it is adorned with the light of

both kingship and of the consultation of the people.
(Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*)

Attribute of God	Potent God	Loving God
Interaction with humans	Compelling God	Attracting God
Social structure	Social hierarchy—king/president at the top	Egalitarian—group decision making
Social processes: Decision-making	decision coming from the top—to be obeyed	consultative decision making
Reason for following decisions	Punishment for disobedience	Following decision out of love
Social interactions	Competition, conflict, winner takes all	Cooperation, Consultation and collaboration; service
Basis of social interactions	Interactions are legalistic	Interactions based on equality and mutual respect

With this change of vision, in place of the remote kingly authoritarian God running the world mechanically through cause and effect, reward and punishment, rules and systems, one has a much closer more intimate relationship with a loving God, who is compassionate, merciful, and attracts us to Himself/Itself rather than compels obedience. Our goal in life is not so much to obey the laws of a King but to draw ever closer to a Divine Beloved. Obedience to the law of God thus becomes secondary and a consequence of the human being's love of God. The social structure that most closely parallels this change is one where the bonds of love are emphasized, where interactions with others are characterized by consultation, cooperation and collaboration

rather than creating situations where one person gives orders and the rest obey. The governance of communities is also implemented through consultative decision making, based on experience and learning, rather than on obedience to the laws and directives flowing down from the upper levels of a power hierarchy. The ethos that is created is not one of dictatorial authority and compelling obedience but rather that of a culture where all, those in the institutions of authority as well as the ordinary believers, are learning together, consulting together and working together on a journey to build better, more loving, more prosperous communities.

Conclusion

This paper presents yet one more way in which the present activities of the world Baha'i community can be viewed. The path along which the Baha'i community is journeying can be conceptualized as the path from having one concept of God to having another. Whereas previously the Potent God, the Ruler, the Creator the Omnipotent was the central focus of the conceptualization of God, this is not cast aside but has become secondary and a consequence of the conceptualization of the Loving and Attracting God, the Friend, the Beloved, the celestial Beauty. God is not conceptualized as being in the past as the initiator of chains of cause and effect that affect us in our lives, but rather is in the future as the Good towards which we are attracted and are moving. One obeys the laws of God as a consequence of one's love for God. This leads to new ways of interacting between human beings: replacing power and hierarchy with love and mutuality in relationships. It leads to new models of governance not based on compulsion and fear but on consultation, cooperation and collaboration.

NOTES

- 1 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (trans. W. D. Ross), Book 12, Part 7. (at <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.html>, accessed 31 March 2019)
- 2 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 12, Part 7.
- 3 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 12, Part 7.
- 4 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 12, Part 7.
- 5 Paul Humphrey, *Metaphysics of Mind: Hylomorphism and Eternality in Aristotle and Hegel*. (Stony Brook: State University of New York, 2007), p. 71
- 6 Roland Faber, "The Manifestation of God in the View of Process Theology", *Lights of 'Irfān*, vol. 20, 2019, pp. 7-54, esp. p. 15, I am grateful to Roland Faber for drawing this whole area of thought to my attention.
- 7 Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, vv. 78-79, p. 48.
- 8 Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, no. 27, p. 64.
- 9 The Bab, *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, p. 212.
- 10 Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, p. 140.
- 11 Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, v. 7, p. 21.
- 12 Moojan Momen, "'Abdu'l-Baha's Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: 'I Was a Hidden Treasure . . .' A Provisional Translation)," *Bulletin of Baha'i Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (Dec. 1985), pp. 4-64
- 13 See for example, Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (London: Sheen and Ward, 1958), pp. 388-98.
- 14 Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings*, no.1, pp. 4-5; no. 153, pp. 326-7; Baha'u'llah, *Prayers and Meditations*, no. 176, p. 106
- 15 Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 89.
- 16 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Baha'i World Faith*, p. 446.
- 17 Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 162.
- 18 *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 2, p. 105.

Tablet of Fitnih (Tribulations) and Its Recipient: Shams-i Jahán

Foad Seddigh

Abstract

One of the clearly visible characteristics of the Cause of God in the earlier stages of its development was its acceptance by a large number of eminent people from the ranks of the learned. Yet another characteristic of the Faith was that several Qájár princes as well as some government officials of higher ranks joined the Faith. However, acceptance of the Faith by princesses was rare to the extent that we can cite at this time only one who is recorded as having recognized the station of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh—Princess Sháms-i Jahán. She was a grand-daughter of Fátḥ-i-'Alí Sháh and an aunt of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh. The Princess became one of the believers of the Báb, met Ṭáhirih, later travelled to Baghdád and met Bahá'u'lláh, recognized His station and became one of His ardent adherents despite the fact that He had not disclosed His station. Bahá'u'lláh conferred upon her the title of: *Varaqtu'r Riḍván* (Leaf of Paradise). She was an accomplished poetess and her book of poems is now available but has not been translated into English. She used “Fitnih” meaning test and tribulations as a pseudonym in her poems. In this paper we will review her life story as recorded and reflected in her poems. Bahá'u'lláh revealed a significant Tablet in her honour, known as the “Tablet of Fitnih”. The Tablet revealed in Arabic is about two to three pages in length. The salient features of this Tablet are discussed in this paper which contains a warning concerning the tribulations arising as a result of upcoming trials and pointing clearly to the difficulties which lie ahead. The trials described in the Tablet would be so pervasive that they would encompass everything, disturbing people's minds, renting asunder the heaven of knowledge and causing the stars of knowledge in the heaven of the Cause to fall down. A provisional English translation of the Tablet is provided by the author of this paper and is placed at the end of the article.

Introduction

In the study of past religions and their history or their scriptures, we come across the fact that many of the early believers during the developmental stages of these revelations were ordinary people. For example, in the Qur'án we read:

“And when it is said unto them: believe as the people believe, they say: Shall we believe as the foolish believe? Beware! They indeed are the foolish? But they know not.” (Baqarih or Cow, 2:13)

Also:

“The chieftains of his folk, who disbelieved, said: We see thee but a mortal like us, and we see not that any follow thee save the most abject among us, without reflection. We behold in you no merit above us—nay, we deem you liars.” (Húd, 11:27)

A cursory review of the Bible or examination of the lives of the disciples of Jesus Christ supports this statement.

On the other hand, when we study the history of the Bábi and Bahá'í revelations we find that a large number of eminent individuals believed in this Faith. Bahá'u'lláh, in the Kitáb-i Iqán, says:

“In this most resplendent Dispensation, however, this most mighty Sovereignty, a number of illumined divines, of men of consummate learning, of doctors of mature wisdom, have attained unto His Court, drunk the cup of His divine Presence, and been invested with the honour of His most excellent favour. They have renounced, for the sake of the Beloved, the world and all that is therein. We will mention the names of some of them, that perchance it may strengthen the faint-hearted, Among them was Mullá Husayn, who became the recipient of the effulgent glory of the Sun of divine Revelation. But for him, God would not have

been established upon the seat of His mercy, nor ascended the throne of eternal glory. Among them also was Siyyid Yahyá, that unique and peerless figure of his age, Mullá Muḥammad ‘Alí-i-Zanjání; Mullá ‘Alí-i-Bastamí.... and others, well nigh four hundred in number, whose names are all inscribed upon the ‘Guarded Tablet’ of God ...” (KI 223)

The early prominent followers of the Báb were not exclusively among the learned; they included government officials, princes, other prominent people and in particular one Qájár Princess by the name of Shams-i Jahán. She was a unique person, a distinguished figure, a poetess and possessed many other talents. We will present in this paper the story of her life as gleamed through her poetry and from other sources. She was the recipient of several Tablets from Bahá’u’lláh one of which is the Tablet of Fitnih (Tribulations), a translation of which is presented at the end of the paper. We will also discuss this Tablet in further detail.

The Life History of Shams-i Jahán

The story of the noble life and spiritual exploits of this princess has been pieced together from brief mention in different parts of the historical events of the time. It is a story worthy of exploration. This paper attempts to bring together her story from scattered sources and present it briefly and as completely as may be possible at this time.

The author of Zuhúru’l-Ḥaqq writes: “Amongst the most famous and well respected Bábís who came to Baghdád on those days for a visit, who discovered the station of Bahá’u’lláh and could not stop talking about it was a princess called Shams-i Jahán known as Ḥájjiyyih Princess “Varaqtu’r Riḍván—Fitnih”, an aunt of Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh whom the Abhá Beauty commanded to return to Iran.” (Kitab-i Zuhúru’l-Ḥaqq, vol. iv, pp. 194-195)¹

At this time, we have no information regarding the life of the Princess until she became attracted to the Faith. In the life of princess Shams-i Jahán, a few matters stand out that we will try to clarify;

these are: her connection and relationship to the ruling dynasty of Qájár, her belief in the Báb, her connection to Ṭáhirih; her recognition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, her connection with other believers, her final visit to Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople, and her poetry.

1. Princess Shams-i Jahán and Qájár Family

Princess Shams-i Jahán was a grand-daughter of Fátḥ-i-'Alí Sháh, the second monarch in Qájár dynasty. Her father was Prince Muḥammad Riḍá Mírzá, one of the sons of Fátḥ-i-'Alí Sháh. He was the Governor of the northern province of Gílán for some time. For the detailed Genealogy of the Princess, refer to the following site:

<http://www.royalark.net>

This web site contains information regarding dynasties of the rulers of the world. Selecting Iran, and then Qájár from the link enables viewing of her particulars in the following link:

<http://www.royalark.net/Persia/qajar14.htm>

It should be noted that Princess Shams-i Jahán had a cousin by the same name. This Princess Shams-i Jahán never became a believer and was not even close to the Faith. She was also a grand-daughter of Fátḥ-i-'Alí Sháh, but her father was Prince Muḥammad-'Alí Mírzá; It is worth mentioning that some scholars have confused the two cousin-princesses who share the name, Shams-i Jahán, with each other. They have referred to the brothers of one and assumed they were the brothers of the other Shams-i Jahán. The mother of the Shams-i Jahán of interest to us is a lady from the district of Núr in the province of Mázindarán.

2. Princess Shams-i Jahán to Believe in the Báb

Princess Shams-i Jahán heard a true story about the Báb from her tutor, Siyyid Muḥammad Gulpáyiganí. Siyyid Muḥammad was one the followers of Ṭáhirih who was in Karbilá with her and returned to

Iran in her company. The year that Princess Shams-i Jahán started her tutelage with Siyyid Muḥammad Gulpáyiganí is not reflected in her poems; neither is the year when she joined the ranks of believers in the Báb. So, we must reconstruct the story of her life from the information available at present with timelines and time estimates based on the description of various events as they appear in the history. She became a believer around the time of the martyrdom of the Báb. By this time, she was an accomplished person and most likely in her early twenties.

3. Princess Shams-i Jahán to Meet Ṭáhirih

We know that Ṭáhirih was arrested shortly before the martyrdom of the Báb and was put under house arrest in the house of Tíhrán's chief of police, Maḥmúd Khán-i Kalántar. Two incidents connect Shams-i Jahán with Ṭáhirih. The first one is described in detail in the Princess' poems. We note that most of the Bábís were unaware of the whereabouts of Ṭáhirih at this time. Most probably, Siyyid Muḥammad was an exception due to his former association with Ṭáhirih. The following story has been extracted from Shams-i Jahán's poems:

"I was searching for the truth and Siyyid Malíh (Siyyid Muḥammad Gulpáyiganí) guided me towards God. Mercy of God be upon him as he showed me the way. He told me that in the house of Maḥmúd Khán-i Kalántar someone is imprisoned who is preferable to any one's essence of life." Of course, this person was no one else except Ṭáhirih. In her poem, the Princess says she abandoned all thoughts concerning her own safety and walked towards the house of Kalántar. In order to meet Ṭáhirih, she resorted to different actions. She entered the garden of the Kalántar with much apprehension and walked towards a run-down building at the end of the garden and stood there drowning herself in her own thoughts as she sought a way to contact Ṭáhirih. Suddenly Ṭáhirih, from the upper room of the building where she was imprisoned, opened a window and Shams-i Jahán saw her face bright as the moon which had risen in the sky. She could not go near her as there were no steps to the upper room where she was confined

and the access to the room was by a ladder which could not be located around that place. Ṭáhirih asked her to come closer to the building. The princess stepped forward and asked Ṭáhirih who she was; indicating that she had attracted her and removed all her sanity and will power. Shams-i Jahán asked some questions regarding the incidents in Mázan-dirán referring to the upheavals of Shaykh Ṭabarsí and the Conference of Badasht. Ṭáhirih informed her that what happened there was due to the appearance of the Lord of the Age. Shams-i Jahán had many questions, all of which were answered by Ṭáhirih to her complete satisfaction. After a while some guards showed up and became aware that the sun (Shams means the sun) and the moon were in one place together (Sun is herself and she has referred to Ṭáhirih as the moon). The guards asked her what she was doing there. We assume she provided sufficiently satisfactory answers such that they decided to go away so that she could continue her conversation with Ṭáhirih. After a while Ṭáhirih asked her to leave Kalántar's premises as it posed a great danger to her life. She says that meeting Ṭáhirih as short as it was left an unforgettable impression in her memory; something very profound that she could never forget. She says that she had a lot to say but chose to be brief. At this time, the Lord (The Báb) was in Chihríq. We also note from other sources that Shams-i Jahán was also present in the festivity on the occasion of the wedding of Kalántar's son, a celebration which had been organized by Kalántar's wife, in which we know Ṭáhirih was also present. If there were other meetings with Ṭáhirih, she has not mentioned it and she has made this part of the story short.

4. Princess Goes to Kalántar's House after Martyrdom of Ṭáhirih

The massacre during the summer of 1852 due to the attempt on the life of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh as a result of which Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in the Síyáh Chál (Black Pit) is well documented. One of the victims of that incident was Ṭáhirih who was led to a garden outside the city gates and was strangled. The following story has been narrated by Nabíl Zarandí concerning Kalántar's wife in relation to the martyrdom of Ṭáhirih:

“One night, whilst Ṭáhirih was staying in my home, I was summoned to her presence and found her fully adorned, dressed in a gown of snow-white silk. Her room was redolent with the choicest perfume. I expressed to her my surprise at so unusual a sight. ‘I am preparing to meet my Beloved,’ she said, ‘and wish to free you from the cares and anxieties of my imprisonment.’ I was much startled at first, and wept at the thought of separation from her. ‘Weep not, she sought to reassure me.’ The time of your lamentation is not yet come. I wish to share with you my last wishes, for the hour when I shall be arrested and condemned to suffer martyrdom is fast approaching. I would request you to allow your son to accompany me to the scene of my death and to ensure that the guards and executioner into whose hands I shall be delivered will not compel me to divest myself of this attire. It is also my wish that my body be thrown into a pit, and that that pit be filled with earth and stones. Three days after my death a woman will come and visit you, to whom you will give this package which I now deliver into your hands”. (The Dawn-Breakers, pp. 622-623)²

The person who came and collected the package was no one other than Shams-i Jahán (Muḥaḍirát, vol. I-II, p. 31-32).³ This shows that a strong bond had been established between Ṭáhirih and Shams-i Jahán. She stated that meeting Ṭáhirih changed her life and the meeting or meetings with her had left profound and imperishable effects on her. Her Faith was confirmed, and she decided to dedicate her entire life to the promotion of the new Faith.

She complains about her brothers who made her life miserable due to her acceptance of the new Faith and were most critical of her association with the Bábís. However, one of her brothers by the name Hášim Mírzá and known by the designation Jináb was supportive of her. (Zuhúru'l-Haqq Vol. vi, p. 413)⁴

5. Princess Shams-i Jahán Travels to Baghdád and Back

During the immediate years following the martyrdom of Ṭáhirih, the Princess had to be careful as the social and political climate continued to put pressure on the Bábí community. It was a period fraught with danger as any contacts with the Bábí community could be misrepresented. However, she kept her contact with the leading figures of the Bábí community for a few years and then decided to travel to Baghdád to meet Mírzá Yaḥyá who was the “Nominal Head” of the Bábí community. An extract from her poems concerning this trip can be summarized as follows:

“I had lost my mind and was driven by a great desire to go to Iraq in order to meet the head of the Bábí Faith.” The Princess made arrangements to travel to Baghdád. As she gradually drew nearer to the city, her anticipation rose. Upon her arrival in Baghdád she sent a letter to Mírzá Yaḥyá stating that she was sure that he knew the secrets of her heart and she had come there to meet him. He wrote back stating that he was not sure whether she was his enemy and even if she was a friend her meeting with him would cause his enemies to become aware of his whereabouts and they would come and harm him. Then she wrote back to him and tried to convince him that she would take every precaution to avoid compromising his safety. Then he sent a word to those near him that they should force her to leave the city at once. When she heard this order, she was greatly astonished, much upset and asked herself what kind of spiritual leader Mírzá Yaḥyá was who could not distinguish a friend from a foe. She regretted falling into what she refers to as a trap. She had planted a seed of hope in her heart and watered it with her eye’s stream. If it were a pure seed, it would have germinated, and it would have grown to become a big tree by now. As she tried to get closer to Mírzá Yaḥyá, gradually all her spiritual aspirations were fading away.

One night she cried all night and asked God to have mercy upon her. She believed in the new religion and through the face of Mírzá Yaḥyá

Azal had tried to find the Lord. Now she asked her Lord to assist her and cure her spiritual sickness. She recalled that God had said that if a servant would take one step towards Him, He would take ten steps towards such a person. During that night she did not sleep and asked God for enlightenment. Then she had a few questions and thought while she was in Baghdád it would be useful to approach Jináb-i-Bahá. Therefore, she put down on a piece of paper the questions for which she sought an answer. She was up all night until it became near sunrise. Suddenly, she heard a knock on the door. She responded and found Áqá Ján, Khádimu'lláh, standing by the door. He said to her that Jináb-i Bahá sent him to tell her that He knew she had become disappointed with Mírzá Yahyá and lost all hope; whatever communion she had with God He heard them all. Whatever she had written down to ask Him, He knew them all. Áqá Ján told her she should come along to meet Him and there was no need to bring her questions. Bahá'u'lláh would provide the answer to all her questions. She went and met Bahá'u'lláh. She was astounded and bewildered. He provided all the answers before she asked any questions. She thought to herself—If He was not the Lord then how would He know the secrets of her heart? Then she asked God for forgiveness. Jináb-i Bahá told her that she should not discuss her experience with others. After a six month stay in Baghdád, Bahá'u'lláh asked her to leave Baghdád for Iran. She was so overwhelmed that she was not able to describe her feelings when she was saying goodbye.

Concerning this period, the Guardian has written:

“At the same time an influx of Persian Bábís, whose sole object was to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, swelled the stream of visitors that poured through His hospitable doors. Carrying back, on their return to their native country, innumerable testimonies, both oral and written, to His steadily rising power and glory ... a grand-daughter of Fátih-i-'Alí Sháh and fervent admirer of Tábirih, surnamed Varaqatu'r-Ridván all these were numbered among the visitors and fellow-disciples who crossed His threshold, ...” (GPB 130)

A brief clarification is needed here. “Varaqah” is an Arabic word meaning leaf. In the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh it is typically a reference to female believers. The title of “Varaqatu'r Riḍván” means Leaf of Paradise. This title was also given to the second sister of Mullá Ḥusayn of Bushrúyih. Mullá Ḥusayn's first sister was given the title of Varaqatu'l-Firdus which also means Leaf of Paradise.

Through her poems, Princess Shams-i Jahán continues the rest of her story:

On her way back to Ṭihrán from Baghdád, she met some believers in Karand, a small border town in Iran. In Kirmánsháhán (Kirmánsháh), she met Hájí Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfáhání (who encouraged and misled Mírzá Yaḥyá Azal in his machinations against Bahá'u'lláh) whose character did not please her. She stated that there was no point conversing with someone whose talk would not illumine one's heart. She called him the embodiment of Satan and Dajjál. As she continued her journey, in Hamadán, a town in the western region of Iran, she met with the Bábis. Traveling further, she mentioned that in Naráq she met Kamál'ud-Dín Naráqí, the recipient of the Tablet of “All Foods”. She also says that she was impressed by the believers in Jásb before reaching Káshán where she stayed for three months. She mentioned an individual by the name of Ibráhím who had written poems in the praise of Jináb-i Bahá; it seems that Ibráhím-i Káshání must have left quite an impression on her. Then she started the last leg of her journey towards Ṭihrán. In her poem, she expressed a feeling she had as she approached Ṭihrán—specifically she said it was as though she was entering a prison of her own volition. She then writes about her loneliness in Ṭihrán. She was unable to find a single person she could share the secrets of her heart with. Occasionally she received a Tablet from Baghdád that would give her new life and spiritual vigour.

Six years elapsed after her return from Baghdád. Her mind was preoccupied with a desire to go back to Baghdád in order to meet the best Beloved of her heart once again. After some time, she received news

that Jináb-i Bahá and the company of friends were exiled to Istanbul. Shortly after the news of the departure of the Friends from Baghdad, Nabíl-i A'zam (Mullá Muḥammad-i Zarandí) arrived in Ṭihrán with the New Message. She has specifically referred to her brothers' opposition and efforts to sever her connection with the Bábí community—a situation which made her feel miserable. As a result, she secluded herself and talked to no one except friendship which she established with the daughter of Siyyid Muḥammad Gulpáyiganí. After some time, she became determined to travel to Adrianople and finally the permission to go for a visit to Adrianople arrived. She had inherited a garden which she sold and used the proceeds to hire a believer to accompany and assist her on this trip.

As she made plans to leave Ṭihrán, winter arrived, and she was cognizant of the fact that it was not a good time to travel. However, her heart overrode her concerns, pressing her to ignore the hardship of winter travel. The fire of longing for the visit motivated her to disregard the dangers and difficulties of travel in winter-time. Finally, she left Ṭihrán and traveled northward arriving in Qazvín. She has described the believers in that city as being polished and radiant like a mirror. She spent a few days there and then traveled to Zanján. She lauds praises on the believers in that city and particularly Siyyid Ashraf who became a famous martyr a few years later. At Zanján, she heard that a group of believers had left for pilgrimage and she tried to catch up to them, but she was unsuccessful. She continued her journey and arrived near the border by the river Aras (Araxes). She mentions that she could see the castle of Chihríq which may be a mistake—the castle of Máh-Kú is near the border river of Aras. From there she traveled to Nakhjaván and then to Yerevan, the Capital of Armenia. She said that she found the environment very interesting as she heard the sound of church bells and the call to prayers from mosques.

From Yerevan she traveled to Georgia reaching Tbilisi and from there traveled westward where she reached the shores of the Black Sea. From there she boarded a ship and traveled by sea, with the boat sailing close

to shore during this journey. After visiting the port city of Batumi in Georgia and then Trabzon (Trebizond) she reached the sea-port of Sam-sun where she remembered the sea-travel of her Lord from that place towards Istanbul. Eventually she arrived in Istanbul. In her poetry, she says that she had not done anything worthwhile for the Faith in her life and expresses a wish to give her life away as a martyr. She says that a mirror is made of stone, which over the years, combined with persistence would become a mirror – in other words something worthless becomes of value. She states that she does not see herself being less than a stone and expresses the desire to become a mirror. Now that she reached a city in the vicinity of her Lord, she says that she was ready to sacrifice whatever she had, even should she be given a hundred lives in order to attain to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Her poetry describing her thoughts and feelings at this time, projects strong emotions.

Immediately after arriving in Istanbul, she went to Khán-i Muşţafá Páshá hostel and there she saw a person by the name Muşţafá (most probably Muşţafá Naráqí). As soon as she saw his face, she recognized him. Then he came close to her and asked her name and she asked the name of a small boy with him. She inquired regarding the whereabouts of other pilgrims and Muşţafá took her to them. There were nine in all – nine pure souls who she referred to as angels. After five days finally permission to travel to Adrianople arrived for the pilgrims. She refers to their departure as having taken her life along with them. She remained back in Istanbul, awaiting the arrival of her permission to travel to Adrianople. While she waited, she saw Sayyáh and then Mishkín Qalam and then several other Friends who lived in Istanbul at the time. She waited for sixteen days, after which a message arrived that she had to go to Mecca for pilgrimage first, after which she was given permission to proceed to Adrianople.

She boarded a boat once more and traveled to the sea-port of Gallipoli. She knew that the point of adoration was the place where her Lord was and not the place she was travelling towards. She tried to find an answer for herself why she needed to go to a previous point of adoration

which was obsolete. She could not find an answer and was unable to understand its wisdom but obeyed it without slightest hesitation as her beloved Lord had instructed her to do. In her poetry about this travel, she made a reference to her age at this point which was forty years. This puts the year of her birth around the year 1825. She says she boarded the boat and sailed via Egypt to the port of Jidda. While she passed the vicinity of Sinai, she remembered Moses and Bahá'u'lláh as the speaker on the Mount. To shorten the narrative, we have eliminated the details of this section of the journey until she reached Mecca. She arrived safe in Mecca in the year 1865 and performed the pilgrimage. Reviewing the records, in 1865 we observe that the pilgrimage of Muslims fell in the month of May which supports the argument that the time was towards the end of spring. After performing her pilgrimage according to Muslim rites, she followed her journey in reverse, attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople. After her pilgrimage, she traveled back to Iran, retracing her initial trip to Istanbul, arriving in Tabriz.

In Tabriz, her sorrows, excitement of pilgrimage and exhilaration caused her to fall sick and pass away at the early age of nearly forty. Some individuals have mentioned that she was poisoned. Her grave is in Tabriz. (Zuhúru'l-Haqq, Vol. xi, p. 413)

From her poems it is evident that she is well versed in the teachings of the Bayán and the expected Promised One of the Bayán: “He Whom God shall make manifest”. An attempt is now made to translate a few different lines of her poems as a sample:

I have made so much stirring in the world,
By which the people of the Bayán would spill my blood.

And

Should he appear in the year Mustaghath, you and me,
Where will be except at the bottom of a grave?

And

O Fitnih, break thy pen and cut short the argument,
It is not befitting to disclose the mysteries.

And

The Parsi speaking beloved hath come,
He appeared with a tongue full of utterances.

6. Princess Shams-i Jahán's Poems; Tablets Revealed in Her Honour

The Princess was endowed with great love for Bahá'u'lláh and she was very much devoted to the Cause of God. Despite her royal heritage, she maintained contact with prominent Bahá'ís. She composed the story of her life in form of a Mathnavi which not only projects historical events but also reveals her deep understanding of the tenets of her beliefs in the Day of God. Her poems demonstrate a clear understanding of the station of Bahá'u'lláh. One can examine these poems in form of Mathnavi in:

- "Tadhkirih-i Shu'aráyi Qarn-i Avval-i Bahá'í, volume III
- Some parts of her poems may be found in Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq, volume iv, pp. 195-198.
- A selection of her poems also appears in Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq Vol. vi, pp. 415-446.

Apart from poems in form of Mathnavi, she has written poems in the form of ghazal. One of the believers that she was in contact with regarding her poems was Nabíl Zarandí.

While this paper focuses on the Tablet of Fitnih (Tests and Tribulations), Bahá'u'lláh revealed several other Tablets in her honour. A few lines from the start of some of these Tablets are provisionally translated by the author of this paper and presented below:

"He is the Life-Giving Spirit wafting over lifeless-bodies

No letters from thee have arrived here lately; However, a letter is being sent to thee. Indeed thou art always remembered without requiring a reminder ...” (Asrar’ul—Athar vol. iv, pp. 437-439) ⁶ (Provisional translation by F.S.)

Again

“In the Name of the Merciful God

O Shams! Hearken thou with the ear of spirit the warbling of the Nightingale of love. Haply that thou mayest be enabled to take a step away from the realm of self and passion ...” (Asrar’ul—Athar vol. iv, pp. 437-439) ⁶ (Provisional translation by F.S.)

And

“He is the Almighty, the Self-Subsisting

This is a Revelation uttering the truth which instilleth in hearts the hidden secrets of God, the All-Encompassing, the Almighty, the Most-Powerful. Within it the spirit calleth aloud by a Word which no ears have ever heard Verily, the Concealed Book hath been manifested in this Ancient Temple. Say, O peoples of the world! Tribulations will come to you from every direction ...” (Asrar’ul—Athar vol. iv, pp. 437-439) ⁶ (Provisional translation by F.S.)

Tablet of Fitnih (Test and Tribulations)

Recipient: The Tablet of Fitnih was addressed to Princess Shams-i Jahán who used Fitnih (Test and Tribulations) as her sobriquet in her poetry. It is plausible to think that there is a relationship between her pen name and the theme of the Tablet. It is also possible to consider that the Tablet with such a theme would have been revealed in her honour regardless of any connection with her pen-name.

Time and Place of Its Revelation: We have no definite information regarding the time and place where the Tablet was revealed. From the tone of the Tablet, its theme is consistent with the major theme of the Revelation extending from the final years of Iraq to early years in Adrianople. Ishrâq Khávâri believes that it was revealed in Baghdád after Bahá'u'lláh's return from Kurdistan. (*Ganj-i Sháyegán*, p. 36)⁷ Fázil Mázandarání believes that it was revealed in Adrianople (*Asrar'ul—Athár*, vol. iv, p. 438). Táherzádeh says: "The Lawh-i-Fitnih (Tablet of the Test) is another of Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic Tablets revealed in Baghdad Some Bahá'í scholars have stated that this Tablet was revealed in Adrianople; they may well be right" (*The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. I., p. 128)⁸

Language: The Tablet is revealed in its entirety in Arabic.

Length: The length of the Tablet is about three pages

Copies of the Tablet: The Tablet was published in Má'idíy-i-Asmání, vol. p. 1429 and also in INBA vol. 81 p. 80.10

Translation into English: The author is not aware of any official (authorized) or provisional translations of this Tablet available at present. The author of this paper has made a provisional translation of the Tablet which has been presented at the end of this paper.

Theme: The single and overarching theme of the Tablet is tests, tribulations and difficulties. The Tablet is generally understood to refer to tests in general when we choose one option among several choices. It also discusses specific tests that people are faced with when Manifestations of God appear. To be more specific, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the tests that the people of the Bayán would face at the time of His open and universal declaration regarding His claim to be the Promised One of the Bayán foretold by the Báb: "He Whom God shall make manifest".

Summary of the Tablet: The following key points are raised in the Tablet:

- A specific test will surely come
- It will separate the people from each other
- Reference to “Mustagháth”
- It will encompass the entire creationw
- It will make pure souls thunderstruck
- Heavens of knowledge and learning will be cleft asunder
- The throne of glory will be shaken
- The concourse of the Spirit in the eternal sanctity will be sore perplexed
- Resplendent suns will be darkened
- Moons will fall down
- Every noble man will be tested
- Holy fire will be quenched
- Water of truth will solidify
- “They who recognized the Splendour of Sinai will faint away”
- The entire earth will be disturbed
- Separation will occur the same as in the past cycles
- This is a mystery
- They will not be able to scrutinize its source
- “The inner eyes of the Unseen will be dazzled”
- “The steps of them who have known God will slip”
- “Soon all servants will be tested and thrown into the fire”

- “The Holy Spirit will be disturbed during such time”
- “The mystery within the mystery will tremble, so will the lofty Láhút, and then the angels around the Seat of God will be frightened.”
- “By God, all will be tested—the heavens, earth, stars, moons ...”
- “The steps of them who have known God will slip”
- “Soon all servants will be tested and thrown into the fire”

Background Information: The theme of Tests appears frequently in several Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh during the period between the years 1860 to 1868. He talks about the appearance of the Calf (false God) and Birds of Night (Bats who cannot withstand the Sun of Reality; therefore, they appear when darkness surrounds us and when the sun no longer shines). The Calf reminds us of a specific occurrence during the time of Moses. Bahá'u'lláh was definitely aware of the mischief of the insincere individuals and their onslaught. Maybe He was trying to forewarn the Bábí community of the repetition of the same events; this time through the rebellion of Mírzá Yaghá and those around him who were his supporters—for further details, refer to the article by Foad Seddigh.(Lights of Irfan, vol. 15, pp. 355-402) ¹¹

Clarification of Specific References

General Comments: As mentioned earlier, the central theme of the Tablet of Fitnih is tests, tribulations and difficulties which will appear at an unspecified time in the future. The Tablet emphasizes various aspects and characteristics of these tribulations. Below, we discuss a few concepts and terminologies which could be of assistance for better understanding of the Tablet. These are briefly stated below:

“Káf and nún”: These terms appear in the following passage from the Tablet: “And it will be a trial such as to make a distinction between káf

and nún.” In the Writings, we come across the combination of these two words. In fact, káf and nún are not words but rather, phonetic scribing of two letters of alphabet in Arabic and Persian very similar to “k” and “n” in English. When káf and nún join together, they become the command word “Kun” meaning “to be” or “to come to existence”. This is the command of God for the world of existence to come into being and therefore it symbolizes Divine action in creation. Noting that creation is also ancient and has no beginning in time, therefore, it may refer to the appearance of the Manifestation of God and a new creation in the spiritual realm. The above phrase which states that between two letters separation will take place and they will be pushed apart might mean that the authority of the manifestation of God who is the representative of God in the realm of creation will be challenged.

The Passage: “... till such time as He will appear once more in the wondrous days promised in the manifestation of His unseen Essence.” In this line, it seems that Bahá’u’lláh refers to His own declaration yet to come. Bahá’u’lláh did not universally and publicly call Himself the Promised One of the Bayán until sometime in Adrianople, though some believers knew very well that He was the Promised One of the Bayán: “Him whom God shall make manifest.” For example, when Mullá Muḥammad-Riḍá-i—Muḥammad—Ábádí read the Ode of the Dove (Qasidih-i Izz-i Varqá’íyyih) he said the author of this Ode is the Promised One of the Bayán (This was around the year 1858). A similar statement was made around the same time by Mullá Aḥmad Azghandí, one of the prominent believers of the Báb. A more subdued declaration took place in the garden of Riḍván according to the statement of the Guardian:

“Of the exact circumstances attending that epoch-making Declaration we, alas, are but scantily informed. The words Bahá’u’lláh actually uttered on that occasion, the manner of His Declaration, the reaction it produced, its impact on Mirzá Yahyá, the identity of those who were privileged to hear Him, are shrouded in an obscurity which future historians will find it difficult to penetrate.” (GPB 152)

The open and universal declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's claim was made around the second year after His arrival in Adrianople when He revealed Surih-i Amr and asked Mírzá Áqá Ján to read it to Mírzá Yahyá Azal and to request an answer from him. About one year after the revelation of this important Tablet, the "Most Great Separation" occurred the date of which is generally taken as 10 March 1866.¹² Believers faced the dilemma of choosing between Bahá'u'lláh or Mírzá Yahyá Azal. In this regard, the Guardian has written the following:

"This supreme crisis Bahá'u'lláh Himself designated as the Ayyám-i-Shidád (Days of Stress), during which "the most grievous veil" was torn asunder, and the "most great separation" was irrevocably effected. It immensely gratified and emboldened its external enemies, both civil and ecclesiastical, played into their hands, and evoked their unconcealed derision. It perplexed and confused the friends and supporters of Bahá'u'lláh, and seriously damaged the prestige of the Faith in the eyes of its western admirers." (GBP 163)

Since at this time we do not have a clear evidence regarding the time of the revelation of this Tablet, this passage may indicate that the Tablet was in fact revealed in Baghdád when Princess Shams-i Jahán was visiting there and the passage might refer to the Declaration at the Garden of Ridván.

The Nature of Trial: "Say, this is a trial through which the thrones of glory will be shaken, the inhabitants of the exalted Tabernacle overturned, and the concourse of the Spirit in the eternal sanctity will be sore perplexed." Bahá'u'lláh delayed the universal declaration of His mission for nearly fifteen years. One of the reasons for the delay could possibly be the fact that the general population of the Bábí community particularly its leaders at the time were not ready yet for such an announcement. In particular the jealousy and monstrous behavior of Mírzá Yahyá was a great concern to Bahá'u'lláh, as the Guardian has written:

“... the monstrous behavior of Mírzá Yahyá,” which “brought in its wake a period of travail which left its mark on the fortunes of the Faith for no less than half a century. . . . It had been brewing ever since the early days of Bahá’u’lláh’s sojourn in Baghdad, was temporarily suppressed by the creative forces which, under His as yet unproclaimed leadership, reanimated a disintegrating community, and finally broke out, in all its violence, in the years immediately preceding the proclamation of His Message.” (GPB 163)

Therefore, Bahá’u’lláh chose to nurture those who showed some capacity. As soon as He left Baghdád, He sent such teachers as Nabíl-i A’zam (Mullá Muḥammad-i Zarandí), Ismu’lláhu’l-Muníb and Aḥmad Yazdí to Iran to inform the people of the Bayán, with utmost wisdom, of the news of the appearance of “He Whom God shall make manifest” with specific instructions to avoid arguments with trouble makers and to disclose His station only to those who showed spiritual capacity. The main concern of Bahá’u’lláh at this phase of the announcement of His station was to maintain the unity and integrity in the Bábí community until such time when a large number of believers had already accepted His message and then making a public and universal declaration. Ultimately, a significant majority of the Bábí community accepted His station as the Promised One of the Bayán. However, Mírzá Yahyá Azal and some learned in the Bayán remained defiant and stood up in revolt. Mírzá Yahyá’s machinations caused the greatest sufferings and damage to Faith which were far greater than the martyrdom of the Báb as has been described by the Gurdian. It seems that the above passage refers to such challenges.

The year of Mustagháth: Mustagháth is an Arabic word; more specifically it is one of the names and attributes of God that means: “He Whose aid is invoked by all men.” The reference to Mustagháth has also appeared in the Bayán that became a stumbling block and test for some Bábís in the years following the martyrdom of the Báb. At times it has appeared as: “The year of Mustagháth” in the Bayán referring to

the time of the appearance of the Promised One of the Bayán. Some individuals and particularly those who followed Mírzá Yahyá Azal argued that the numerical value of “Mustagháth”, on the basis of Abjad system of numerology, was 2001 and therefore they promoted the idea that the Promised One should appear in the year 2001 after the appearance of the Báb. They clung to this argument while disregarded other references to the time of the appearance of the Promised One which indicated that it would be imminent such as the Year Nine or Nineteen. Even the Báb promised to one of the Letters of the Living that he would live long enough to see the Promised One during his life—time. Furthermore, it should be noted that the Báb did not state that the promised one would appear in the year of Mustagháth, rather the year of His coming would not exceed the year of Mustagháth. Even if it would be interpreted that way, it is only an upper limit and would not contradict His appearance in the Year Nine, Nineteen, etc. The Báb also made it clear that the time of the appearance of the Promised One of the Bayán was entirely in the hands of God. The following quote from the Bayan should suffice (Váhid six, chapter 3; VI:3):

“Concerning the appearance of Him Whom God shall manifest, God knoweth in what limit of years He will manifest Him; but His advent is to be expected from the beginning of the Revelation until the number of Váhid (19) for in each year the announcement of the Faith may occur at any moment.” (Provisional Translation by FS)

The following explanation in the Dawn-Breakers sheds more light on the subject:

“He (the Bab) bestowed on him the name Dayyán and revealed in his honour the Lawh-i-Hurúfát (literally means letters) in which He made the following statement: “Had the Point of the Bayán no other testimony with which to establish His truth, this were sufficient—that He revealed a Tablet such as this, a Tablet such as no amount of learning could produce.”

The people of the Bayán, who utterly misconceived the purpose underlying that Tablet, thought it to be a mere exposition of the science of Jafr. When, at a later time, in the early years of Bahá'u'lláh's incarceration in the prison city of Akká, Jináb-i-Muballigh made, from Shiráz, his request that He unravel the mysteries of that Tablet, there was revealed from His pen an explanation which they who misconceived the words of the Báb might do well to ponder. Bahá'u'lláh adduced from the statements of the Báb irrefutable evidence proving that the appearance of the Man-Yuzhiruhu'llah must needs occur no less than nineteen years after the Declaration of the Báb. The mystery of the Mustagháth had long baffled the most searching minds among the people of the Bayán and had proved an unsurmountable obstacle to their recognition of the promised One. The Báb had Himself in that Tablet unravelled that mystery; no one, however, was able to understand the explanation which He had given. It was left to Bahá'u'lláh to unveil it to the eyes of all men.” (The Dawn-Breakers p. 304, Chap 17)

For further reading on this subject refer to the endnote number 13.

Now, that we have considered briefly the background information regarding the “The year of Mustagháth”, we may examine the statement of Bahá'u'lláh in the above passage in which He refers to such combination of words. Firstly, by mentioning “Mustagháth” in this Tablet, we could possibly conclude that He wanted to connect reference to Mustagháth with the coming of test and tribulations. Secondly, we may infer that He is trying to disassociate it from the notion of being a reference to a specific year and to emphasise another meaning for it—a meaning which interprets the term as the year that God would respond to those who asked for assistance. This could refer to the open and universal declaration of Bahá'u'lláh in Adrianople—a time when Bahá'u'lláh came to the assistance of the Bábí Community who had suffered at the hands of some of its learned and those who supported Mírzá Yahyá Azal.

Tear asunder mysteries: “Say, this is such a trial that would dismay people, astound minds, tear mysteries asunder, and then would make pure souls to be thunderstruck.” The Báb has made extensive use of the word “mystery” in His Writings. It seems finally, after the public declaration Bahá’u’lláh’s claim, the mystery spoken by the Báb would become known to the people of the Bayán and they will be thunderstruck.

Falling the sun, moon and stars: “Say, this is a trial from which resplendent suns will be darkened, the moons of the realm above will fall down, and then the stars of knowledge in the heavens of the decree of God will fall.” Darkening of the sun and falling of the moon and stars of knowledge have particular meanings. Their physical occurrence cannot be entertained as such interpretation is not consonant with physical observation and rational thought. Bahá’u’lláh has interpreted a variety of meanings for such references. For example, the sun, moon and stars may be taken as the learned that lose their position of authority when a new manifestation of God appears. In this way, for example, such learned leaders of religion are like a sun which darkens. Bahá’u’lláh says:

“And now, concerning His words — “The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give light, and the stars shall fall from heaven.” By the terms “sun” and “moon,” mentioned in the writings of the Prophets of God, is not meant solely the sun and moon of the visible universe. Nay rather, manifold are the meanings they have intended for these terms. In every instance they have attached to them a particular significance. In another sense, by these terms is intended the divines of the former Dispensation, who live in the days of the subsequent Revelations, and who hold the reins of religion in their grasp. If these divines be illumined by the light of the latter Revelation, they will be acceptable unto God, and will shine with a light everlasting. Otherwise, they will be declared as darkened, even though to outward seeming they be leaders of men, inasmuch as belief and unbelief, guidance and error, felicity and misery, light and darkness, are all dependent upon the sanction of Him Who is the Day-star of Truth. Whosoever among the divines of every age receiveth,

in the Day of Reckoning, the testimony of faith from the Source of true knowledge, he verily becometh the recipient of learning, of divine favour, and of the light of true understanding. Otherwise, he is branded as guilty of folly, denial, blasphemy, and oppression.” (KI 32-37)

Every noble man will be tested: “This is a trial by which every noble man will be tested, followed by all pure servants of God, the angels who are nigh unto God, and then the dwellers of the Supreme Concourse.” In this passage Bahá’u’lláh declares that devoted believers are not spared from tests. The term angels refer to pure souls and devoted servants of God, neither of which are exempt from tests.

Láhút: “By God, the Holy Spirit will be disturbed during such time, the light of fellowship will be dimmed, the mystery within the mystery will tremble, so will the lofty Láhút, and then the angels around the Seat of God will be frightened.” Láhút is one of the worlds of God. Before we discuss its meaning and significance, we should emphasize that the worlds of God are infinite. Bahá’u’lláh says: “As to thy question concerning the worlds of God. Know thou of a truth that the worlds of God are countless in their number, and infinite in their range. None can reckon or comprehend them except God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.” (GWB 151) and (TB 187)

In the Seven Valleys, Bahá’u’lláh acknowledges that the worlds of God are infinite. However, He is explicitly reciting how some refer to them and He names a few of them:

“Infer, then, from this the differences among the worlds. Though the worlds of God be infinite, yet some refer to them as four: the world of time, which hath both a beginning and an end; the world of duration, which hath a beginning but whose end is not apparent; the world of primordial reality, whose beginning is not to be seen but which is known to have an end; and the world of eternity, of which neither the beginning nor the end is visible. Although there are many differing statements as to these points, to recount them in detail would result in weariness.

Thus, some have said that the world of primordial reality hath neither beginning nor end, and have equated the world of eternity with the invisible, inaccessible, and unknowable Essence. Others have called these the worlds of the Heavenly Court, of the Celestial Dominion, of the Divine Kingdom, and of Mortal Existence.” (Call of the Divine Beloved – Seven Valleys, pp. 34-35)¹⁴

Bahá'u'lláh specifically in the Tablet of “All Foods” has made references to five worlds which are: Násút, Malakút, Jabarút, Láhút and Háhút. Further details are presented in the endnotes.¹⁵

Moon and stars will be tested: “By God, all will be tested—the heavens, earth, stars, moons...” It is obvious that earth, stars and moon belong to the material realm and cannot exercise choices in their existence. As a result, tests have no meaning for them. This is similar to the Qur’anic verse: “The sun and the moon are made to give account.” (Ar’rahman 55:5). Because, the sun and moon cannot give account at the “Time of the End” like humans would, it appears that there must be another meaning for the above statements. Should we refer to the explanation of Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i Iqán, we would readily understand that they refer to the special people in the firmament of the Bayán. At a specific time, such individuals are tested. We refer the reader to the explanation regarding falling of sun, moon and stars which was given earlier.

Luqmán admonished his son: “O my son! Verily, God will bring everything to light, though it were but the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, and hidden in a rock or in the heavens or in the earth; for God is the Subtle, informed of all.” Luqmán is a wise man or a sage known for his wisdom with many words of wisdom attributed to him. In the Qur’án there is a surih by this name. The above verse from the Qur’án quoted in the Tablet is in this surih; Luqmán: 31:16. It simply points to the insight and power of God.

Friend: "... and this is the mystery of that which had been revealed to the First Friend from the realm of the revelation of God, the Exalted, the All-Knowing, the All-Known." Friend or "Friend of God" in the first instance is the title of Prophet Muḥammad. According to Islamic sources, this title was given to Him by God on the night He ascended to Heaven in order to reach the presence of God. On the other hand, Bahá'u'lláh has called the Báb "My Beloved". The words "Lover" and "Beloved" or "Ḥabīb and Maḥbúb" have been used by Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb to refer to each other; However, in the case of the Báb's reference to the object of His "love" is in the form of allusions only.

Time of Severe Tests or "Ayyám-i Shidád": This refers to a time which started with the uprising and the open revolt of Mírzá Yaḥyá in Adrianople and the rejection by some eminent Bábís of the claims of Bahá'u'lláh. It continued until His passing and in the early years of the activities of the Covenant-Breakers after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. Refer to the explanation given for one of the passages given above. It has been mentioned in the Tablet that it might not have any end.

Most Great Announcement: "Verily, should I mention this Most Great Announcement, its strong trials and tests from this time until eternity, by God, its mention could not be exhausted and its description could not be completed, even if thousands of oceans of ink were utilised for its writing." The "Most Great Announcement" is a prophecy in the Qur'án. It appears in surih An'Naba 78:2. All Islamic scholars missed its significance and interpreted it in a way other than its true meaning. Both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh have referred to themselves as the "Most Great Announcement."

His Concern: "I swear by God and by Him who hath manifested this Ancient Beauty in His Essence for His Essence and through His Essence! Shouldst He remove the veils which cover that which is hidden from the eyes of all men, the supports of the Throne of God would tremble, those who carry the Throne would become disturbed,

and their beings would become disintegrated.” “This Ancient Beauty” is no other person than Bahá’u’lláh Himself. This passage seems to support what was said before that His universal and open declaration would cause the supports of the religion of God in the Bábí community to tremble and bring about a much feared revolt and disturbance and would cause the Bábí community to disintegrate. Through His timely announcement of His station, He was able to safeguard the unity of the Bábí community and guide the ark of God to safety, protecting it from the gale-storms engulfing it.

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

The author of this paper wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Nabil Seddigh in preparation of the paper.

NOTES

- 1 Zuhúru'l-Haqq, vol. iv, written by Asadu'lláh Fáḍil Mázararání, edited by Moojan Momen, published by Baha'i Verlag, Germany-Hofheim, 168 BE, 2011.
- 2 The Dawn-Breakers, Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation, Translated and Edited by Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 1970.
- 3 Muḥaḍirát, vol. I-II, written by 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishraq Khavari, published (reprinted) by Baha'i Verlag, Germany-Hofheim, 150 BE, 1994.
- 4 Zuhúru'l-Haqq Vol. vi, written by Asadu'lláh Fáḍil Mázararání – personal copy and also available in digital print in the following web site: <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh6/tzh6.htm>
- 5 Taḍhkirih-i Shu'arayi Qarn-i Avval-i Bahá'í, volume III, compiled by Dkukayi Bayḍay-i
- 6 Asráru'l Áthár vol. iv, written by Asadu'lláh Fáḍil Mázararání, published by Mu'assisih Milli Matbu't Amri, Tíhrán, 129 BE
- 7 Ganj-i Sháyegán, written by 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishraq Khavari, published by Mu'assisih Milli Matbu't Amri, Tíhrán, 124 Badi
- 8 The Revelation of Baha'u'llah vol. I, Adib Taherzadeh, George Ronald Publisher, Oxford, 1974.
- 9 Má'idí-i-Asmání, vol. 4, written by 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishraq Khavari, published by Mu'assisih Milli Matbu't Amri, Tíhrán, 124 Badi
- 10 Iranian Bahá'í National Archives (INBA) vol. 81, p. 80.
- 11 Tablet of Patience: Declaration of Baha'u'llah and Selected Topics by Foad Seddigh in: Lights of Irfan, vol. 15, pp. 355-402.
- 12 La'álí-i Maknúnih (Sharḥ-i-Lawḥ-i-Mubárah-i Aḥmad-i-Fársí) (Hidden Pearl- A Commentary on the Persian Tablet of Ahmad) Written by Foad Seddigh, published by Mir'at, New Delhi, 2017—Refer to pp. 319-321.
- 13 Refer to pages 187 to 191, in particular page 191 in:
Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, written by Dr. Nader Saiedi, Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000.
Also refer to pages 601 to 605 in:
Making the Crooked Straight, written by Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, and Ulrich Gollmer, published by George Ronald Publisher, 2000.

14 The Call of the Divine Beloved, Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, 2018.

15 Adib Taherzadeh writes in *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. I, pp. 58-59:

Likewise, the spiritual worlds of God mentioned in this Tablet (Tablet of Kullu't-Ta'am or Tablet of All Food) are of different degrees:

Háhút: The world of Háhút is described by Bahá'u'lláh as the Heaven of Oneness, the realm of the Divine Being, the imperishable Essence, a realm so exalted that even the Manifestations of God are unable to understand it. Bahá'u'lláh has written in one of His Tablets: "From time immemorial, He, the Divine Being, hath been veiled in the ineffable sanctity of His exalted Self, and will everlastingly continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of His unknowable Essence... Ten thousand Prophets, each a Moses, are thunderstruck upon the Sinai of their search at God's forbidding voice, 'Thou shalt never behold Me!'; whilst a myriad Messengers, each as great as Jesus, stand dismayed upon their heavenly thrones by the interdiction 'Mine Essence thou shalt never apprehend'!"

Láhút: The next is the world of Láhút which is the plane of Divinity, the Heavenly Court. In the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh it appears that the realm of Láhút is perhaps the world of God in relation to His Manifestations and Chosen Ones. Immersed in the ocean of His Presence, they claim no station for Themselves on this plane and are as utter nothingness in relation to Him. In this realm no one is identified with God and the designation 'He alone, and no one else beside Him, is God' becomes manifest here.

Jabarút: Yet another spiritual world which Bahá'u'lláh describes in this Tablet is that of Jabarút, the All-Highest Dominion. The station of those who abide therein is closely identified with God, insofar as they manifest all the attributes of God, speak with His voice and are united with Him. This world appears to be the realm in which God's Chosen Ones, in relation to created things, are invested with His authority.

In the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh there are many statements concerning the dual station of the Manifestations of God and His Chosen Ones. In relation to God, these Holy Souls appear as utter nothingness, but in relation to the world of creation They are endowed with all the attributes of God and are closely identified with Him.....

Malakút: Another plane in the spiritual worlds of God is that of Malakút, the Kingdom of God, often referred to by the Prophets of the past. In the Tablet of Kullu't-Ta'am, Bahá'u'lláh has described it as the Heaven of Justice.

Násút: Apart from these four spiritual worlds, Bahá'u'lláh also refers in this Tablet to the realm of Násút — this mortal world — which He describes as the Heaven of Bounty. In many of His Tablets He has confirmed that both the human world and Divine Revelation have come into being through the bounty of God alone, and that if His bounty were to be replaced for one moment by the operation of His justice, the whole of creation would cease to exist.

Tablet of Fitnih From Bahá'u'lláh

A Provisional Translation by
Foad Seddigh

Await thou, O everlasting Fitnih, the trials of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting! Verily, it will surely come to you in truth, indeed you are witnessing the start of its coming to you. And it will be a trial such as to make a distinction between káf and nún and one that would differentiate all peoples from now till such time as He will appear once more in the wondrous days promised in the manifestation of His unseen Essence and the reality of Its perpetual existence in the year of Mustagháth. This matter is verily nothing but the truth and will surely come to pass.

Verily, this is a kind of trial which encompasseth the entire creation whether in the seen or unseen realms. Say, this is such a trial that would dismay people, astound minds, tear mysteries asunder, and then would make pure souls to be thunderstruck. Say, this is a trial in which the heavens of knowledge and learning will become cleft asunder, the fields of might and power will be split apart and the mountains of glory will become crushed to dust. Say, this is a trial through which the thrones of glory will be shaken, the inhabitants of the exalted Tabernacle overturned, and the concourse of the Spirit in the eternal sanctity will be sore perplexed.

Say, this is a trial from which resplendent suns will be darkened, the moons of the realm above will fall down, and then the stars of knowledge in the heavens of the decree of God will fall. Say, this is a trial by which God will test every atom, all the inhabitants of earth and the heavens, and then the entire universe. This is a trial by which every noble man will be tested, followed by all pure servants of God, the angels who are nigh unto God, and then the dwellers of the Supreme Concourse. Say, this is a trial by which will be tested all those who claim to be cherishing love and belief in God, the Omniscient, the

Exalted, the Beloved, and in this the Glorious, the Exalted, the Best-Beloved Beauty.

Say, it is a trial through which the holy fire will be quenched, the water of truth will solidify, trees of light will be stirred and they who recognized the Splendour of Sinai will faint away. Say, this is a trial which will encompass every submissive man who hath known God, every mature and wise man, every organizer and man of knowledge, every trusted angel and every Prophet who hath been sent. Say, this is a trial through which the entire earth will be disturbed, all peoples will be tested and some will be differentiated from others—even to a more severe extent than the difference between earth and heaven.

Exalted be God! Who would make such irrevocable trials to appear by the agency of which separation will take place as it did during the time of all the Prophets and Messengers and before them during such ages which the knowledge of the learned encompass not. The separation will occur as it did during other times. This is a mystery which is well preserved in the treasure houses of holiness; no one knoweth this except those who are given sharp vision that is hidden by God from the eyes of men; this is derived from a vision such that should the peoples of the realms of truth and the inhabitants of exalted stations gain its knowledge, they would cry out in their own selves, tremble in their being and would not be able to scrutinize its source.

I swear by God that verily, through this trial the inner eyes of the Unseen will be dazzled, the eyes of holy and spiritual beings will be struck by lightning, and then the lights of the lordly moons in the heaven of revelation will be dimmed. Say, by God! In this trial, the steps of them who have known God will slip—those who have known God by God and those who are beholding the mysteries of revelation and creation with keen eyes at all times. Say, this is the kind of trial from which the cover of those who are well wrapped will be torn apart, thereby exposing all preserved mysteries. Say, by God! Soon all servants will be tested and thrown into the fire, even those to whom

never occurred, even to the slightest extent—as small as an atom—the possibility of worshipping anyone other than God.

Say, by God, in this trial the realities of those who have never been heedless of God and His Cause will be tested in less than the twinkling of an eye—these are the people who were remembering God—noting such consideration then it would be obvious that those who did not recognize this Cause in which all exalted manifestations are dumbfounded to an extent that an ant knoweth the fire must be tested more severely; such people are considered as the essence of waywardness before God.

By the One True God, in this trial the steps of all those who have known God, from the inhabitants of the Supreme Concourse, would slip before their soul would become aware, their inner hearts could understand or would be able to differentiate the essence of their knowledge with highest gems of mindfulness. After they realize that which they have missed, then they would cry out within their inner hearts, shout within their essence of being, and then would weep, wail and moan; even should the inhabitants of heavens and the earth from the realm of spirit and eternity accompany them they would like to abandon them so that they would not be veiled from this Exalted Beauty.

By God, the Holy Spirit will be disturbed during such time, the light of fellowship will be dimmed, the mystery within the mystery will tremble, so will the lofty Láhút, and then the angels around the Seat of God will be frightened. By God, in this trial, moving winds will be tested while they blow, flowing waters will be tested while being drunk, and fire will be tested while angrily blazing. By God, all will be tested—the heavens, earth, stars, moons—and then so will the seas with their boats, waves, splashes, and what is placed in them by the wonders of the creation of God, the Omniscient, the All-Subsisting be tested.

I swear by God, all things will be tested with all things towards all things through the essence of things; the atoms of the air are not

excluded, and this is the mystery of that which had been revealed to the First Friend from the realm of the revelation of God, the Exalted, the All-Knowing, the All-Known. And it is this verse according to which Luqmán admonished his son: “O my son! Verily, God will bring everything to light, though it were but the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, and hidden in a rock or in the heavens or in the earth; for God is the Subtle, informed of all.” as God witnesseth every single act they will be doing. I swear by God! Should ye look upon the lamp which sheddeth light every night before you, ye would behold that it is tested the moment it is enkindled, then would the moth that circulateth around it be tested, and so also would the light shed from it that encompasseth its surroundings be tested.

I swear by God that the trials would test, touchstones would find impurities, sieves would sift, and every single hair would be split into a thousand parts and each piece would be tested. All such occurrences would result from this Great Trial which would appear from the direction of the All-Encompassing, the Ancient of Days. Its winds have already started to blow softly, it will certainly come to pass during the Time of Severe Tests; it will encompass all cities, and everyone in such places will cry for help.

I swear by God and by Him who hath manifested this Ancient Beauty in His Essence for His Essence and through His Essence! Shouldst He remove the veils which cover that which is hidden from the eyes of all men, the supports of the Throne of God would tremble, those who carry the Throne would become disturbed, and their beings would become disintegrated. Verily, should I mention this Most Great Announcement, its strong trials and tests from this time until eternity, by God, its mention could not be exhausted and its description could not be completed, even if thousands of oceans of ink were utilised for its writing.

IN MEMORIAM



Manuchehr Derakhshani

1932-2025

Dr. Manuchehr Derakhshani served for many years on the Board of Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund and was instrumental in coordinating and arranging the Irfan Colloquia held at Louhelen and Bosch Baha'í Schools.

Manuchehr Derakhshani was born on the 15th of February 1932 in Tehran, Iran, to Farahangiz Iman and Habibu'lláh Derakhshani. From a very young age, he witnessed his parents' devotion to the Faith and their willingness to obey the directives of the Beloved Guardian. In 1942, the family moved to Aligúdarz to fulfill a goal of the Forty-Five Month Plan. Later, after some years back in Tehran, they pioneered to Imámzadih Qásim, a suburb of Tehran, to help form the Local Spiritual Assembly.

As a young man he studied English literature and spent some time in Edinburgh, Scotland where he studied at the university in 1951-52. In 1958, responding to the Guardian's call for pioneers during the 10-Year Crusade, he moved with his wife, Mahvash Ala'i, and daughter to Morocco. After the passing of his wife Mahvash in 1966, he decided to continue his education in the United States. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education in 1971, a Master's Degree in Psychology in 1973, and a Ph.D in Educational Psychology in 1976.

In 1973 he married Rezvan Mohragi. Together, they decided to move back to Iran, where he worked as Research and Development Director at the National Institute of Psychology as well as Professor at various universities. Plans to remain in Iran were disrupted by the revolution in 1979. They were forced to return to the United States. Within a few months of his arrival, he was

called by the National Spiritual Assembly to start the office of Persian American Affairs to help Iranian refugees integrate into the American community. The office was also charged eventually with assisting the displaced families and individuals through all the administrative and emotional hurdles of refugee resettlement. Manuchehr Derakhshani, lovingly called Dr. D. by his staff and others around the National Center, served as Director of the Office for the next 28 years. He devoted long hours in service of the friends who had been displaced because of their faith during a particularly difficult time of the Iranian Baha'is.

In addition to his work at the National Baha'i Center, Dr. Derakhshani served as liaison for the Universal House of Justice with the Persian Literature Review Panel for 35 years, continuing this work beyond his retirement. His erudition in the sacred writings of the Faith as well as his excellent mastery of Arabic, Persian, and English made him a remarkable asset to the Review Panel. These same skills were extremely valuable in the many boards of directors of scholarly organizations on which he served, such as the Association of Friends of Persian Culture, the Wilmette Institute, and the Irfan Colloquium among others.

Manuchehr Derakhshani dedicated his life to serving the Baha'i Faith in myriad ways, as a pioneer, as a scholarly resource, as an administrator, and as a mediator and councilor. After his passing, many people commented on his humility, generosity, kindness, courtesy, and humor.



Ian Kluge

1948-2023

Ian Kluge was an active and enthusiastic participant in the Irfan Colloquium gatherings from 2002-2016. His presence will be missed by all who knew him. He had wide-ranging interests in philosophical traditions and the intellectual history of religious thought. He published some 27 papers in the *Lights of Irfan* volumes, two of which he co-authored with Wolfgang Klebel. The topics these papers covered include Neoplatonism, Nietzsche, Ontology, minimalism, relativism, ethics, freedom, Aristotelianism, meta-history, New Atheism, and many others. Some of the topics that he explored had previously received very little scholarly attention. These papers were all substantial—for example, his two-part article on neo-Platonism numbered some 142 pages. He exhaustively mined the Baha’i writings for relevant passages to the topics he was researching, and at the same time read widely in the scholarship of the philosophical traditions that he analyzed.

Ian Kluge was a wonderful lecturer, and his talks were always engaging and entertaining, no doubt a result of the many years he spent as a seasoned and sage-like school teacher. He never read from his papers and had a particular talent for taking complex ideas and making them accessible to non-specialists. Irfan Colloquium participants will remember and appreciate how he generously brought copies of his papers with him and distributed them to his audience. He was most approachable, always encouraging people to ask questions during his talks, and if people wanted to continue their discussions with him after the colloquium, he invited further dialog, having shared his email address and contact information before he even started his talk.

His legacy remains enshrined in his papers available to read in the *Lights of Irfan* volumes.

—Sholeh Quinn



The 'Irfán Colloquia, started in 1993, have since been held annually in North America and Europe and conducted in English, Persian and German. The aim and purpose of the 'Irfán activities are to foster systematic studies of the scriptures and theology of the world religions from a Bahá'í perspective and to promote scholarly studies in the sacred writings, verities, and fundamental principles of the belief system of the Bahá'í Faith.

For more information on the 'Irfan Colloquia and its publications,
visit www.irfancolloquia.org