

# Lights of 'Irfán



Papers Presented  
at the 'Irfán Colloquia  
and Seminars

Book Ten

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Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

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'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Ten



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Lights of 'Irfán: Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs  
Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars

Book Ten

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*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.*

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh



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## Preface

*Promotion of science and spiritual knowledge (ʻIrfán)  
is a duty and an obligation for each and every Bahá'í.\**

ʻAbdu'l-Bahá

The organization of the annual sessions of the ʻIrfán Colloquia and the publication of the successive volumes of *The Lights of ʻIrfán*, first initiated fifteen years ago, are some attempts towards the fulfillment of this spiritual obligation exhorted by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá. Eighty five sessions of the ʻIrfán Colloquia have, so far, been organized in North America and Europe and twenty five volumes of the collections of the research papers, in English, German and Persian, presented at various sessions of the colloquia have been published. Furthermore, ʻIrfán publications include over ninety booklets containing the abstracts of all of the presented research papers and fifteen booklets of occasional research papers as well as guidebooks for the study of the scriptures.

The aim of *The Lights of ʻIrfán* is publishing scholarly studies in a variety of areas including the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í belief system, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, the scriptures of other religions, as well as the interface between the Bahá'í Faith and current intellectual and religious trends in the world, and to address the Bahá'í perspective of major issues and challenges faced by human society.

In 2008 ʻIrfán Colloquia celebrated the centenary of the publication of *Some Answered Questions* of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá', hereinafter referred to as SAQ, by inviting researchers to present papers and commentaries at the ʻIrfán Colloquia on different subjects which were addressed in that book. A number of those papers are published in the present volume. Laura Clifford Barney-Dreyfus was instrumental in raising most of the questions that were answered by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá. She undertook to compile those answers, organize them in the form of a book and publish them in 1908. A biographical sketch of

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\* Translated from Compilation on Bahá'í Education (in Persian), p 38.



Laura Barney-Dreyfus, mostly based on information from primary sources, is published in the present volume.

“A Philosophical Perspective of Some Answered Questions” is an attempt to identify and examine the philosophical positions explicitly embedded in SAQ, and to point out the philosophical foundations of the Bahá’í teachings. It further tries to specify those philosophical views with which the position taken in SAQ has the greatest natural affinity.

A number of chapters in SAQ are devoted to the questions related to Biblical prophecies and various topics and verses in the Bible. One of those topics is explored in the article on “Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.” This article also considers the general phenomenon of covenant-breaking in the Bahá’í Faith and discusses a possible definition of this phenomenon.

Another subject covered in SAQ is presented in the article on “Methods and Qualities of the Seekers of Reality.” This subject is one of the fundamental principles of the Bahá’í belief system. It is elaborated on in light of the guidance given in the Bahá’í Scriptures on the necessity of, and conditions for, the successful search for truth.

The article on “The Bahá’í Worldview on Unity of Religion” is an attempt to present the relationship between the “Manifestations of God” (prophets) and the principle of “progressive revelation” (successive appearance of revealed religions). This is one of the essential teachings of the Bahá’í Faith and it is dealt with in several chapters of SAQ. The intent of this article is to explore the Bahá’í “paradigm” of the unity of religions and its role and function in the advancement of civilization.

“In the Heart of All Things” is the title of an article dealing with the idea of the heart being the site where the spiritual and the physical meet. There are, in common use, two distinct meanings for the concept of “heart.” One is the physical heart and the other is a metaphorical concept of the heart. This article explores the distinction between these two concepts and then explains the usage of these two concepts in the Bahá’í scriptures and reaches the conclusion that the heart is the organ (or the instrument) for spiritual experiences.

A unique explanation of the issue of creation versus evolution that was given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, at the beginning of the twentieth century, and published in this book, is elaborated

on in the article entitled “**Man is Man: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Human Evolution.**” Scientific research and discoveries since that time have increasingly supported the validity of the solution presented in this book.

One of the themes expounded in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Wisdom (*Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat*) is the way in which philosophical wisdom is ultimately dependent on revealed religion and “the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets.” The article entitled “**Further Comments on a Passage of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat**” demonstrates that ancient records and modern scholarship provide an enormous amount of information about a possible transmission of ideas from Eastern religions into Greek philosophical thought.

The section on **Elucidations** opens with a clarifying article by Mr. Ali Nakhjavani on the **Ministry of the Universal House of Justice**. This article provides well-documented answers and explanations of a series of questions and issues related to the ministry of the Universal House of Justice in the absence of the Guardian, such as the timing of its election, the limits of the sphere of its jurisdiction, and the wide range of responsibilities and enactments the Universal House of Justice.

The above topic is also elucidated in the “**Comments on the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice**” issued by the Universal House of Justice.

The taxonomy of the Bahá’í sacred texts, which is the basis of textual studies and documentation, is clarified in the letter of the Universal House of Justice on “**The Classification of the Bahá’í Sacred Texts**” that differentiates between various categories of the Writings by the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith.

A recently issued letter by the Universal House of Justice on the **Promotion and Development of Bahá’í Scholarly Activities** completes the section on **Elucidations**. This letter provides welcome support and reinforcement for the activities and services of the ‘Irfán Colloquium and its publications.

Starting with Book Six we have adopted two changes in the ‘Irfán Colloquia’s style guide. All “authoritative” publications are cited by an abbreviation; see Appendix I, “**Bibliography of the Bahá’í Writings and Their Abbreviations Used in This Book.**” Second, the Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from the Sacred Writings (not including statements

by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers in this volume present the views and understandings of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. The writing styles and scholarly approaches are, therefore, different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the authors' last names.

Iraj Ayman  
Chicago May 2009

# Further Comments on a Passage of the *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*

Amin Egea

## Introduction

One of the themes expounded in the *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat* – a Tablet of the ‘Akká period revealed in honour of Nabíl-i-Akbar – is the way in which philosophical wisdom is ultimately dependent on revealed religion. Bahá’u’lláh states:

*The sages aforesaid acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries. Men quaffed the crystal, living waters of Their utterance, while others satisfied themselves with the dregs. Everyone receiveth a portion according to his measure. Verily He is the Equitable, the Wise.*

Furthermore, Bahá’u’lláh adds that “the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets”. This principle is illustrated with some examples from well-known figures of classical philosophy:

*Empedocles, who distinguished himself in philosophy, was a contemporary of David, while Pythagoras lived in the days of Solomon, son of David, and acquired Wisdom from the treasury of prophethood. It is he who claimed to have heard the whispering sound of the heavens and to have attained the station of the angels. In truth thy Lord will clearly set forth all things, if He pleaseth. Verily, He is the Wise, the All-Pervading.*

*Consider Hippocrates, the physician. He was one of the eminent philosophers who believed in God and acknowledged His sovereignty. After him came Socrates who was indeed wise, accomplished and righteous. He practised self-denial, repressed his appetites for selfish desires and turned away from material pleasures. He withdrew to the mountains*

*where he dwelt in a cave. He dissuaded men from worshipping idols and taught them the way of God, the Lord of Mercy, until the ignorant rose up against him. They arrested him and put him to death in prison. Thus relateth to thee this swift-moving Pen. What a penetrating vision into philosophy this eminent man had! He is the most distinguished of all philosophers and was highly versed in wisdom. We testify that he is one of the heroes in this field and an outstanding champion dedicated unto it. He had a profound knowledge of such sciences as were current amongst men as well as of those which were veiled from their minds. Methinks he drank one draught when the Most Great Ocean overflowed with gleaming and life-giving waters. He it is who perceived a unique, a tempered, and a pervasive nature in things, bearing the closest likeness to the human spirit, and he discovered this nature to be distinct from the substance of things in their refined form. He hath a special pronouncement on this weighty theme. Wert thou to ask from the worldly wise of this generation about this exposition, thou wouldst witness their incapacity to grasp it. Verily, thy Lord speaketh the truth but most people comprehend not.*

*After Socrates came the divine Plato who was a pupil of the former and occupied the chair of philosophy as his successor. He acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs which pervade all that hath been and shall be. Then came Aristotle, the well-known man of knowledge. He it is who discovered the power of gaseous matter. These men who stand out as leaders of the people and are pre-eminent among them, one and all acknowledged their belief in the immortal Being Who holdeth in His grasp the reins of all sciences.<sup>1</sup>*

Nabíl-i-Akbar was probably not unfamiliar with this correlation between ancient Greek philosophy and the Jewish religion. In fact, as Bahá'u'lláh states, He is following “some accounts of the sages”, accounts that actually represent a long historiographical Muslim tradition of which Abu'l-Fat-i-Sháhristání (1076-1153 CE) and Imádu'd-Dín Abu'l-Fidá (1273-1331 CE) – from whose histories Bahá'u'lláh seems to quote – are two representatives.

For a Western reader, however, the implications of the words of Bahá'u'lláh may pose a challenge to the long-standing assumption that Greek philosophy – considered for many the bedrock of Western civilization – developed in the absence of any influence from foreign religions or philosophical schools.

Three decades ago, Juan Cole presented some of the Muslim sources of this tradition pointing also to a chronological inconsistency from the perspective of modern scholarship in regards to the statement about Empedocles and Pythagoras<sup>2</sup>. More recently, Peter Terry approached the subject from a different angle and, aside from analysing the Muslim sources – adding more to the list presented by Cole – left room for a literal reading of this tradition in the context of the fragility of ancient chronologies and the infallibility of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God<sup>3</sup>. Both positions represent, to some extent, the sides of the dialogue that over the years has been held among Bahá'í scholars in formal and informal discussions about the historicity of the tradition.

The focus in the chronological issues of the Tablet has, to a certain extent, deviated attention from the theme presented by Bahá'u'lláh, that “the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets”. Whether such transmission really happened and, if so, where and how it can be traced, are issues independent of the chronological plausibility of the tradition quoted by Bahá'u'lláh regarding Empedocles and Pythagoras.

Moreover, other questions may rise that seem important for a deeper appreciation of the theme underlying this section of the *Tablet of Wisdom*. Was this transmission limited only to the sages mentioned in the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat* or did it extend to other philosophers and other schools of ancient philosophy in the West? Did such transmission from revealed religion to Greek philosophy occur only via Judaism or had other origins as well?

This presentation does not intend to fill these gaps but it will try, however tentatively, to examine some of the ancient sources that may allow for the idea of foreign religious inputs into the development of Greek philosophy. It will also survey some of the conclusions that present-day scholarship has to offer about this subject and lastly it will suggest some links between ancient and Muslim sources for the tradition under review.

## Greek philosophy and Persia

Ancient Greek literature offers a large amount of accounts about Zoroaster, Persian religion and the practices and customs of the Magi as is shown by Franz Cumont and Joseph Bidez in their monumental *Les Mages Hellénisés*<sup>4</sup>. More recently, Albert de Jong has synthesised some Greek and Latin sources offering an interesting picture of the Persian religion as it was seen in ancient times<sup>5</sup>.

The oldest known Greek record about Zoroastrianism belongs to the book *Lydiaka*. In a particular section known as *Magika* (On the Magi) its author, the Lydian historian Xanthus (fifth century BCE), mentioned Zoroaster in connection with the doctrines of the Persians<sup>6</sup> and placed him six thousand years before the second of the Graeco-Persian wars<sup>7</sup>. Unfortunately, only a few lines of his work have survived in the books of Clement of Alexandria and Diogenes Laertius, among others. A cotemporary of Xanthus, the historian Herodotus (484-425 BCE), despite not mentioning Zoroaster by name, also paid some attention to the religious customs of the Persians in his *History*. The interest for the religion of Zoroaster and the Magi was to be present throughout the history of Greek literature and thought.

That there was some knowledge of Zoroastrianism at that stage should not come as a surprise. The Ionian region, on the Aegean coast of the Anatolian peninsula, was always under the influence of the neighbouring Persian Empire. Eventually (545 BCE) the entire region became subjugated to the Persians. Other evidence, moreover, reveals that during the Achaemenid dynasty the Magi were established well inside territory under the Greek cultural orbit. For instance, in Dascylium (modern Ergili, Turkey), a bas-relief from the fifth century BCE shows a group of Magi performing a ritual. Historical accounts mention also that a temple dedicated to Anahita was built by Cyrus in Lydia<sup>8</sup>.

This contact between both civilizations in Ionia is of particular relevance to our subject, especially when considering that during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE the region was a crucible where the first philosophical ideas of the Western world were developing in places such as Miletus or Ephesus.

The earliest preserved record explicitly linking a particular philosopher to Zoroastrianism can be dated back to the fourth

century BCE. Aristoxenus of Tarentum, a disciple of Aristotle with interest in Pythagorean ideas, wrote a biography of Pythagoras which was subsequently used by later biographers<sup>9</sup>. One of the few fragments that have survived for us is quoted by Hippolytus (170-236 CE) who quotes Aristoxenus together with an unknown Diodorus the Eretrian, stating that “Pythagoras came to Zaratas<sup>10</sup>, the Chaldean”<sup>11</sup> who imparted to him a doctrine that clearly resembles Persian dualism.

Evidently, Zoroaster and Pythagoras were not contemporaries. Aristoxenus’ statement is, however, the expression of a firmly rooted tradition, transmitted in different versions, according to which Pythagoras learnt the doctrines of the Zoroastrians from the Magi in Babylonia or from their prophet Himself. As Kingsley convincingly shows, even the dating by some Greek historians of Zoroaster in the sixth century BCE may have been the result of an effort to make Him coincide in time with Pythagoras<sup>12</sup>.

All the surviving biographies of Pythagoras agree in this influence into his thought. Thus, Diogenes Laertius (probably third century CE), the author of the *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*, states that “... [Pythagoras] was a young man, and devoted to learning, he quitted his country, and got initiated into all the Grecian and barbarian sacred mysteries. Accordingly, he went to Egypt, on which occasion Polycrates gave him a letter of introduction to Amasis; and he learnt the Egyptian language, as Antipho tells us in his treatise on those men who have been conspicuous for virtue, and he associated with the Chaldaeans and with the Magi.”<sup>13</sup>

The Neoplatonic Porphyry of Tyre (233-305 CE) wrote in his *Life of Pythagoras* that the sage, while in Babylon, “associated with the other Chaldeans, especially attaching himself to Zaratus, by whom he was purified from the pollutions of his past life, and taught the things from which a virtuous man ought to be free. Likewise he heard lectures about Nature, and the principles of wholes. It was from his stay among these foreigners that Pythagoras acquired the great part of his wisdom.”<sup>14</sup>

In discussing Pythagoras’ thought, Porphyry also states that he learnt from the Magi “secrets concerning the course of life”<sup>15</sup> and adds the following: “Such things taught he, thought advising above all things to speak the truth, for this alone deifies men. For as he had learned from the Magi, who call God



Horomazda, God's body is like light, and his soul is like truth."<sup>16</sup>

Iamblichus (250-325 CE), a disciple of Porphyry and one of the outstanding figures of Neoplatonism, states in his biography of the Samian that in his search for wisdom Pythagoras travelled to Egypt and afterwards to Babylon where he met the Magi: "He was taken captive [from Egypt] by the soldiers of Cambyses, and carried off to Babylon. Here he was overjoyed to be associated with the Magi, who instructed him in their venerable knowledge, and in the most perfect worship of the Gods. Through their assistance, likewise, he studied and completed arithmetic, music and all other sciences. After twelve years, about the fifty-sixth year of his age, he returned to Samos."<sup>17</sup>

While describing the teachings of Pythagoras, Iamblichus mentions, moreover, that "his divine philosophy and worship was compound, having learned much from the Orphic followers, but much also from the Egyptian priests, the Chaldeans and Magi...". He also links some of the Pythagorean rules with Zoroastrian practices: "The bodies of the dead he did not suffer to be burned, herein following the Magi, being unwilling that anything (so) divine (as fire) should be mingled with mortal nature. He thought it holy for the dead to be carried out in white garments; thereby obscurely prefiguring the simple and first nature, according to number, and the principle of all things."<sup>18</sup>

Besides his biographers<sup>19</sup>, many other Greek and Latin authors mention in their writings a sojourn of Pythagoras with the Magi. Cicero (106-43 CE)<sup>20</sup>, Valerius Maximus (first century CE)<sup>21</sup> and Philostratus (170-247 CE)<sup>22</sup> are some Latin examples. The Platonic philosopher Apuleius (124?-170? CE) makes a comment similar to that written later by Iamblichus: "There are some who assert that Pythagoras was about this time carried to Egypt among the captives of King Cambyses, and studied under the magi of Persia, more especially under Zoroaster the priest of all holy mysteries; later they assert he was ransomed by a certain Gillus, King of Croton."<sup>23</sup>

The Christian teacher Clement of Alexandria (?-215 CE) also mentions this connection and affirms that: "He [Pythagoras] held converse with the chief of the Chaldean and the Magi; and he gave a hint of the church, now so called, in the common hall which he maintained"<sup>24</sup>.

Another pre-Socratic philosopher who is linked with Persia in ancient sources is Democritus (460-370 BCE), one of the earliest, probably the first, of the atomists. Historian Claudius Aelianus (second century CE) mentions that “it is reported that Democritus the Abderite was wise, besides other things, in desiring to live unknown, and that he wholly endeavoured it. In pursuit whereof he travelled to many countries; he went to the Chaldeans, and to Babylon, and to the Magi, and to the Indian Sophists.”<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, in an interesting text in which fragments from Democritus are quoted, Clement of Alexandria states:

... pluming himself on his erudition, he says, “I have roamed over the most ground of any man of my time, investigating the most remote parts. I have seen the most skies and lands, and I have heard of learned men in very great numbers. And in composition no one has surpassed me; in demonstration, not even those among the Egyptians who are called Arpenodaptæ, with all of whom I lived in exile up to eighty years.” For he went to Babylon, and Persia, and Egypt, to learn from the Magi and the priests.<sup>26</sup>

Diogenes Laertius begins his biography on Democritus stating the following:

[Democritus] was the son of Hegesistratus, but as some say, of Athenocrites, and, according to other accounts, of Damasippus. He was a native of Abdera, or, as it is stated by some authors, a citizen of Miletus.

He was a pupil of some of the Magi and Chaldaeans, whom Xerxes had left with his father as teachers, when he had been hospitably received by him, as Herodotus informs us; and from these men he, while still a boy, learned the principles of astronomy and theology. Afterwards, his father entrusted him to Leucippus, and to Anaxagoras, as some authors assert, who was forty years older than he... And Demetrius in his treatise on ‘People of the same Name’, and Antisthenes in his ‘Successions’, both affirm that he travelled to Egypt to see the priests there, and to learn mathematics of them; and that he proceeded further to the Chaldeans, and penetrated into Persia, and went as far as the Persian Gulf. Some also say that he made acquaintance with the

Gymnosophists in India, and that he went to Aethiopia.<sup>27</sup>

Empedocles is also said to have visited the Magi. Thus, in his biography on Apollonius of Tyana, Philostratus (179-247 CE) states: "For Empedocles and Pythagoras himself and Democritus consorted with wizards [*magoi*] and uttered many supernatural truths, yet never stooped to the black art..."<sup>28</sup>

Diogenes Laertius quotes the following about Socrates: "Aristotle tells us that a certain one of the Magi came from Syria to Athens, and blamed Socrates for many parts of his conduct, and also foretold that he would come to a violent death."<sup>29</sup> Similarly the pseudo-Platonic work *Axiochus* (c. 300 BCE) portrays Socrates as saying that he learnt about the existence of an afterlife from the Magi Gobryas, grandson of a companion of Xerxes.

Plato, Socrates' pupil, is also said to have had some interest for Persian religion. Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE), for instance, explains that at the time of his passing, Plato was accompanied by a group of Magi<sup>30</sup>. Diogenes Laertius states that "Plato had also formed the idea of making the acquaintance of the Magi; but he abandoned it on account of the wars in Asia."<sup>31</sup>

Clement, mistakenly following one of the many pseudo-Zoroastrian works that circulated during his time, identifies Er, the personage of a late Platonic myth present in the *Republic*, with Zoroaster<sup>32</sup>:

And the same [Plato], in the tenth book of the *Republic*, mentions Eros the son of Armenius, who is Zoroaster. Zoroaster, then, writes: "These were composed by Zoroaster, the son of Armenius, a Pamphylian by birth: having died in battle, and been in Hades, I learned them of the gods." This Zoroaster, Plato says, having been placed on the funeral pyre, rose again to life in twelve days. He alludes perchance to the resurrection, or perchance to the fact that the path for souls to ascension lies through the twelve signs of the zodiac; and he himself says, that the descending pathway to birth is the same. In the same way we are to understand the twelve labours of Hercules, after which the soul obtains release from this entire world.<sup>33</sup>

Dealing also with the myth of Er, Proclus informs of a certain Colotes, a third century BCE Epicurean, who

questioned the originality of the myth in his anti-Platonic polemics and accused Plato of plagiarism from Zoroastrian ideas<sup>34</sup>.

Clement also notes that “it is well known that Plato is found perpetually celebrating the barbarians, remembering that both himself and Pythagoras learned the most and the noblest of their dogmas among the barbarians. Wherefore he also called the races of the barbarians, ‘races of barbarian philosophers’...”<sup>35</sup>

Another Christian writer, Lactantius (260-330 CE), asserted: “Whence I am accustomed to wonder that, when Pythagoras, and after him Plato, inflamed with the love of searching out the truth, had penetrated as far as to the Egyptians, and Magi, and Persians, that they might become acquainted with their religious rites and institutions (for they suspected that wisdom was concerned with religion), they did not approach the Jews only, in whose possession alone it then was, and to whom they might have gone more easily.”<sup>36</sup>

In the twentieth century, scholars in the field of classical studies, ancient history and Greek and Latin philology have done important research into the Eastern influences on Greek thought. In some cases this research has confirmed some of the ancient records quoted above and in others it has offered new and fascinating theories. This interest for the Oriental influence on Greek thought rose partly after the reconstruction by Jaeger of some parts of a lost work by Aristotle. Jaeger’s conclusions followed by the publication of *Les Mages Hellenises* and Bidez’s *Eos ou Platon et l’Orient* shook some of the assumptions held at the time in Western scholarship and opened a whole new vista in the field of classical studies.

The most important intellectual achievement of the pre-Socratics was to arrive to the notion of the existence of a universal principle or *arkhé*, from which all existence is derived and to which all existence can be reduced. Interestingly, there is evidence enough to conclude that at least in the case of some of the pre-Socratics this idea of an *arkhé* may had its origin in Persian religion.

While Pherecydes is not generally included as one of the pre-Socratics his was at least a role of transition between the mythical thinkers and the early philosophers. He is also said to have been the first Greek author to write in prose. Martin L. West<sup>37</sup> notes that some features of Pherecydes’ system had no

precedent in Greek thought but rather seem to have some counterparts in Persia and India. Pherecydes' conception of Chronos would be one case: "Pherecydes's Time, like Zurván and Kála, always existed. He too creates out of his seed, without a consort, we don't know exactly how. Our world is fashioned not by him but by Zas [i.e. Zeus]. Zas, it is true, does not spring from Chronos's seed... Pherecydes prefers to say that he too always existed, and that again has Iranian parallels."<sup>38</sup>

Anaximander's (610-546 BCE) astronomy is also thought to have certain elements of Iranian origin<sup>39</sup>. He seems to be the first Greek in ordering the celestial bodies – with doctrinal rather than astronomical purposes – in the sequence 'stars-moon-sun' placing therefore the stars in the first place above the earth: "...the stars were hoop-like compressions of air, full of fire, breathing out flames at a certain point from orifices. The sun was highest of all, after it came the moon, and below these the fixed stars and the planets."<sup>40</sup>

This scheme has parallels only in Persian religion and it is possible to find Avesta and Pahlavi texts where this order is reproduced in different contexts, such as descriptions of the ascension of the soul. In some cases, a fourth level above the sun, the 'endless stars', is added<sup>41</sup>:

... for in the *Dámdád Nask* it is revealed that when they sever the consciousness of men it goes out to the nearest fire, then out to the stars, then out to the moon, and then out to the sun; and it is needful that the nearest fire, which is that to which it has come out, should become stronger. (*Sháyást Lá - Sháyást* 12.5.)<sup>42</sup>

...'Thereupon, when Ohrmazd had produced the material (dahisno) of Zartosht, the glory then, in the presence of Ohrmazd, fled on towards the material of Zartosht, on to that germ; from that germ it fled on, on to the light which is endless; from the light which is endless it fled on, on to that of the sun; from that of the sun it fled on, on to the moon; from that moon it fled on, on to those stars; from those stars it fled on, on to the fire which was in the house of Zoish; and from that fire it fled on, on to the wife of Frahimrvana-zoish, when she brought forth that girl who became the mother of Zartosht.'<sup>43</sup> (*Denkard*, 7.2.3)

I announce (and) carry out (this Yasna) for these places and these lands... and for the stars, moon, and sun, and for the eternal stars without beginning, and self-disposing, and for all the Asha-sanctified creatures of Spenta Mainyu, male and female, the regulators of Asha. (*Yasna* 1.16)<sup>44</sup>

And we sacrifice to all the springs of water, and to the water-streams as well, and to growing plants, and forest-trees, and to the entire land and heaven, and to all the stars, and to the moon and sun, even to all the lights without beginning (to their course). (*Yasna* 71.9)<sup>45</sup>

We worship the good, strong, beneficent Fravashis of the faithful, who showed their paths to the stars, the moon, the sun, and the endless lights, that had stood before for a long time in the same place, without moving forwards, through the oppression of the Daevas and the assaults of the Daevas. (*Yasht*, 13.57)<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, Anaximander's *arkhé* and key concept of the Infinite or Boundless (*to apeiron*)<sup>47</sup>, shares also some of the features of the Persian 'endless stars'<sup>48</sup>. Both are designated as the principles of all things, are 'self-disposing', and have a fixed duration<sup>49</sup>.

All these coincidences induce West to state that: "Anaximander's conceptions cannot be derived from Greek antecedents, and to suppose that they chanced to burgeon in his mind without antecedents, at the very moment when the Persians were knocking at Ionian doors, would be as preposterous as it was pointless."<sup>50</sup>

Just as fire plays a major role in Zoroastrian doctrine, for the Ephesian Heraclitus (540-475 BCE) fire it is the *arkhé* of all things:

This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now and ever shall be an ever-living fire, with measures kindling and measures going out. (Fr. 30)

All things are exchanged for Fire, and Fire for all things, even as wares for gold, and gold for wares. (Fr. 90)<sup>51</sup>

It is in fragments like these that Duchesne-Guillemin sees connections between the Heraclitean fire and Zoroaster's

Asha. Both fires play the role of cosmological principles, both share also eschatological implications ("fire in its advance will judge and convict all things", fr.66) and both inspire the deeds of men<sup>52</sup>. West points to several other coincidences between Zoroastrian and Heraclitean ideas some of which can be mentioned here<sup>53</sup>:

*Treatment of corpses:*

Fr. 96                      *Vendidad* 3.8

Corpses are more fit to be cast out than dung.	O Maker of the material world, thou Holy one! Which is the second place where the Earth feels sorest grief? Ahura Mazda answered: 'It is the place wherein most corpses of dogs and of men lie buried.'
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*The souls of the dead can smell:*

Fr. 98                      *Yasht* 25-32

Souls smell in Hades (hell).	At the end of the third night, O holy Zarathustra! when the dawn appears, it seems to the soul of the faithless one as if it were brought amidst snow and stench, and as if a wind were blowing from the region of the north, from the regions of the north, a foul-scented wind, the foulest-scented of all the winds in the world.
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And it seems to the soul of the wicked man as if he were inhaling that wind with the nostrils, and he thinks: 'Whence does that wind blow, the foulest-scented wind that I ever inhaled with my nostrils?'

*Non-adoration of figures:*

Fr. 5

And they pray to these images, as if one were to talk with a man's house, knowing not what gods or heroes are.

The philosopher and mathematician Whitehead once described philosophy as a series of footnotes to Plato, a statement that well describes the magnitude of the influence Plato has had on Western thought. For some modern scholars however, Plato drunk, in turn, from Eastern systems of thought, particularly Persian religion. As has already been noted, even some ancient sources point to that direction.

In 1923, Jaeger published his *Aristotle, Fundamentals of the history of his development*. In its fourth chapter, the German scholar reconstructs from different fragments part of the ideas presented in a lost early Aristotelian work, *On Philosophy (peri philosophia)*, which “holds a unique place in Aristotle’s development”<sup>54</sup>. As the title portrays this piece – originally presented in dialogue form – contained Aristotle’s ideas on philosophy and its history. His thesis was that “the same truths reappear in human history, not merely once or twice but indefinitely often”<sup>55</sup>. Following a chronological order Aristotle deals first with some Eastern forms of thought, including Zoroastrianism, and proceeds afterwards with the Greek sages.

A fragment from *On Philosophy* dealing with the Magi survives in Diogenes’ *Lives*. In it, Aristotle assimilates the Persian divinities with the Greek. Diogenes, in turn, compares this view with that of other authors:

But Aristotle, in the first book of his Treatise on Philosophy, says, that the Magi are more ancient than the Egyptians; and that according to them there are two principles, a good demon and an evil demon, and that the name of the one is Jupiter or Oromasdes, and that of the other Pluto or Arimanius. And Hermippus gives the same account in the first book of his History of the Magi; and so does Eudoxus in his Period; and so does Theopompus in the eighth book of his History of the Affairs of Philip; and this last writer tells us also, that according to the Magi men will have a resurrection and be immortal, and that what exists now will exist hereafter under its own present name; and Eudemus of Rhodes coincides in this statement.<sup>56</sup>

In another fragment, contained in Pliny’s *Natural History*, Aristotle is reported as giving a date for Zoroaster: “Eudoxus, who wished it to be thought that the most famous and most beneficial of the philosophical sects was that of the Magi, tells



us that this Zoroaster lived 6,000 years before the death of Plato. Aristotle says the same."<sup>57</sup>

This fragment proofs some knowledge of the Persian division of time in intervals of 3,000 years, successively ruled by Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu. By placing Plato as a reference for dating Zoroaster, Aristotle is establishing a link between both. Plato's doctrine is thus represented as the cyclical return of ancient doctrines brought first by Zoroaster. In a section of *Metaphysics*<sup>58</sup>, moreover, Aristotle mentions the Magi as an intellectual precedent in discussing Plato's dualism. This remarkable fact seems to further corroborate Jaeger's theory which was afterwards accepted by other scholars like Nyberg<sup>59</sup>, Bidez<sup>60</sup> and Cumont<sup>61</sup> among many others. With all this evidence Jaeger states that "the Academy's enthusiasm for Zarathustra amounted to intoxication...It heightened the historical self-consciousness of the school to think that Plato's doctrine of the Good as a divine and universal principle had been revealed to eastern humanity by an Oriental prophet thousands of years before."<sup>62</sup>

Eudoxus of Cnidus (408-355 BCE), mentioned earlier, has been identified by some as the possible channel for this transmission. He was well versed in Chaldean astronomy and is said by ancient sources to have performed extended travels. His role in the Academy was not minor and during an absence of Plato, he even assumed its direction. His origin from Cnidus is of especial importance since the place had significant connections with the Persian Empire<sup>63</sup>. There is further evidence of students in the Academy of 'Chaldean' origin<sup>64</sup>.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the Magi living in the Western part of the Persian Empire soon assimilated Babylonian religion and science. These Magi, or best called Maguseans, incorporated into the Persian religion notions of astrology, astronomy and other concepts that were alien to what was professed by the Magi in the East. Thus, with the expansion of the Persian territory, its religion evolved into a Babylonian version. It is the Magusean's heterogeneous version of Persian religion that later philosophers like Eudoxus may have encountered. This may explain the use of the Semitic name 'Zaratas' for Zoroaster as well as the ancient notion of Zoroaster as a Chaldean astrologer or the many references to Chaldean Magi. It is difficult, therefore, to segregate what was purely Zoroastrian from what was Babylonian in the doctrines incorporated into his thought by Plato<sup>65</sup>.

The myth of Er<sup>66</sup> may stand as an example of such a phenomenon. It contains an imagery that is clearly Babylonian in origin but includes, at the same time, eschatological elements that may be traced till the *Avesta*<sup>67</sup>. Similarly, the *Phaedrus* – a work with strong Babylonian influences as can be gathered from its many astrological elements – also contains some elements that can be found in works circulated by the Maguseans<sup>68</sup>.

At some point in the *Statesman* Plato uses a myth involving the god Chronos to explain why humans are mortals. For this purpose, Plato goes on to use a rich set of dualistic concepts. While Bidez does not rule out the possibility of an influence on Plato from Empedocles, in any case he seems to agree with Reitzenstein in ascribing a Persian origin to some of the elements present in the myth: “The idea that generation depends on the movement of stars; the reference to the earthborn men with no offspring; the intercalation in between each of the great periods of Time of moments of catastrophic oscillations and earthquakes, when stars suffer chaotic perturbations and collide in a way similar to the fight described in the Bundahishn (with the zodiac commanded by Ormurzd and the planets leaded by Ahriman placed face to face); and last but foremost the hypothesis envisaged at some point by Plato of the alternative predominance of a god of Good and a god of Evil, such are the principal elements of the myth that can make the pan-Iranian thesis plausible.”<sup>69</sup>

In addition to the *Statesman*, there are also clear occurrences of this dualism in *Timaeus*, *Laws* and *Epinomis*:

And therefore, since we now claim that, as the soul is cause of the whole, and all good things are causes of like things, while on the other hand evil things are causes of other things like them, it is no marvel that soul should be cause of all motion and stirring – that the motion and stirring towards the good are the function of the best soul, and those to the opposite are the opposite – it must be that good things have conquered and conquer things that are not their like. (Epinomis, 988d)<sup>70</sup>

...and since He perceived that all soul that is good naturally tends always to benefit, but the bad to injure, – observing all this, He designed a location for each of the parts, wherein it might secure the victory of

goodness in the Whole and the defeat of evil most completely, easily, and well. (Laws, X 904b)<sup>71</sup>

One soul, is it, or several? I will answer for you – “several.” Anyhow, let us assume not less than two – the beneficent soul and that which is capable of effecting results of the opposite kind. (Laws, X 896e)<sup>72</sup>

When analysed against the background of Aristotle's statement in *On Philosophy* and in *Metaphysics*, these texts become appealing arguments in support of the thesis that the Platonic thought of the late period, which incorporates into its system a form of dualism of opposites which is so characteristic of Plato's doctrine, may have its intellectual origins nowhere else than in Persian religion<sup>73</sup>.

The Greek notion of the human body as a microcosm presenting in itself the order or parts of the greater cosmos appears in a particular passage of Plato's writings<sup>74</sup>. This is a concept on which there is a consensus in that it has a Persian parallel in the Greater Bundahishn<sup>75</sup> but opinions differ when establishing who first incorporated this idea. Duchesne-Guillemin sees rather an influence into Persian religion from Greece or from India<sup>76</sup> and adduces, among other reasons, the later date of the Bundahishn. On the other hand, Bidez, following Göetz, believed in an influence in the opposite direction and considered the passage in the Bundahishn as likely having its origin in the Avesta. In this way, the pseudo-Hippocratic *Peri Ebdomádon* (On the weeks), where this notion is also present, and the Platonic *Timaeus* may have drunk from the doctrine reproduced later in the Greater Bundahishn which would have reached Greece through the Cnidean physicians serving the Persian kings<sup>77</sup>.

Against the theories linking Plato with the East, other authors like Koster, Festugière, Spierri and Dodds<sup>78</sup> deny or at least suspend the possibility that Plato ever incorporated Persian doctrines into his thought. The arguments put forth are varied, but a common feature is that they rely mostly, it should be noted, on distinct interpretations of Platonic thought rather than on alternative comparisons between Persian and Platonic texts. In some cases, it has been rightly noted that some of the Platonic doctrines that Bidez and others have traced back to Persia have instead immediate precedents in Greek soil and especially in Pythagoras but have avoided the

question of where Pythagoras or others acquired those ideas from.

Regardless of how indebted Plato was to Zoroaster's religion, it is manifest that a considerable interest for the Persian religion aroused in his Academy. Two of Plato's disciples, Hermodorus of Syracuse and Heraclides of Pontus are said to have written works dealing with the Eastern religion or at least entitled under the name of its founder. As has already been noted, two other disciples of Plato, Aristotle and Eudoxus, proved to have some knowledge of the Zoroastrian doctrines.

The Alexandrian conquests strengthened Greek and Persian cultures and a large amount of documentation about the Zoroastrian religion began to proliferate. Books on astronomy, astrology, botany and mineralogy<sup>79</sup> ascribed to the Prophet Himself or to the semi-legendary Magi Ostanes, perhaps parts of the Avesta<sup>80</sup> and philosophy treatises summarizing some of the Zoroastrian doctrines became more and more available in the Greek world. According to Plynny the Elder, Hermippus of Smyrna (third century BCE) compiled over two million lines of Zoroastrian texts<sup>81</sup>. These apocryphal books – the work of Maguseans in most cases – had in turn an impact on the neo-Pythagorean, neo-Platonic and Stoic schools as well as on Hellenistic Judaism<sup>82</sup>.

## Greek philosophy and the Jewish religion

Today, it is widely recognized that ancient Greek mythology and theology received a notable input from Semitic ideas and imagery – particularly from Phoenicia and Babylonia – in the second and the end of the first millennium BCE<sup>83</sup>. Traditionally however, the possibility of a later Jewish influence on Greek culture has been overlooked or considered by many as simply an invention by Jewish and Christian apologists.

Just as was the case with Persian religion, ancient Greek and Latin literature provide a no less relevant catalogue of records concerning Judaism<sup>84</sup>. Many of those records are the manifestations of the antisemitic trends that had started in Alexandria during the second century BCE and invaded the Roman Empire. As a consequence, a second type of records covers the apologetic efforts of Jewish and Christian scholars

to lessen the effect of the many defamations circulating at the time.

There is, however, a third category of ancient records. These have a rather positive tone, comprise the earliest mentions to Jewish religion and, therefore, precede and are independent of any later vituperative or apologetic literature. As Martin Hengel has noted "...the earliest Greek witnesses, for all their variety, present a relatively uniform picture: they portray the Jews as a people of 'philosophers'. From this it is clear that the intellectual 'encounter' between Greeks and Jews did not take place only from the Jewish side, and that the Greeks took and interest in meeting this people with its religion that sounded so 'philosophical'".<sup>85</sup>

To a certain extent these records implicitly assumed that an exchange of ideas from the Hebraic world into the Greek was a matter of fact. It is in this context that some classic authors held a respect for the Jewish religion as an ancient and influential philosophical system of thought just as it happened, as has been shown previously, with Persian religion.

One of the earliest Greek accounts on the practices of the Jews is attributed to one of Aristotle's disciples, Theophrastus (372-287 BCE)<sup>86</sup>, who in discussing about sacrifices portrays the Jews as a philosophical people: "During this whole time, being philosophers by race, they converse with each other about the deity, and at night-time they make observations of the stars, gazing at them and calling on God by prayer. They were the first to institute sacrifices both of other living beings and of themselves; yet they did it by compulsion and not from eagerness for it."<sup>87</sup>

Origen tells us about a now lost work by Hecateus of Abdera (fourth century BCE) dedicated to the Jewish religion: "And there is extant a work by the historian Hecataeus, treating of the Jews, in which so high a character is bestowed upon that nation for its learning, that Herennius Philo, in his treatise on the Jews, has doubts in the first place, whether it is really the composition of the historian; and says, in the second place, that if really his, it is probable that he was carried away by the plausible nature of the Jewish history, and so yielded his assent to their system."<sup>88</sup>

Megasthenes (c. 300 BCE), who spent some years in India where he was at the service of Seleucus Nicator I, is quoted from his book *Indica* as stating that: "All the opinions

expressed by the ancients about nature are found also among the philosophers outside Greece, some among the Indian Brahmans and others in Syria among those called Jews”<sup>89</sup>.

Pythagoras was said to also have had contacts with the Jews. Some fragments by the Peripatetic historian Hermippus of Smyrna (third century BCE) and preserved by Josephus and Origen point in that direction. The reference quoted by Josephus is from Hermippus’ *De Pythagora*:

Pythagoras, therefore, of Samos, lived in very ancient times, and was esteemed a person superior to all philosophers in wisdom and piety towards God. Now it is plain that he did not only know our doctrines, but was in very great measure a follower and admirer of them. There is not indeed extant any writing that is owned for his but many there are who have written his history, of whom Hermippus is the most celebrated, who was a person very inquisitive into all sorts of history. Now this Hermippus, in his first book concerning Pythagoras, speaks thus: “That Pythagoras, upon the death of one of his associates, whose name was Calliphon, a Crotonlate by birth, affirmed that this man’s soul conversed with him both night and day, and enjoined him not to pass over a place where an ass had fallen down; as also not to drink of such waters as caused thirst again; and to abstain from all sorts of reproaches.” After which he adds thus: “This he did and said in imitation of the doctrines of the Jews and Thracians, which he transferred into his own philosophy.” For it is very truly affirmed of this Pythagoras, that he took a great many of the laws of the Jews into his own philosophy.<sup>90</sup>

The passage alluded by Origenes seems to refer to a different work of the same author: “It is said that also Hermippus, in his first book on legislators, related that Pythagoras brought his own philosophy from the Jews to the Greeks.”<sup>91</sup>

Later biographers of Pythagoras also described some connections between him and the Jews. Thus Porphyry, quoting a certain Antonius Diogenes, says: “He sent de boy [Pythagoras] to a lyre player, a gymnast and a painter. Later he sent him to Anaximander at Miletus, to learn geometry and astronomy. Then Pythagoras visited the Egyptians, the Arabians, the Chaldeans and the Hebrews from whom he

acquired expertise in the interpretation of dreams, and acquired de use of frankincense in the worship of divinities.”<sup>92</sup>

Iamblichus offers further information on this contact and explains that Pythagoras spent some time in solitude on Mount Carmel:

Enjoying such advantages, therefore, he sailed to Sidon, both because it was his native country, and because it was on his way to Egypt. In Phoenicia he conversed with the prophets who where descendants of Moschus<sup>93</sup> the physiologist, and with many others, as well as with the local hierophants. He was also initiated into all the mysteries of Byblos and Tyre, and in the sacred function performed in many parts of Syria...

After gaining all he could from the Phoenician mysteries, he found that they had originated from the sacred rites of Egypt... Therefore following the advice of his teacher Thales, he left, as soon as possible, through the agency of some Egyptian sailors, who very opportunely happened to land on the Phoenician coast under Mount Carmel where, in the temple of the peak, Pythagoras for the most part had dwelt in solitude... They [the sailors] began to reflect that there was something supernatural in the youth's modesty, and in the manner in which he had unexpectedly appeared to them on their landing, when, from the summit of Mount Carmel, which they knew to be more sacred than other mountains, and quite inaccessible to the vulgar, he had leisurely descended without looking back...<sup>94</sup>

Both Porphyry and Iamblichus detail Pythagoras' visit to Egypt. Laertius also alludes to this episode<sup>95</sup>. This was an old tradition that can be traced as far as Isocrates in the fifth century BCE<sup>96</sup> and that has especial relevance for the understanding of later views held by Christian and Muslim historians. Eusebius, for instance, in his *Praeparatio evangelica* considers that Pythagoras' learning from the Jews could have occurred during his sojourns in Egypt or in Babylonia<sup>97</sup>: “Pherecydes also is recorded to have been a Syrian, and Pythagoras they say was his disciple. He is not, however, the only teacher with whom, as it is said, Pythagoras was associated, but he spent some time also with the Persian Magi, and became a disciple of the Egyptian prophets, at the time

when some of the Hebrews appear to have made their settlement in Egypt, and some in Babylon.”<sup>98</sup>

Regarding Plato, Numenius of Apamea (second century CE) is quoted as having made the following striking comments:

Also from the Pythagorean philosopher himself, I mean Numenius, I will quote as follows from his first book *On the Good*: ‘But when one has spoken upon this point, and sealed it by the testimonies of Plato, it will be necessary to go back and connect it with the precepts of Pythagoras, and to appeal to the nations of good repute, bringing forward their rites and doctrines, and their institutions which are formed in agreement with those of Plato, all that the Brahmans, and Jews, and Magi, and Egyptians arranged.’<sup>99</sup>

Thus then speaks Numenius, explaining clearly both Plato’s doctrines and the much earlier doctrines of Moses. With reason therefore is that saying currently attributed to him, in which it is recorded that he said, ‘For what else is Plato than Moses speaking Attic Greek?’<sup>100</sup>

The peripatetic Clearchus of Soli (c. 300 BCE) is one of the earliest authors known for having established a sort of link between the Jewish religion and a particular Greek philosopher. In a book discussing the phenomenon of dreams, he reproduces a dialogue between Aristotle and a Jew which has been preserved in Josephus’ *Contra Apionem*:

For Clearchus, who was the scholar of Aristotle, and inferior to no one of the Peripatetics whomsoever, in his first book concerning sleep, says that “Aristotle his master related what follows of a Jew,” and sets down Aristotle’s own discourse with him. The account is this, as written down by him: “Now, for a great part of what this Jew said, it would be too long to recite it; but what includes in it both wonder and philosophy it may not be amiss to discourse of. Now, that I may be plain with thee, Hyperochides, I shall herein seem to thee to relate wonders, and what will resemble dreams themselves. Hereupon Hyperochides answered modestly, and said: For that very reason it is that all of us are very desirous of hearing what thou art going to say. Then replied Aristotle: For this cause it will be the best way to imitate that rule of the Rhetoricians, which



requires us first to give an account of the man, and of what nation he was, that so we may not contradict our master's directions. Then said Hyperochides: Go on, if it so pleases thee. This man then, [answered Aristotle,] was by birth a Jew, and came from Celesyria; these Jews are derived from the Indian philosophers; they are named by the Indians Calami, and by the Syrians Judaei, and took their name from the country they inhabit, which is called Judea; but for the name of their city, it is a very awkward one, for they call it Jerusalem. Now this man, when he was hospitably treated by a great many, came down from the upper country to the places near the sea, and became a Grecian, not only in his language, but in his soul also; insomuch that when we ourselves happened to be in Asia about the same places whither he came, he conversed with us, and with other philosophical persons, and made a trial of our skill in philosophy; and as he had lived with many learned men, he communicated to us more information than he received from us." This is Aristotle's account of the matter, as given us by Clearchus; which Aristotle discoursed also particularly of the great and wonderful fortitude of this Jew in his diet, and continent way of living, as those that please may learn more about him from Clearchus's book itself; for I avoid setting down any more than is sufficient for my purpose.<sup>101</sup>

While it is attested that Aristotle spent a part of his life living in Asia some authors<sup>102</sup> consider this encounter with a Jew as fictitious. This conclusion is reached on the grounds that placing a hellenized Jew as a contemporary of Aristotle is an anachronism. Paradoxically, the argument can be applied to Clearchus himself.<sup>103</sup>

There is direct evidence of various ancient authors having incorporated notions of Jewish religion into their works. Thus, some scholars see traces of a passage from *Genesis* (I.28) in the *De universi Natura* written around the second century BCE by the Pythagorean Ocellus Lucanus<sup>104</sup>.

In his *Res Divinae*, the Latin Varro (116-27 BCE) assimilates the god Jupiter with Yahweh and extols the way in which the Jews worship their God. Augustine quotes from him:

He [Varro] also says that for more than one hundred and seventy years the ancient Romans worshipped the gods without and image. 'If this usage had continued to our own day', he says, our worship of the gods would be more devout'. And in support of his opinion he adduces, among other things, the testimony of the Jewish race. And he ends with the forthright statement that those who first set up images of the gods for the people diminished reverence in their cities as they added to error, for he wisely judged that gods in the shape of senseless images might easily inspire contempt.<sup>105</sup>

Yet Varro – one of themselves – to a more learned man they cannot point – thought the God of the Jews to be the same as Jupiter, thinking that it makes no difference by which name he is called, so long as the same thing is understood. I believe that he did it being terrified by his sublimity. Since the Romans habitually worship nothing superior to Jupiter, a fact attested well and openly by their Capitol, and they consider him the king of all the gods, and as he perceived that the Jews worship the highest God, he could not but identify him with Jupiter.<sup>106</sup>

The anonymous pseudo-Longinus author of the *De Sublimitate* – written around the first century CE – also quotes from *Genesis* and praises Moses: "A similar effect was achieved by the lawgiver of the Jews – no mean genius, for he both understood and gave expression to the power of the divinity as it deserved – when he wrote at the very beginning of his laws, I quote his words: 'God said' -what? 'Let there be light. And there was. Let there be earth. And there was'".<sup>107</sup>

And Porphyry, who also quoted from the book of *Genesis*<sup>108</sup>, is said by Lydus to have assimilated Yahweh with the Platonic Demiurge: "But Porphyry in the Commentary on the Oracles says that the god worshipped by the Jews is the second god, the creator of all things whom the Chaldaean in his discourse on the gods counts to be the second from the first god, i.e. the Good."<sup>109</sup>

Of course, modern scholarship has offered different theories about a possible Hebraic influence on Greek philosophy but a general consensus as to how and when it happened is still lacking.

In recent times, for instance, West has detected some common features between the biblical giant Og and the Greek Ogygos. The biblical Leviathan and Rahab also seem to have a counterpart in Pherecydes' Ophioneus but the possibility exists that both the biblical and the Greek mythical beings have a common origin in the ancient Middle East.<sup>110</sup>

For Stern, the fact that some Pythagoreans like Ocellus were aware of some Jewish doctrines may be proof of a Hebraic influence on neo-Pythagorean circles.<sup>111</sup> And Hengel considers that the personification of "Wisdom" as it appears in Proverbs (8.22-31) and Job (28) can not be the result of an influence from Greek culture. Rather, the personification of Sophia in Greek thought, which is later, seems of Oriental influence.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Hengel points to the possibility that many of the themes and concepts present in the Estoic school had the same origins. One wonders if Hengel means Hebraic when he says Oriental.<sup>113</sup>

As has been shown earlier, the Platonic myth of Er has been considered by some as an element with strong Persian roots. But for others, however, the myth may be Semitic in origin. The name Er, for instance, is a Semitic name (Lc. 3,28). Gómez de Liaño points out the striking similarities in the structure and imagery used by Ezekiel in his vision of the Chariot (1.4-28) and Plato's symbols in Er's myth (*Rep.* X.617). Common features appear also between Plato's description of the ideal city and Ezekiel's vision of the Holy City. Gómez admits, however, that despite the common features of both texts, the possibility exists that its authors followed a common Babylonian text or scheme not yet identified.<sup>114</sup>

## The Muslim sources

Juan Cole lists a number of Muslim authors that reproduce the tradition alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Wisdom. The names and works of some of them are:

Sa'id al-Andalusí (1029-1070 CE): *Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam*

Abu'l-Fatḥ-i-Sháhristání (1076-1153 CE): *Kitáb al-Milal wa al-Nihal*

Jamálu'd-Dín al-Qiftí (1172-1248): *Tárikh al-Hukamát*

Muwaffaḡu'd-Dīn ibn Abī Usaybiah (1194-1270): *Uyun Al-Anba Fi-Tabakat Al-Attibba*

Imádu'd-Dīn Abu'l-Fidá (1273-1331 CE): *Al-Mukhtasar fi Akhbar Al-Bashar*

Walbridge<sup>115</sup> and Terry<sup>116</sup> mention an earlier writer, the Persian Abú'l Hasan al-'Ámiri (d. 992), that also used the tradition in his *Al-Amad 'Alá al-Abab*<sup>117</sup>. Being the earliest known Muslim author to treat the issue, it will be worth reproducing his words as translated by Rowson:

The first one to whom wisdom was attributed was Luqmán, the Sage, as God says: "And verily we gave Luqmán wisdom" (Q 31:12). He lived at the time of the prophet David; they were both residents of the land of Syria.

It is said that Empedocles the Greek used to keep company with Luqmán and learn from his wisdom. But when he returned to the land of Greece, he spoke on his own authority about the nature of the world, saying things which, if understood literally, offend against (the belief) of the Hereafter. The Greeks attributed wisdom to him because of his former association with Luqmán; indeed, he was the first Greek to be called a Sage. A group of the Bâtinites claim to be followers of his wisdom and speak of him with high esteem. They claim that he wrote in symbols whose hidden meanings are rarely comprehended.

Another Greek who was described as wise was Pythagoras. In Egypt he kept company with the companions of Solomon son of David, after they moved there from the land of Syria. Having (already) learned geometry from the Egyptians, he then learned the physical and divine/metaphysical sciences from the companions of Solomon. These three sciences – that is, geometry, physics, and the science of religion – he transferred to the land of Greece... He claimed that he had acquired these sciences from the niche of prophecy.

After him, another Greek who was described as wise was Socrates. He derived (his) wisdom from Pythagoras, but limited himself to the divine sciences...

Then, after him, another one described as wise was Plato. He was of noble lineage and pre-eminent among

them. He agreed with Socrates in deriving (his) wisdom, and with Pythagoras...

Another of the Greeks after Plato who was described as wise was Aristotle... [He] studied with Plato for nearly twenty years in order to derive wisdom (from him)...<sup>118</sup>

Accordingly, Rowson sees the origin of the reference to Empedocles – actually the Muslimized pseudo-Empedocles – to traditions circulating among the batínís<sup>119</sup>.

Similarly, he traces the reference to Pythagoras back to Eusebius (see quotation in the precedent section)<sup>120</sup>, a reasoning which is quite convincing. But there is also a passage from Porphyry, an author widely used and quoted by Muslim historians, that also fits well as the source for 'Al-Amirí's passage on Pythagoras: "As for his knowledge, it is said that he learned the mathematical sciences from the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Phoenicians; for of old the Egyptians excelled in geometry... and the Chaldeans in astronomical theorems, divine rites, and worship of the Gods."<sup>121</sup> Both 'Al-Amirí's and Porphyry's texts coincide in mentioning the Egyptians as Pythagoras' teachers in geometry while Porphyry mentions the Chaldeans as the instructors of the Samian in divine matters. Since sometimes the identification of the Chaldeans with the Jews was, to a certain extent, common in medieval times it may be assumed that some readers of Porphyry, including 'Al-Amirí or his source, may have understood this reference to the Chaldeans as a reference to the Jews. What is more probable is that a combination of Christian (be it Eusebius, Augustine or both) and Pagan texts took place.

Furthermore, it is also worth noting that 'Al-Amirí's text does not portray Empedocles and Pythagoras as meeting with David and Solomon but rather as meeting their followers. In the case of Pythagoras, this is consistent with pre-Islamic texts.

The information as it appears in 'Al-Amirí was afterwards used by other historians such as Al-Andalusí and Al-Sijistání (c. 932- c. 1000, *Siwán al-Hikma*). From Sijistání it passed to Sháhristání and from him to other writers like Abu'l-Fidá. From Al-Andalusí the text passed to al-Qiftí and ibn Abí Usaybiah.<sup>122</sup> As for Al-Andalusí, it is interesting to note, that among the many books he cites in his work, he does not make any mention of 'Al-Amirí's. It should not be discarded, therefore, that both

authors used a common source or that there was an intermediary between both.

The tradition quoted by Bahá'u'lláh, while widely used in Muslim scholarship seems therefore, in the absence of further evidence pointing to a different direction, to be not a repetition but an evolution of previous traditions. At its core, it derives in last term from the many Pagan sources referring, on the one hand, to the stay of Pythagoras in Egypt and, on the other, to his contact with the Jews. At a second level we find both traditions linked in a single one by some Christian authors like Eusebius or Augustine who locate Pythagoras' contacts with the Jews in Egypt. At a third level, we have 'Al-Amirí or one of his sources rescuing this Christian tradition and adding to it comments about Empedocles – with no precedent in ancient writers – and data extracted from Pagan historians like Porphyry. At a fourth level, we find historians like Sháhristání and Abu'l-Fidá – authors probably quoted by Bahá'u'lláh – using 'Al-Amirí's version and adding to it little variations like the one describing Pythagoras as living in the days of Solomon.

## Conclusion

Ancient records and modern scholarship offer us an enormous amount of information about a possible transmission of ideas from Eastern religions into Greek thought. This data help us to better understand the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's statement that “the essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets”. The *arkhé* of some of the pre-Socratics or the dualism of Plato with its notion of a supreme Good, may stand as just two examples of such phenomenon.

To prove or to discard a chronological synchrony between Empedocles and King David or between Pythagoras and Solomon, becomes, therefore, a very secondary matter, just as for the question of whether the tradition quoted by Bahá'u'lláh needs to be interpreted literally or not. Of course, it could be interpreted literally and hopefully future research will uncover new documents backing this approach. But in any case, what is important from the passage under study are not the examples cited by Bahá'u'lláh from some historians but the statement that the Manifestation Himself is presenting and that underlies the whole passage.

When an individual approaches the history of ancient philosophy from the standpoint marked by Bahá'u'lláh then he or she is confronted with a whole new picture, one that questions many of the prevalent paradigms in present-day Western scholarship. It also transcends the traditions present in Muslim historiography, for it forces the researcher to take into account besides Jewish religion, other ancient religions such as Zoroastrianism or even Hinduism or Buddhism<sup>123</sup>, and to consider the cases, not only of the most popular figures of Greek philosophy, but also of their predecessors and successors.

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## NOTES

Note: I want to express my gratitude to Leilí Egea and to Somhairle Watson for proofreading the text.

<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

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- <sup>2</sup> Cole, Juan. "Problems of Chronology in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom", 1979.
- <sup>3</sup> Terry, Peter. "Some Chronological issues in the Law-i-Ḥikmat of Bahá'u'lláh", 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> Bidez, J.- Cumont F., *Les Mages Hellénisés. Zoroastre, Ostanés et Hystape d'après la tradition grecque*, 1938.
- <sup>5</sup> de Jong, Albert. *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature*, 1997.
- <sup>6</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III.2.11 (trans. Schaff). This and other texts of the church fathers available at <http://www.ccel.org/>.
- <sup>7</sup> Diógenes Laertius, *Lives of eminent philosophers*, 1.2 (trans. Yonge). As will be shown this dating implies a knowledge of the Zoroastrian conception of cycles.
- <sup>8</sup> Bidez-Cumont, op. cit. I, 6.
- <sup>9</sup> K. S. Guthrie, *The Pythagorean sourcebook and library*, 1987, pp. 38-39.
- <sup>10</sup> "Zaratas" is a Semitic form for "Zoroaster". While Xanthus used the Greek form "Zoroastres" other authors used "Zaratas" a fact that implies an import of the term from Babylonia. Cf. Bidez-Cumont op. cit. I, 37-38 for an etymology of the word "Zaratas" including an identification by Aghatias of both names with the same person. Some classical authors, however, seem to regard Zaratas as a Magi living in Babylonia and not as the prophet Zoroaster Himself.
- <sup>11</sup> Hippolytus, *The Refutation of all Heresies* (trans. Schaff). Book 6, chapters 18-19.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. Kingsley, "The Greek Origin of the Sixth-Century Dating of Zoroaster", 1990.
- <sup>13</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and opinions of eminent philosophers*. VIII, 3 (trans. Yonge, 1853)
- <sup>14</sup> K. S. Guthrie, op. cit. 125 (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 12)
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 124 (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 6)
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 131 (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 12)
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 61 (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 4)
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 95 (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 21).
- <sup>19</sup> For a discussion on the biographies of Pythagoras see J.A. Phillip, "The Biographical Tradition-Pythagoras", 1959.
- <sup>20</sup> *De finibus bonorum et malorum* V, 29.
- <sup>21</sup> *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium liber*, VIII, 7.2
- <sup>22</sup> *Life of Apollonius*, I.2.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Apologia and Florida of Apuleius of Madaura* (transl. H. E. Butler, 1909), p. 184.
- <sup>24</sup> *Stromata* op. cit I.15
- <sup>25</sup> *Various History*, V. 20 (trans. Thomas Stanley, 1665)

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- <sup>26</sup> *Stromata* op. cit. I. 15
- <sup>27</sup> Laertius, op. cit. IX.1-2.
- <sup>28</sup> Vita Apollonii, I.2.1 (trans. F.C. Conybeare 1912)
- <sup>29</sup> Laertius, op. cit. II.24
- <sup>30</sup> Bidez, *Eos ou Platon et L'Orient*, 1945, p. 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Laertius op. cit. III, 8.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. Edwards, "Atticizing Moses? Numenius, the Fathers and the Jews", 1990.
- <sup>33</sup> *Stromata* op. cit. V. 14.
- <sup>34</sup> Cf. Edwards, op. cit.
- <sup>35</sup> *Stromata*, op. cit. I. 15.
- <sup>36</sup> *Divine Institutes*, IV. 2 (trans. Fletcher).
- <sup>37</sup> West, M. L. *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*. 1971.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid. pp. 34-35.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. Ibid. pp. 89-91
- <sup>40</sup> Fr. A18. (trans. Burnet, 1908).
- <sup>41</sup> Passages referred to in West op. cit.
- <sup>42</sup> E. W. West in *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 5. All Zoroastrian quotations from <http://www.avesta.org/>.
- <sup>43</sup> E. W. West in *SBE*, Vol. 47.
- <sup>44</sup> L.H. Mills in *SBE*, Vol. 31.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> Yasht, 13.57 (trans. James Darmeteter *SBE*, Vol. 23).
- <sup>47</sup> Fr. A.9: "Anaximander of Miletos, son of Praxiades, a fellow-citizen and associate of Thales, said that the material cause and first element of things was the Infinite, he being the first to introduce this name for the material cause. He says it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but a substance different from them, which is infinite, from which arise all the heavens and the worlds within them. And into that from which things take their rise they pass away once more, 'as is ordained; for they make reparation and satisfaction to one another for their injustice according to the appointed time' as he says in these somewhat poetical terms."
- <sup>48</sup> West mentions Burkert (Iranisches bei Anaximandros', *Rheinisches Museum*, 1963) as a proponent of this theory, op. cit.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 93.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 97.
- <sup>51</sup> All Heraclitan fragments following Burnet's translation (1919)
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. Duchesne-Guillemin, "Heraclitus and Iran", 1963.
- <sup>53</sup> Cf. West, op. cit. 177-200.

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- <sup>54</sup> Jaeger, Werner. *Aristotle. Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, 1962, p. 126.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibíd.* p. 130.
- <sup>56</sup> Laertius op. cit. I, 6.
- <sup>57</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* (30.3) in *Ibíd.* p. 131. cf. Jaeger op. cit. 135 for some arguments on the provenance of this fragment from *On philosophy*.
- <sup>58</sup> “This difficulty arises not from ascribing goodness to the first principle as an attribute, but from treating unity as a principle, and a principle in the sense of an element, and then deriving number from unity ... those of them who compromise by not describing everything in mythological language – e.g. Pherecydes and certain others – make the primary generator the Supreme Good; and so do the Magi, and some of the later philosophers such as Empedocles and Anaxagoras: the one making Love an element, and the other making Mind a first principle. And of those who hold that unchangeable substances exist, some identify absolute unity with absolute goodness; but they considered that the essence of goodness was primarily unity”. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1091b (trans. Hugh Tredennick)
- <sup>59</sup> Nyberg, “Questions de cosmogonie et cosmologie mazdéennes”, 1931.
- <sup>60</sup> J. Bidez, *Eos ou Platon et l’Orient*, 1945, p. 36.
- <sup>61</sup> Bidez-Cumont, op. cit.
- <sup>62</sup> Jaeger, op. cit. 134-135.
- <sup>63</sup> Cf. *Ibíd.* 24-37.
- <sup>64</sup> Jaeger, op. cit. 105 and 132.
- <sup>65</sup> Cf. Bidez-Cumont op. cit. I, 34-36 and 57-59 for further considerations on this.
- <sup>66</sup> The Myth of Er is found at the end tenth book of Plato’s *Republic* starting in 614b.
- <sup>67</sup> Cf. Bidez, op. cit. 43-51 for an analysis of the myth under this light.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibíd.* 62-63.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibíd.* 72-73. Bidez here is following the thesis put forth by R. Reitzenstein in ‘Plato und Zarathustra’, *Bibliothek Warburg*, 1927.
- <sup>70</sup> (trans. W.R.M. Lamb, 1925)
- <sup>71</sup> (trans. R.G. Bury, 1968)
- <sup>72</sup> *Ibíd.*
- <sup>73</sup> Cf. Bidez-Cumont op. cit. I, 34-36 and 57-59 for further considerations on this. *Ibíd.* 97-98.
- <sup>74</sup> *Timaeus*, 73
- <sup>75</sup> Chapter 28.
- <sup>76</sup> Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Western Response to Zoroaster*, 1973 pp. 73-78

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<sup>77</sup> Bidez op. cit. 126-133.

<sup>78</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>79</sup> For a catalogue and description of such texts see *ibid.* I chapters IV to VII.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Íbid.* I 91ss.

<sup>81</sup> *Íbid.* I 86.

<sup>82</sup> Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 1981, 192-193

<sup>83</sup> See for instance Michael Astour's *Hellenosemitica* and Walter Burket's *The Orientalizing Revolution*.

<sup>84</sup> Dr. Iraj Ayman has pointed me to a work by the late Manuchehr Salmanpour published in *Safini-yi Irfán* IV in which the author presents sources for the idea of a Jewish transmission into Greek philosophy. Unfortunately I have been unable to consult this article to the risk of repeating some of its thesis.

<sup>85</sup> Hengel op. cit. 255.

<sup>86</sup> Reinach and Stern consider this fragment as the first Greek text "to deal expressly with the Jews". Jaeger, however holds a different opinion.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Stern, *Greek and Latin authors on the Jews and Judaism* I, Jerusalem, 1976, p. 10.

<sup>88</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, I.XV

<sup>89</sup> Stern op. cit. I 46. This fragment has survived in Clemens' *Stromata* I 15.72 and was afterwards reproduced by Eusebius in *Praeparatio Evangelica* IX.6

<sup>90</sup> Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I.161 (trans. William Whiston 1895).

<sup>91</sup> Stern op. cit. I 96. Fragment in Origenes' *Contra Celsum* I 15.

<sup>92</sup> K. S. Guthrie, op. cit. 125. (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 11).

<sup>93</sup> Identified by Guthrie as Moses. See Danton Sailor's *Moses and atomism* for an opposite view.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 61 (Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 60).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Diogenes op. cit. VIII.3

<sup>96</sup> "If one were not determined to make haste, one might cite many admirable instances of the piety of the Egyptians, that piety which I am neither the first nor the only one to have observed; on the contrary, many contemporaries and predecessors have remarked it, of whom Pythagoras of Samos is one. On a visit to Egypt he became a student of the religion of the people, and was first to bring to the Greeks all philosophy, and more conspicuously than others he seriously interested himself in sacrifices and in ceremonial purity, since he believed that even if he should gain thereby no greater reward from the gods, among men, at any rate, his reputation would be greatly enhanced." Isocrates 11.28 (trans. by George Norlin 1980).

<sup>97</sup> Besides the fragments from pagan writers there are also abundant arguments set forth in Jewish and Christian spheres on the theme of a Mosaic transmission into Greek philosophy, Aristobulus together with Artapanus, Eupolemus, Philo of Alexandria or the above mentioned Flavius Josephus being the Jewish writers known for having defended this idea. In confronting the attacks made from the pagan ranks Jewish and also Christian writers endeavoured to prove the antiquity of the Mosaic religion and to establish bridges between philosophy and revealed religion with the twofold purpose of proving a dependence of philosophy on revealed religion and avoiding any notion in the mass of believers of incompatibility between reason and faith, between religion and philosophy. For some authors theology and philosophy were not only compatible but rather the same thing.

Clement says of Aristobulus: "Aristobulus, in his first book addressed to Philometor, writes in these words: Plato too has followed our legislation, and has evidently studied carefully the several precepts contained in it. And others before Demetrius, and prior to the supremacy of Alexander and of the Persians, have translated both the narrative of the Exodus of our fellow countrymen the Hebrews from Egypt, and the fame of all that happened to them, and their conquest of the land, and the exposition of the whole Law. So it is perfectly clear that the philosopher before-mentioned has borrowed much, for he is very learned; as also was Pythagoras, who transferred many of our precepts into his own system of doctrines" (*Stromata* I.22). Eusebius quotes Eupolemus as saying that Moses invented the alphabet that was afterwards taught to the Phoenicians who in turn transmitted it to the Greeks (*Praep.* IX.26).

Christian authors, especially Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Origen and Pseudo-Justin followed also this trend and dedicated whole chapters showing supposed examples of plagiarism made by Greek philosophers from the revealed Scriptures. In some cases, like in Pseudo-Justin, this endeavour reached the point of exaggeration in attempting to detect references to the cross or the trinity in the works of Plato. Paradoxically, some authors, as was also the case with Pseudo-Justin, combined these ideas with harsh antisemitism.

<sup>98</sup> *Praeperatio* X. IV (trans. E.H. Gifford 1903). Interestingly, Alexander Polyhistor may have identified the prophet Ezekiel with Zoroaster. This idea may have been the result of a mixture of two traditions, one representing Pythagoras as a pupil of Zoroaster and the other having Pythagoras meeting the Jews in Babylonia. The identification of Zoroaster with Ezekiel is denied by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, I.15): "Zoroaster the Magus, Pythagoras showed to be a Persian. Of the secret books of this man, those who follow the heresy of Prodicus boast to be in possession. Alexander, in his book *On the Pythagorean Symbols*, relates that Pythagoras was a pupil of Nazaratius the Assyrian (some think that he is Ezekiel; but he is not, as will afterwards be

shown)...". See Bidez-Cumont op. cit. 42 and Hegel op. cit. 154 for further information.

<sup>99</sup> *Praeparatio* IX. VII

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* XI.X, Eusebius is quoting Clement's *Stromata* I.22 .

<sup>101</sup> Josephus, *Contra Apionem* I.161 (trans. William Whiston 1895).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Reinach *Textes d'auteurs Grecs et Romains relatifs au Judaïsme*, 1895, p. 12; Stern op. cit. I 47; H. Lewy, "Aristotle and the Jewish Sage According to Clearchus of Soli", 1938.

<sup>103</sup> In this regard it would be interesting to note that archaeological evidence shows some presence of Jews in Athens at least as late as the third century BCE. Cf. Lewis, "The First Greek Jew", 1957.

<sup>104</sup> Stern, op. cit. I 131

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* I 209

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* I 210

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* I 364

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* II 444

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* II 443

<sup>110</sup> Cf. West op. cit. 40-46.

<sup>111</sup> Stern, op. cit. I 131

<sup>112</sup> Hengel, op. cit. 148-49

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 153-154.

<sup>114</sup> See Gómez de Liaño, *Filósofos griegos, videntes judíos*, 2001, pp. 215-252.

<sup>115</sup> Walbridge, "Explaining Away the Greek Gods in Islam", 1998.

<sup>116</sup> Terry, op. cit.

<sup>117</sup> This work has been translated and published by Everett K. Rowson. The present author, however, has only had access to the Phd dissertation of Rowson. I first became aware of the existence of this translation thanks to a posting to *tarikḥ* discussion e-list by William McCants (2005-09-10).

<sup>118</sup> Rowson, *Al-'Amiri on the Afterlife. A Translation with Commentary of His al-Amad 'ala al-Abad* (Ph.D. diss.), 1982, III.1-8.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* p. 227.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* p. 232.

<sup>121</sup> K. S. Guthrie, op. cit. 124. (Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, 6)

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 223. Rowson considers 'Al-Amiri as the direct source for Andalusí.

<sup>123</sup> See Conger, Rahula and Sastri in the bibliography, for some recent works studying the possibility of an Indian influence in Greek thought.



# The Bahá'í Worldview on Unity of Religions

## “Progressive Revelation”: The Application of Principles and Insights from the History of Science<sup>1</sup>

Jena Khadem Khodadad

The intent of this paper is to explore and discuss the Bahá'í “paradigm” on unity of religions, that is the fundamental Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation, in the context of the thesis proposed by Thomas Kuhn, in his classical work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*.<sup>2,3,4</sup> This paper is organized in two parts:

- I. Discussion of the process of advancement of scientific knowledge through stages which according to Kuhn bring about a change in paradigm; this will employ an example from the history of science (the Copernican Revolution) as analyzed by Kuhn.
- II. Presentation of certain concepts inherent in the Bahá'í paradigm on unity of religions through the use of diagrams; this will be discussed in the context of the Copernican Revolution and the change in paradigm from a geocentric to heliocentric universe.

### Introduction

Thomas Kuhn, an eminent philosopher of science, was the first to introduce the term “paradigm”. Paradigm comes from the Greek word, “paradigmia” which means pattern. Paradigm signifies our worldview; how we believe knowledge or systems work. The Oxford English Dictionary defines paradigm as “a pattern or model, an exemplar”. The word “paradigm” as used in this paper in respect to the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation, denotes “the religious worldview” on unity of religions. The term “paradigm” has over time acquired various connotations and in some instances its application has become trivialized. However, the concept of paradigm as used by Kuhn is replete with significant insights. My intent is to apply the

concept of “paradigm” in this paper with the depth imparted to it by Thomas Kuhn.

Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* discusses the role of paradigms in advancement of scientific research and knowledge. This book is considered as one of the most significant books on the philosophy of science since it was first published in 1962, and subsequently in 1964 and 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* has been widely read (it has sold over a million copies) and has influenced scholars from numerous disciplines. It has generated much discussion and debate, and won praise as well elicited criticism. Some have hailed it as “monumental” while others have critiqued and rejected its central thesis. This book has thus stimulated extensive discourse leading to numerous other publications. These have, in turn, contributed to increased understanding in respective fields. This is indeed the hallmark of any significant publication. The terms “seminal” and “monumental” rightly apply to Kuhn’s work regardless of how one may view any of its possible shortcomings. Kuhn’s contributions, in particular in respect to the thesis of this paper, warrant in-depth consideration and reflection. Such reflections are bound to provide learning and insights heightening one’s understanding and appreciation of the Bahá’í paradigm of unity of religions.

Kuhn’s central thesis is that advances in scientific knowledge are essentially revolutionary. He believes that scientific research consists of long periods of “normal science” interrupted by a radical shift in paradigm whereby one paradigm is supplanted by a mutually exclusive one. This is tantamount to a revolution as it involves the overthrow of an old paradigm, an old regime, and its replacement with the new. The thesis of Kuhn has stimulated dialogues and in-depth discussions on whether advancements in scientific knowledge follows the revolutionary path or whether it is a process which is cumulative and hence evolutionary. A revolutionary process entails a “paradigm shift” whereby the paradigm undergoes a radical change. An evolutionary process entails “paradigm expansion” whereby the paradigm undergoes expansion through gradual accretion of knowledge. Kuhn’s enthusiastic supporters are numerous; among them is Howard Margolis<sup>5</sup> who draws a relationship between a Kuhnian paradigm shift and a shift in well entrenched “habits of the mind”.

Many of those who have critiqued Kuhn’s view hold that advancement in scientific knowledge is cumulative and hence

evolutionary. Stephen Toulmin<sup>6</sup> argues against Kuhn's thesis that advancement in science is revolutionary and holds that the process is in fact evolutionary. According to Toulmin's understanding of Kuhn, the revolutionary process implies that there is competition between paradigms which are mutually exclusive; thus with paradigm shift one paradigm replaces the other. Whereas the evolutionary process implies a cumulative process in conceptual change. Kafatos and Nadeau<sup>7</sup> also argue that the process of advancement in science is cumulative and evolutionary. Hoyningen-Huene<sup>8</sup> provides insightful critique and interpretation of certain points regarding the thesis presented by Kuhn. In a later publication, Kuhn<sup>9</sup>, acknowledges the cumulative and evolutionary process in the advance of science. Additionally, Kuhn also acknowledges in his foreword to the writing of Hoyningen-Huene<sup>10</sup> some of this criticism. Notwithstanding such arguments, the work of Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* is significant as it provides valuable insights in the progression and advancement of knowledge.

The question of whether the process of advancement of science is evolutionary or revolutionary will not have a critical bearing on the discussions presented in this paper. In fact, it is likely that advances in knowledge have both characteristics; that is an evolutionary process with features which may exhibit revolutionary characteristics. Such a process may apply to the advances in science in certain fields and under certain conditions as well as to the Bahá'í paradigm of unity of religions known as the principle of "Progressive Revelation". Inherent within the principle of Progressive Revelation is a cumulative process and hence it is essentially an evolutionary process; nevertheless, certain factors impart to it also a revolutionary character. Thus the paradigm of Progressive Revelation is an evolutionary process with revolutionary features to which "paradigm shift" as well as "paradigm expansion" can apply. This matter will be taken up in the ensuing parts of this paper. The analysis and discussions of Kuhn are insightful and are in particular applicable to the thesis of this paper.

## I. Advancement of Scientific Knowledge through Paradigms

Kuhn provides several examples from the history of science in order to explain and elucidate his thesis on "shift" in a

scientific paradigm. Among these, the example of “Copernican Revolution”, is appropriate and applicable to the thesis and discussions which will be presented in this paper. The Copernican Revolution was a tumultuous process which precipitated the overthrow of the geocentric model of universe and its replacement with a heliocentric model.

### The Essential Stages of a Paradigm Shift

Kuhn identifies and describes several stages which, in general, take place when a paradigm shift, whereby a new paradigm replaces the established one.

He first emphasizes that paradigms are essential. Paradigms are created based on the known scientific achievements in a specific scientific community; they attempt to explain the findings, on which there is, in general, agreement among the scientists in a respective field. Paradigms are essential to scientific inquiry. They play a significant role in helping the scientists generate and formulate questions thus stimulating further inquiries and research. These lead to continuing scientific advancement and expansion in learning. Thus paradigms set in motion a dynamic process leading to escalating levels of research and expansion in knowledge.

The established paradigm generates questions and inquiries. Such inquiries lead to new observations and data. Accumulated data, in time, can result in what Kuhn calls “anomalies”; anomalies are puzzles. The emerging data can no longer fit into the pattern of thinking embodied in the established paradigm; thus they generate puzzles. Puzzles persist as they can no longer be explained in the context of the current paradigm. In time, anomalous observations, mount resulting in what Kuhn calls, a “crisis situation”. Kuhn emphasizes that the crisis itself must be of such magnitude as to produce tension in the system preparing it for a shift in paradigm. Ultimately, further investigations into new findings, bring about or may even force a paradigm shift. Thus the process becomes revolutionary as the new emergent paradigm replaces the old established one. It is a change in regime, a coup d'état. The new paradigm necessitates a reconstruction of the original facts and assumptions.

However, such a paradigm shift is not a smooth transition as the emergent new paradigm faces opposition and resistance. The resistance comes from those in the scientific community

who are committed to the old paradigm. There are desperate efforts to hold on to the established paradigm by attempting to modify and articulate it differently. Additionally, significant challenges are posed by the new paradigm; as what is now required is a retooling, a new language, new methodologies and a whole new mindset. These challenges, when met, can induce significant advancement in scientific knowledge.

Kuhn goes on to emphasize that the acceptance and adoption of the new paradigm requires the rejection of the older established one. When the new paradigm is adopted and assimilated it is then that in the context of the new paradigm, the scientists acquire a new way of looking at data, a whole new worldview. Those observations and findings which seemed anomalous can now be explained; puzzles are solved. Even the old data take on their expanded and true meaning.

### The Copernican Revolution

The “Copernican Revolution” is, in particular, a suitable example for the application of the stages described by Kuhn in process of a paradigm shift. Furthermore, it is also cogent to the discussion of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation (to be covered in the second part of this paper).

The Copernican Revolution illustrates the implications of various stages, described by Kuhn, which lead to a shift in the established geocentric paradigm of universe. The Ptolemaic paradigm of the universe had long ceased to make sense. It was based on a pattern of thinking which had created dilemmas and inconsistencies; the literal understanding of certain biblical verses on Creation and the Christian doctrine of salvation posed barriers which seemed impenetrable.

The understanding of cosmos has been a quest ever since the emergence of man on planet earth. There has always been an urge to explain the mystery of creation, in a comprehensible manner in accordance with the state of knowledge of the time. Explanation of the creation of universe was fundamental to Greeks and Romans as well as to many religions. The Judeo-Christian view is that the universe had a distinct beginning in a not very distant time in the past. According to the literal statements in the Old Testament, the creation of the universe took place in seven days. St. Augustine, accepted the date of approximately 5000 B.C. as the date of creation of universe; this he based on his understanding of the verses in the Book of

Genesis. He argued that time is a property of universe that God created, thus time could not have existed before the beginning of universe.

### *The Geocentric Paradigm of the Universe*

Aristotle in 340 B.C. argued the sphericity of earth. He believed that the Earth was stationary and that the sun, the moon and the stars orbited around it in circles. This idea was further elaborated by Ptolemy, the Greek astronomer in 140 A.D. into a complete cosmological model. He formulated the old paradigm of Earth at the center of universe with moon, sun, and planets revolving around it in circular orbits. This was based on Plato's view that the perfect form of motion was the circular one. Earth was then at the center surrounded by eight spheres that carried the moon, the sun, the stars and the five known planets. The outermost sphere carried the fixed stars. What lay beyond was not made clear as it was not thought to be part of observable universe.

Ptolemy's paradigm was conveniently supported, promoted and adopted by the Christian church as the picture of universe that was in accordance with the Scriptures. It reinforced and was in line with the literal understanding of the Bible. Such a model reinforced religious sentiments and was compatible with the Christian doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ for the significant planet Earth, with its unique position of centrality in the entire cosmos; for around it revolved all other heavenly bodies including the Sun itself. The Ptolemaic paradigm of universe also provided a model for the placement of heaven. The moon at one time had been considered the residence of the souls of those who had passed away and are there waiting to return for rebirth. Dante's Divine Comedy was based on such a model of universe.

It is of interest and puzzling that even the learned of Islam seemed to believe in the Ptolemaic theory of universe although certain verses in the Qur'an pointed to the contrary<sup>11</sup>. One of these verses<sup>12</sup> states, "*The sun moves in a fixed place,*" This clearly indicates that the sun is fixed and moves around an axis.

Another Quranic verse<sup>13</sup> states, "And each star moves in its own heaven."

*The Paradigm Shift to Heliocentric Universe*

The early Church found the cosmology of Aristotle and Ptolemy convenient. No conflict arose as long as the language of science was not in significant variance with their beliefs. However, conflicts emerged in time. Anomalies surfaced and accumulated. Increasing new observations and data were presented by notable scientists such as Giordano Bruno, Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler, Galileo, and others. These posed puzzles which could not fit into the context of the Ptolemaic model of universe. Data presented by Copernicus in the sixteenth century showed that the sun is the center of the universe. In time, such mounting anomalies precipitated what is known as the "Copernican Revolution". The story of Genesis no longer seemed to make sense.

The resistance to the new heliocentric model of universe was vehement. Even when the model explained the new findings it was still not accepted by the establishment. When Galileo gathered evidence in support of the new model of universe with the invention of telescope, he was denounced by the professors in the university. He went before the Inquisition and was forced to "abjure, curse and detest" these absurd ideas. Giordano Bruno was burnt as a heretic in 1600 A.D., because among other things, he taught that the earth revolved around the sun.

The resistance to the new model of universe was such that desperate attempts were made to retain the geocentric model of universe. Although observations had shown that movement of planets were not in smooth circles, they tried to address the new data by introducing into the established paradigm absurd accommodations, such as inclusion of epicycles into the orbits of movement of planets. Such attempts at retaining the geocentric model of universe persisted for centuries.

Mounting anomalies and inconsistencies finally forced the paradigm to shift. The Ptolemaic paradigm of a geocentric universe was replaced by the Copernican paradigm of a heliocentric universe. The process was tumultuous; similar to a revolution, it resulted in overthrow of the regime of the established paradigm. The adoption and assimilation of the paradigm of heliocentric universe imparted an expanded worldview. The new data now fit into the structure of the new paradigm. The old data also fit! The old data and facts remained unchanged; however, they took on their true

placement and expanded meaning in the context of the new paradigm. The new paradigm served to stimulate further observations and findings.

### Learning and Insights from the Copernican Revolution

The Copernican Revolution provides important learning and insights. An extensive discussion of these insights are beyond the scope of this paper. However few points warrant special emphasis.

The process of advancement in the knowledge of universe through the Copernican Revolution followed an apparent revolutionary path; this can be attributed, to a large extent, to the barriers which were posed by religious dogmas. It is reasonable to think that the paradigm shift which took place with the Copernican Revolution, would have expanded the mindset to the true meaning and implication of the scriptures. Are they to be taken in a literal sense? Galileo, in his letter of 1615, to the Grand Duchess, Christine, argued that Biblical writers had neither intended nor wanted to convey scientific information about the natural universe. Opening up of the mindset to the inherent meaning of the scriptures must surely have relevance to the paradigm of unity or religions.

Additionally, the advancement in the knowledge of cosmos, also had an evolutionary feature as it was the result of accretion of findings. The revolutionary part of this process was unusually lengthy. It was not until Sir Isaac Newton in 1687, published his basic laws of gravity in his book, Principia, that the new model was accepted and the shift of paradigm was finally completed. The stages described and analyzed by Kuhn provide insights on the underlying factors which constituted barriers to the acceptance of the new paradigm. However, once that resistance was overcome and the paradigm was adopted and assimilated, the process took on an evolutionary course. It paved the way to new areas of research. Consequently, it has taken us beyond the heliocentric universe to a universe of superclusters of galaxies in a vast universe among many universes. It has opened vistas of discoveries, and undreamt of new possibilities. Opening up of new horizons regarding the universe must surely have its counterpart in the universe of religions.



## II. Advancement of Religious Knowledge through Paradigm of Unity of Religions (Progressive Revelation)

The thesis of Kuhn has been widely employed in fields outside the natural sciences. It is of particular value to apply his analysis to the field of religion. Science and religion are two dimensions of reality. The findings of science, whose domain is the world of matter, are not absolute but relative and progressive. The revelation of religious truth, whose domain is the world of spirit, is also relative; it has infinite scope in its essence but its revelation is progressive. It is important to note that the process of advancement of scientific knowledge relates to the physical reality and its manifestation in the phenomenal world; whereas the process of advancement in the revelation of divine truth is related to the divine reality and its manifestation is through the divine educators. The former is investigated by scientists and the latter is revelation emanating from the ultimate reality, God. Both science and religion, however, are facets of reality.

The profound insights derived from the Copernican revolution, and the essential stages entailed in that process can be applied to the Bahá'í worldview of unity of religions (principle of Progressive Revelation). Kuhn's thesis provides novel insights regarding the nature of the challenges and the opposition associated with various stages of a paradigm shift. Thus the Copernican Revolution serves as an example for discussion of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation. There are similarities between the two processes in respect to: the stages involved in paradigm shift or paradigm expansion; the insights they both hold; and that both are affected by the implications of religious dogmas.

### The Progressive Revelation

The worldview (paradigm) prevalent among the followers of religions is that their respective religion has exclusive hold on God's absolute truth and that all others are bereft of that knowledge. Furthermore, they hold the conviction that their religion provides the only path to salvation and that all others are bereft of it. These beliefs are based on the limited and literal understandings of the respective scriptures.

Such a limited paradigm of religious truth adopted by a particular religion may have been more acceptable at a time in the course of history of humankind when people were geographically isolated from one another. Under such conditions this paradigm may have served its adherents as it induced inspiration, focus, and was relevant to their particular needs.

### *Rising Anomalies and Puzzles*

However, with the passage of time the world has emerged out of isolation. Increasing possibilities and opportunities of this global age have generated anomalies and puzzles; these can no longer be addressed by any paradigm which is limited and does not have answers to the challenges of a world on the verge of a planetary civilization. Increasing interaction among people, cultures and religions generate their own set of puzzles. These have accumulated posing conflicts which can not be resolved by the prevailing paradigm of exclusivity of truth held by one religion.

Technological advances have resulted in rapid transportation, communication and mass immigrations. As a consequence, people of diverse ethnicities, cultures and religious backgrounds have been brought into close proximity. Significant inter-religious exposures have been possible in this global age. We have the opportunity to associate with and establish friendships with those from the Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem, Jewish, and Zoroastrian backgrounds. Thus we have become increasingly aware of other religions; of the nobility and truths inherent in their teachings, of the transformation in character such truths can induce and generate in their followers. The awareness of other religions can inspire study of their respective scriptures. Previously, if one studied religions other than one's own, it would have been most likely through an occasional course on comparative religions. Such studies often compared religions in reference to, for example, Christianity.

There are questions that now arise. For example, "How does one reconcile in the context of the paradigm of exclusivity of salvation, the mystical sentiments of numerous twentieth century physicists with the beautiful spiritual writings of the Buddhists? Such were the probing questions which were raised by the participants of the Second Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1993. Several of the major presenters in that Conference were struggling with such anomalies and

puzzles when placed in the confines of an old paradigm of exclusivity. It was impossible to participate in those sessions and not pose and reflect on numerous such questions. The paradigm of exclusivity of Truth and salvation was workable at a time and in a world characterized by geographical isolation. However, no longer. No paradigm which claims to hold absolute religious truth and exclusive salvation can accommodate the puzzling observations and needs of our times. Surely, the followers of other religions must also have a grasp of the truth. Their sacred texts are uplifting and also inculcate nobility of character. We can rightly ask, whether their scriptures also emanate from the divine source? Are they deprived of salvation? Here, we are faced with major puzzles.

Those of us who have hitherto held the belief that one religion holds the exclusive truth and the only route to salvation, are faced with such mounting questions and must consider whether we can provide a satisfying solution. This poses a major dilemma. How can we uphold the prevailing paradigm of religious truth centered around one religion as the exclusive possessor of Truth and salvation? Is this paradigm of exclusivity meaningful and workable? Such observations and questions pose challenges to church instituted doctrines.

On one hand any attempt to fit these anomalies into the limited paradigm of exclusivity of salvation introduces yet greater complexity. On the other hand, viewing these in the context of Bahá'í paradigm of unity of religions provides viable and refreshing solutions to the puzzles.

Another anomalous observation of our particular times arises from the expanded knowledge of our universe; a universe encompassing countless superclusters of galaxies, each harboring numerous galaxies and each galaxy in turn with numerous solar systems with their own planets. This raises the inevitable question: Are there other solar systems with planets like our planet which are capable of harboring intelligent life? Are these intelligent beings also engraven with the image of God? Is salvation also open to them? Such questions can inevitably take us once again to the doctrine of exclusivity of salvation. Any limited paradigm which applies only to our planet has major inconsistencies.

*Crisis situation*

Such mounting anomalies have reached a point which Kuhn describes, a “crisis situation”; the crisis confronts and poses challenge to the prevailing paradigm of exclusivity of truth and salvation. How can these be accommodated in the context of a paradigm which may have worked well when cultures and religions were geographically isolated and the knowledge of universe was limited? How can we explain these findings and observations in an increasingly interdependent world? In order to flourish spiritually as well as materially in a multi-religious world community we are compelled to expand our paradigm and with it transform our worldview.

*The Bahá'í Paradigm of Unity of Religions*

The Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation is a dynamic and viable substitute paradigm; it provides a major expansion in one's worldview of religions. The paradigm of unity of religions as presented by the Bahá'í Faith, affirms that divine truth is absolute and that its revelation over time through the Manifestations of God (divine educators) is relative and progressive. God's knowledge has been revealed over time progressively through Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. All of these great religions are from the same source; they are interrelated and their missions are interconnected. They all encompass the same essence, a common core which runs through all of them. These Divine Educators bring inspiration for the regeneration of the individual and society; and provide solutions for the urgent needs of the time. All of the great religions of the world come together at this point in the course of human history when the planet has become one interdependent entity; thus the needs and requirements of all now merge into one. This requires the new and expanded paradigm of a common Faith which can acknowledge and accept the validity of all the religions of the world. The Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation provides a dynamic worldview. Its specific mission is to inspire the transformation of humankind and guide it toward the realization of oneness of the human race and a planetary civilization.

### *Presentation of Progressive Revelation through the Use of Diagrams*

Here, I would like to explain certain key features of the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation through the use of several diagrams (see end of article). It is my hope to convey my understanding of certain of its important concepts. Nevertheless, I have an acute awareness that such mode of presentation has its own inherent limitations and that no diagrammatic representation can adequately convey a spiritual principle which is at once mystical, multidimensional, profound and dynamic. However, the responses to my use of such diagrams in various settings have been encouraging. Thus, one can only surmise, based on the level of response and the ensuing discussions, that this mode of presentation through use of diagrams can be of value in serving to elucidate, albeit in a limited way, certain aspects of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation. More importantly, such diagrams have served as springboards in stimulating further discussions and critique leading in turn to expanded understanding of such a dynamic paradigm. In this process, I have personally reaped the results and remain its greatest beneficiary.

Figure 1 (at end), is a diagrammatic representation of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation showing continuing progression in disclosure of divine truth over time. The circles (seen in this figure as ovals) represent revelation through successive dispensations brought by the divine educators: Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and the Twin Manifestations, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. These religions all include the same core of truth, represented in this diagram by the symbol of the radiant sun. That core relates to a divine reality which is infinite. The Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation upholds that the disclosure of divine truth through the divine educators over time is in proportion and in response to the requirements of time (as well as place).

Figure 2, is a diagrammatic representation of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation. This diagram is similar to the previous figure; however it is a rendition which draws attention to the essential connection between the divine dispensations. Thus it underscores the interconnection and linkages among religions. The revelation of God's Truth through divine educators continues on into the future. Bahá'u'lláh has made it very clear that His revelation is not final and that it will be continued through future

dispensations. The dashed curved line in this diagram represents this important key point. Thus the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation addresses a major problem which has caused so much contention and animosity in the past. This has been a misunderstanding due to the perceived exclusivity of salvation in the Church instituted doctrine of salvation and the finality of the revelation to Muhammad in Islam. These have been major barriers leading to fundamentalism, fanaticism, persecutions and brutality in the name of religion.

Figure 3, is a diagrammatic representation of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation. This diagram is similar to Figure 1. It focuses on the common features of religions. This diagram attempts to call attention to the need for a different perspective, a different point of view in looking at religions. Please note that the rotation of the successive circles (representing dispensations/religions) at a  $45^{\circ}$  angle around the axis of their common core (represented by the sun) gives us the figure inserted in the upper right corner. This inserted figure represents a view of religions showing them as concentric circles, surrounding a common core at their very center; the core is represented by the sun. This common core is their divine center. We can obtain the perspective represented by the inserted figure, only when we refine our point of view; that is if we look directly on, focused on that inner essence, through the core (similar to the rotation of  $45^{\circ}$  degree angle, as indicated above). This can serve as an effective **metaphor** for the use of perspective when viewing religions; **that is to look directly with undeviating focus on the core**. It is then that we begin to see that all of these great religions are in essence, one. They are all from the same divine source and they surround the same reality.

Figure 4, is a diagrammatic representation of the Unified Paradigm of Religions. This figure is an enlargement of the insert in figure 3, which was obtained by rotation of the figure at  $45^{\circ}$  angle around the axis of its central core. This diagram underscores the common features shared by all religions, specifically in two respects: a). The concentric circles all encompass the same radiant common core of the infinite reality (represented by the sun); this was discussed in the context of the previous figure b). The common areas (the overlaps) shared by religions. They share common areas (overlaps) but also include additional portions. The additional portions are in response to the needs and challenges of respective times; the mission of religion is to inspire the

regeneration of the individual and the society as well as to provide solutions to the challenges and urgent needs of the time. This paradigm emphasizes the cumulative and hence the evolutionary aspect of this process. The revelation of the divine truth which is imparted through religions is progressive. The Bahá'í paradigm of continuing Progressive Revelation provides a whole new way of looking at the diversity of religions. It imbues one with a new worldview.

The core inherent in all of the religions of the world is like that radiant inner reality depicted in figures 1 through 4. The core includes, such divine truths as belief in God, the soul of man, the immortality of the soul, the kingdoms of God, as well as some other beliefs. The core beliefs are also revealed to man over time progressively in greater and greater measure (see Figures 1 and 3). For example, Bahá'u'lláh has revealed writings about realities such as God, the soul, the stages of the journey of the soul, the immortality of the soul, the spiritual worlds of God, and other truths in a significantly larger proportion than that which had been imparted through the past revelations. Thus the disclosure of divine knowledge regarding the core truths also increases progressively with each successive Revelation.

Additionally, this figure calls our attention to the continuation of Revelation into the future. The outward directed arrows in figure 4, emphasize that revelation through the divine educators will continue on into the future, after the dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh,. Thus according to the worldview of unity of religions presented by Bahá'u'lláh, there can never be a claim to finality in revelation. God's truth is infinite and cannot be given in totality through any one dispensation. Further, the needs and challenges of an ever developing and changing world require continuation of divine guidance.

Figure 5, is a diagrammatic representation of Progressive Revelation over time and space through the major religions of the world. The Hindu, and Buddhist religions are shown, separate in space from Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, the Bábí and Bahá'í religions.

The Hindu and Buddhist Faiths appeared in a part of the world which was geographically isolated from that part of the world from which arose the Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Christian, the Moslem, the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths. However, at this juncture in history of humankind when the planet has

become one entity through the advances in science and technology, all of these religion now come together in one common Faith. Note the line connecting the Hindu and Buddhist religions to the Bábí and Bahá'í Faith. The specific mission of the Bahá'í Faith is to address the urgent needs of humankind at a time when geographical isolation no longer poses a hindrance. Our world is on the verge of globalization with its attendant urgent challenges. These challenges must be addressed and guided toward the realization of a viable and sustainable planetary civilization. A viable paradigm of unity of religions, as presented by the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation, is an absolute essential. It constitutes the framework for the Bahá'í convictions, actions and worldview.

The Buddhist, the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Moslem dispensations are under the Adamic cycle with Muhammad, the Seal of the prophets ending this cycle (see figure 5). The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh initiated the Bahá'í Cycle (see figure 5),

In reflecting on Progressive Revelation, it is important to be cognizant of the implications of the factors of geographical and cultural milieu to which each divine educator brought His message. The divine educators came to differing tribes and cultures who were at differing levels of development and receptivity. For example, Muhammad came to dissenting tribes of idol worshipers, whereas Jesus came to the Jewish people who were monotheistic. We can appreciate the relative magnitude of advancement (progression) in divine revelation which took place through Muhammad in isolated Arabia amidst backward peoples and tribes. They were idolaters and became monotheistic. The revelation of Muhammad induced in these people a significant level of advancement which some view as a quantum leap.

### **Selections from the Bahá'í authoritative writings on Progressive Revelation**

The Bahá'í paradigm of continuing Progressive Revelation encompasses salient points and certain key concepts conveyed through the following selections from Bahá'í authoritative writings through the following passages.

The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh ... is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive



process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the nonessential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society....<sup>14</sup>

His Cause, they have already demonstrated, stands identified with, and revolves around, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution. This final stage in this stupendous evolution, they assert, is not only necessary but inevitable, that it is gradually approaching, and that nothing short of the celestial potency with which a divinely ordained Message can claim to be endowed can succeed in establishing it.<sup>15</sup>

The Revelation identified with Bahá'u'lláh... unhesitatingly acknowledges itself to be but one link in the chain of continually Progressive Revelations, supplements their teachings with such laws and ordinances as conform to the imperative needs, and are dictated by the growing receptivity, of a fast evolving and constantly changing society, and proclaims its readiness and ability to fuse and incorporate the contending sects and factions into which they have fallen into a universal Fellowship, functioning within the framework, and in accordance with the precepts, of a divinely conceived, a world-unifying, a world-redeeming Order.<sup>16</sup>

### *The Resistance to the Paradigm*

The Bahá'í Paradigm of continuing Progressive Revelation was articulated and proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh in 1863. This paradigm has been met with resistance, opposition and rejection. The resistance may be compared, albeit, at a heightened level, to the opposition and resistance which confronted the shift of the paradigm of universe from the geocentric to the heliocentric.

Much of this resistance and opposition can be attributed to attachments and entrenchments in the paradigm of exclusivity

of truth as held by one religion. The implications of the process of paradigm shift from the paradigm of exclusivity to the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation are intriguing. Such a paradigm shift similar to that which took place with the Copernican Revolution has implications of the element of religious dogma which was based on literal understanding of the scriptures. Again in this context, for the Christians, this is due to the Church instituted doctrine of exclusivity of salvation through Jesus Christ and for the Moslems it is the finality of God's revelation with Muhammad.

Thus there continues to be rejection and opposition to the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation. Such rejection and vehement opposition have been to the extent of persecution, imprisonments, and exile of Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, who presented this paradigm in mid nineteenth century. The intensity of persecutions, burnings, imprisonments and martyrdom of the proponents of the Bahá'í paradigm have persisted to this day. Over 20,000 who adopted and defended this paradigm were put to death. Such rejection and resistance are reminiscent, to some extent, of the opposition to the heliocentric universe.

Attempts are made to accommodate solutions to the puzzles which face us within the context of the structure, methodologies and restricted mindset of the old paradigm. This is reminiscent of the attempts which were made to retain the geocentric model of universe by accommodating the new data on the length of orbits around the sun through the introduction of epicycles. It did not work. Likewise attempts to accommodate the requirements for unity of religions in the context of the old paradigm of exclusivity of truth does not work. The established structures, systems and organizations are defective and incapable of addressing the unification of religions and the urgent needs of our global age. Attempts to force fit the needs of our times into the established paradigm can only create further friction causing the breakage of its framework. Nothing can work which is short of a total acceptance and appreciation of the divine origin of all religions and the continuing progression of religious truth.

### *Adoption of Paradigm*

In order to adopt this expanded paradigm of religions barriers must be overcome. Howard Margolis<sup>17</sup> considers the well entrenched "habits of the mind", the barriers to a new

paradigm. These well entrenched habits of the mind include the religious dogmas and the literal understanding of scriptures. Additionally, there are needs and challenges associated with the adoption of the Bahá'í worldview. The paradigm of Progressive Revelation requires adoption of a whole new mindset; a restructuring, a reeducation, a retooling, and a whole new language. New methodologies hitherto unknown, must be developed.

Thoughtful reflection on the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation, is compelling that its adoption can have powerful implications. It imbues one with a new worldview; all of a sudden beliefs and doctrines take on their true and expanded meaning. Furthermore, the accumulating anomalies and puzzles which have arisen in the context of the prevailing paradigms of religions can find their resolution.

### *Assimilation of Paradigm*

When the expanded paradigm of Progressive Revelation is adopted and assimilated one is able to overcome the barrier of religious dogmas on exclusivity of truth and salvation limited to one religion. It is then that the anomalies and puzzles find their solution. Assimilation of this paradigm is tantamount to opening up of new vistas, vast horizons and new undreamt of possibilities. The Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation has now been assimilated by over some six million inhabitants of our planet. Its transformative power has been set in motion radiating out from this relatively small but significant percentage of humanity. When this paradigm is adopted by a critical mass of the inhabitant of this planet, it is then that a fuller measure of its transformative power will be felt.

## **Discussion**

### **Comparisons between The paradigm of Progressive Revelation and The Paradigm of the Heliocentric Universe**

The paradigm of Progressive Revelation can be compared and contrasted in certain respects with the paradigm of the heliocentric universe.

The paradigm of universe is based on scientific discoveries and the paradigm of Progressive Revelation is based on revelations whose source is the divine reality. Religion and

science are in harmony and from the same source of knowledge; however they differ in their domains, their language and modes of expression. Scientific advancement is brought about by scientists reaching out to uncover the mysteries of outer phenomena. Religious progression and advancement are brought by the Divine Educators who provide to man guidance from that ultimate reality, God.

The following quotes from Bahá'í sacred Scriptures warrant in-depth reflection:

*Science may be likened to a mirror wherein the images of the mysteries of outer phenomena are reflected. It brings forth and exhibits to us in the arena of knowledge all the product of the past. It links together past and present".... Science is the governor of nature and its mysteries, the one agency by which man explores the institutions of material creation. (Abdu'l-Bahá' in BWF 242)*

*Religion is the outer expression of the divine reality. Therefore, it must be living, vitalized, moving and progressive. (Abdu'l-Bahá' in BWF 224)*

The stage of acceptance of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation bears similarities to the stage of acceptance of the paradigm of heliocentric universe (in reference to the thesis of Kuhn). Both were confronted with the barriers of religious dogmas and the literal understanding of scriptures. The heliocentric model of universe was finally accepted after centuries. The paradigm of Progressive Revelation which was presented in 1863 by Bahá'u'lláh continues to face this barrier. Both paradigms have elicited vehement oppositions and reactions from those entrenched and committed to the previously established paradigms.

The adoption of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation confers to each religion its rightful place; not at the center, but rather as a planet revolving around that center, God, the Sun of Truth. The Copernican revolution provides a powerful metaphor. With the adoption of paradigm of a heliocentric universe things took on new meaning. Earth was no longer at the center of universe with the moon, the known planets as well as the Sun itself, revolving around it; rather earth was one planet revolving around the sun. The sun was no longer a planet revolving around the earth; rather it was at the very center. The meaning and significance of the sun and planet

earth changed radically. Such a transition had profound implications introducing a significantly higher level of comprehension. It changed and transformed Earth centeredness into Sun centeredness.

Similarly the assimilation of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation, can bring about a major transformation in our worldview from exclusivity to inclusivity of truth. The different religions find their proper placements as planets revolving around the Sun of Truth, God. The transition of worldview from dogma centeredness to God centeredness can bring about a profound transformation. The divine reality, God, takes on its rightful place at the very center with religions coursing along their orbits around it!

When paradigms change our world view changes. We begin to see things in a whole new way. We see them in a different light. We begin to see what we did not see before. This is tantamount to a major transformation; it is a gestalt switch. The work of the Hanover Institute provides an interesting metaphor. In experiments when the subject wears a goggle with inverting lenses, initially he becomes disoriented for the world is seen upside down; however some time after, the visual field inverts over and the world is seen right side up<sup>18</sup>. A transformation has taken place in visual gestalt. When paradigms change our worldview changes.

It is important to emphasize that with the adoption of the new paradigm, old data can be explained and confirmed taking on new meaning. In the context of the new paradigm the fundamental facts remain unchanged. The fundamental facts about the universe did not change with the shift in paradigm of universe. The fundamental truth underlying religions does not change in the context of the Bahá'í paradigm of unity of religions. The truth does not change!

The process of advancement in knowledge of universe, specifically through the Copernican Revolution, demonstrates features which can be compared to that of the Bahá'í paradigm of unity of religions (Progressive Revelation). Both have revolutionary features although they are essentially evolutionary processes. The knowledge of the universe has advanced through observations, findings and collection of data; thus these findings have been cumulative and therefore evolutionary. The Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation upholds that the revelation of God's truth to man is progressive; hence in essence, it is

cumulative and thus evolutionary. However, the implications of religious dogmas introduce to it a *de facto* revolutionary feature. The revolutionary features of both, the heliocentric model of universe and the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation can be attributed, to a great extent, to the implications of religious dogmas. This point was discussed in a previous section of this paper.

It is important to note that the resistance to the change of paradigm of universe from geocentric to heliocentric, persisted over several centuries. However, after that first crucial shift, that coup d'état, had taken place, research and advancement in science of universe took on an evolutionary path leading over time to smooth expansion of paradigms. The rate of accumulation of data on the knowledge of universe has since increased by leaps and bounds. Similarly, it is anticipated that once that initial resistance to the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation is overcome and once the essential tools and methodologies develop, then the process leading to the adoption of the paradigm of unity of religions will show significant acceleration.

It must be borne in mind that the term revolutionary is often used when the discovery is such that it marks a turning point in the particular field. There are numerous examples of such revolutionary processes. In the field of biology, the acceptance of the structure of DNA as shown through the data of Watson and Crick as well as those of other scientists, revolutionized the field. In the domain of religion, the paradigm of unity of religions as presented by the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation, has significant implications such that it can revolutionize mindsets and civilizations. This, in particular, has profound implications at this critical juncture in history when humankind is facing the challenges of globalization.

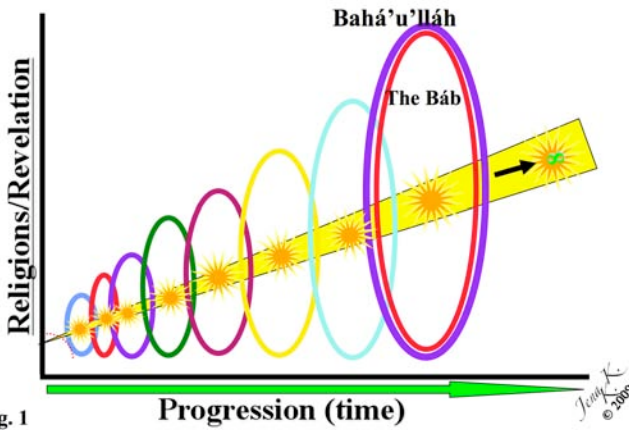
## Concluding Comments

In recent times, the urgent need for addressing the rising religious fanaticism and fundamentalism is deeply felt by many. There is increase in interfaith activities, groups, and organizations with the noble mission of improving inter-religious dialogues and fellowship. This, they see as a solution in addressing the conflicts which have arisen in our global society. All these attempts underscore the urgency in addressing the ever intensifying need for a vital, viable,

sustainable and an all encompassing worldview of unity of religions. There is a dire need for a paradigm which can unify all religions. The need for such a paradigm has been there for some time. Leo Tolstoy, the eminent Russian writer and philosopher of the early twentieth century was among those who wished to resolve the question of religious differences and even contemplated to construct a universal religion which would encompass all religions. However, the enormity of the task is such that nothing short of a force with the potency to transmute mindsets and elevate human consciousness, is capable of bringing about a transformation of such magnitude. One may ask, what agency has such potency?

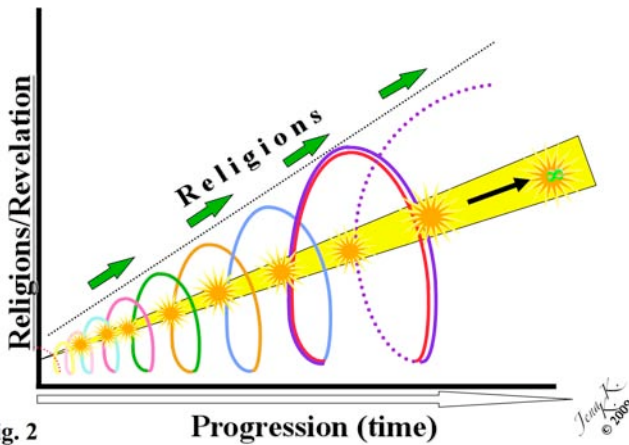
The Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation is a candidate paradigm for bringing about the unification of religions, cultures and nation in this global age. The acceptance and adoption of the Bahá'í paradigm of unity of religions can provide solutions to the dilemmas and needs of our time. Yet, its acceptance continues to follow a long and difficult path strewn with resistance and barriers. However, once it is adopted and assimilated it is bound to bring about a major transformation in our global society.

Legends to Figures 1 through 5



*Paradigm of Progressive Revelation showing progression over time*

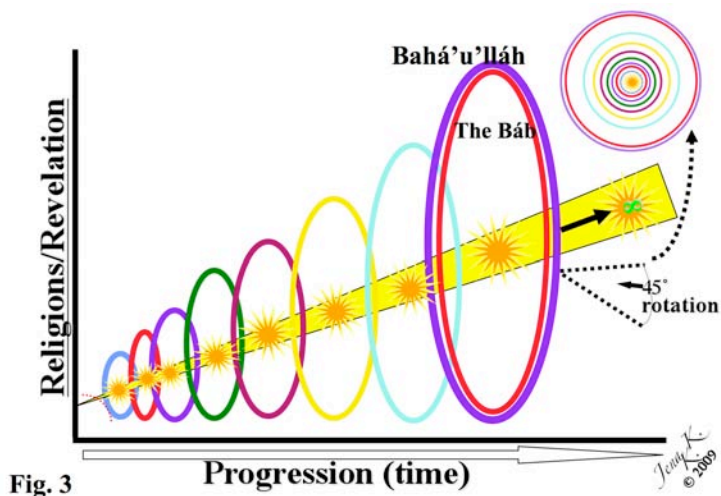
This figure is a diagrammatic representation of the Bahá'í paradigm of Progressive Revelation showing continuing progression in divine truth. The circles represent successive revelation of God's truth through the divine educators: Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and the Twin Manifestations, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. (labeled) The core, that essence of divine truth within each religion, is represented by the symbol of the sun.



*The essential connection between the divine educators*



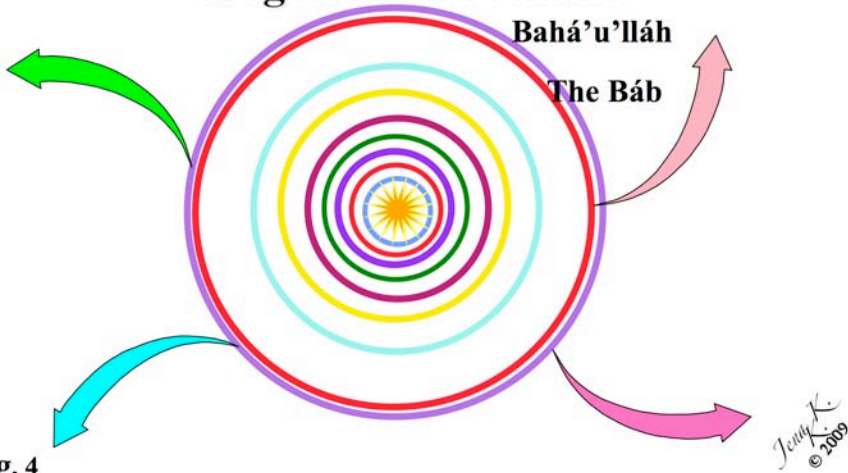
This figure is a diagrammatic representation of the paradigm. This diagram is similar to Fig. 1, but this rendering emphasizes the interconnection and the essential linkages between the religions brought by the divine educators. The dashed curved line indicates continuity of revelation into the future.



*Features shared by religions: A fresh perspective*

This figure is similar to Figure 1 but from different angle of view. The successive circles (representing dispensations/religions) are rotated  $45^{\circ}$  around the axis of their common core. This results in the figure shown in insert at the upper right hand corner of this figure. The inserted figure shows those religions (dispensations) as concentric circles containing a common corner; this is shown by the image of sun at the center of concentric circles. This concentric circle provides a fresh perspective on the paradigm of Progressive Revelation.

## Unified Paradigm of Religions “Progressive Revelation”



**Fig. 4**

*Unified Paradigm of Religions*

Fig. 4 is an enlargement of the insert from Fig. 3, which was obtained by rotation of the successive circles (representing dispensations/religions) at  $45^\circ$  around the axis of their central common core. This figure represents concentric circles all encompassing the same common core (represented by the Sun at the center) of the infinite Divine reality. The circles include common areas and overlaps which are shared by consecutive circles. The outward directed arrows emphasize that continuation of revelation through the divine educators will continue into the future.

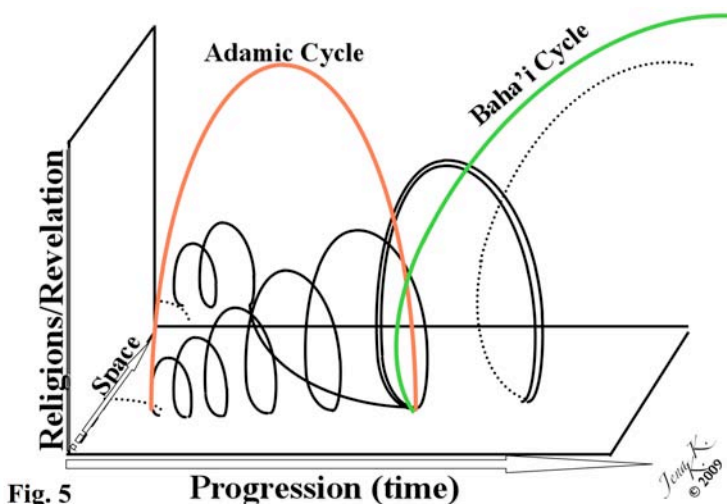


Fig. 5

Progression (time)

*Paradigm of Progressive Revelation showing progression over time, space*

This figure is a diagrammatic representation of the major religions of the world over time and space of which we have record. These religions arose in different parts of the world and have been in the past geographically isolated. The Buddhist and the Hindu arose from India and the Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Christian, the Moslem, the Bábí and the Bahá'í Faiths arose in the Middle East and the Arabian peninsula. Please note the connecting linkage (at this point in time) of the Hindu and Buddhist religions to the twin manifestations the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. The Buddhist, the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Moslem dispensations are under the Adamic cycle with Muhammad the seal, the end of that cycle. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh initiated the Bahá'í Cycle.

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## NOTES

Author's note: I want to express my appreciation to Dr. Feridun Khodadadeh for his encouragement and interest in the ideas presented in this paper. Our discussions and discourses on science helped form my resolve to present the Bahá'í principle of Progressive Revelation in the context of Kuhnian paradigm shift and expansion, and in particular to use diagrams in my attempt to explain the central concepts of the Progressive Revelation, such as mystical, multi dimensional and dynamic principle. To him I am indebted.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was organized for the 2008 session of Irfán Colloquium to honor the centennial of the publication of *Some Answered Questions*.

The essential relationship between the manifestations of God and the principle of “Progressive Revelation” are major themes in the talks and writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá including several chapters of *Some Answered Questions* (SAQ). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Part I, of SAQ, entitled, “Influence of the Prophets in the Evolution of Humanity” (chapters 3 to 9), extols the divine Educators, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh and in Part III, entitled, “On the Powers and Conditions of the Manifestations of God” (chapter 41), He refers to the universal cycles of divine manifestations.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962)

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964)

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Second Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970)

<sup>5</sup> Howard Margolis, *Paradigms and Barriers, How Habits of Mind Govern Scientific Belief*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993)

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding, The collective use and evaluation of Concepts*, (Princeton University press, 1972)

<sup>7</sup> Kafatos and Nadeau, see introduction to *The Conscious Universe: Parts and Whole in Physical Reality*, (Springer, second Edition, 2001)

<sup>8</sup> Paul Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993)

<sup>9</sup> Thomas S. Kühn, “Reflections on my critics” in: *Criticism and Growth of Knowledge*, Eds. I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, 231-238. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Hoyningen-Huene, *Reconstructing Scientific Revolution*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1993)

<sup>11</sup> Abdu’l-Baha, see *Some Answered Questions*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Qur’an 36:37

<sup>13</sup> Qur’an 36:38

<sup>14</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. v

<sup>15</sup> Shoghi Effendi, Extracts from the United States Bahá’í News

<sup>16</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 100

<sup>17</sup> Howard Margolis, *Paradigms and Barriers, How Habits of Mind Govern Scientific Belief*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993)

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Second Edition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970)

# A Glimpse into the Life of Laura Dreyfus-Barney

Mona Khademi

## Introduction

Once, on a pleasant Sunday afternoon in Washington, a gentle nobleman's carriage stops at the door of a beautiful house. He rings the bell. He waits for a while. No one answers. He is tired but waits a little longer. He rings the bell again and still no one answers. He turns back and returns to his place of residence. He has already been to this house a few days earlier. He knows the owner of the house and her daughter. He is paying a last visit to say farewell to the hostess who had invited Him several times during His stay and graciously entertained Him.

Who is this nobleman? Why is He there? Who are the owners of the house? When was that?

That was almost 100 years ago. The year is 1912. The house is Studio House.<sup>1</sup> The nobleman is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The owners are the Barney family of Washington. The author passes in front of this house regularly and cannot forget the image of the Master standing in front that house, knocking on its door! How sad a day it was in 2000 when she learned that the house was being sold and its contents auctioned off.<sup>2</sup>

The author was able to visit the house and see the furniture and objects belonging to the Barney family which were up for auction. Much of the furniture was original, perhaps used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá while enjoying a meal or being entertained by His hosts. This was the last time anyone could see the house with its original contents.



*Alice Barney-Hemmick's home in Washington, D.C., c. 1912*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá came to this house for dinner and for tea several times during His three visits to Washington, DC in April and May of 1912.<sup>3</sup> This was the house designed and built by Laura Barney’s mother in 1903 and called Studio House. Prominent people, artists, authors, musicians and diplomats and even the president of the US had frequented these rooms, known for their opulence, peculiar and artistically exciting architecture.

Later, Studio House was inherited by Barney daughters.<sup>4</sup> Laura donated the House and its contents to Smithsonian Institution, a research and education center, to be used as a

cultural center.<sup>5</sup> Several years after Laura's passing, the Smithsonian decided to sell the House because of its expensive upkeep. It was at that time that the author became interested to learn about the life of Laura Barney and began her research. Unfortunately very limited published material was found on her.

Who is Laura Barney? Why should we know about her? What are some of her achievements? How did she become a Bahá'í? Where was she from?

We immediately know of her from her greatest legacy, the book called *Some Answered Questions* published in 1908. Who was this person who conjured such deep and intriguing questions for 'Abdu'l-Bahá? Why did she spend months in the prison city of Akka? What else did she do?

## Laura Clifford Barney

In this paper, the author attempts to answer some of these questions. But even this is not easy. Unfortunately Laura's personal notes and diaries were stolen during the Nazi occupation of Paris between 1940 and 1944.<sup>6</sup> Hopefully after this research is completed and a proper biography compiled, more light will be shed on the life of this distinguished Bahá'í figure. Today we begin with a glimpse into her life.

The author believes that proper recognition has eluded Laura Dreyfus Barney both within the Bahá'í community as well as the world. One reason may be the lack of her diaries or memoirs. Another factor may be that she still stands in the shadow of her



*Laura Barney, c. 1900*



prominent and accomplished spouse, Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney. Yet another might be that she divided her time between two countries, which was uncommon in those days. Therefore her heroism has been lost in unexamined history.

The author shares her story, compiled from original documents and memoirs with a minimum of interpretation; revolving around her life and the activities of her family.

The three major periods in the life of Laura Dreyfus-Barney can be considered:

1. Her family and childhood (1879-1900);
2. Becoming a Bahá'í, her Bahá'í activities and accomplishments, meeting and marrying Hippolyte Dreyfus (1900-1928)
3. Her life after the passing of her husband (1928-1974).

### First Period (1879-1900): Her Family and Childhood

Laura Clifford Barney was born on Nov. 30, 1879 to a family of industrialists and artists in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her mother was Alice Pike, the daughter of Samuel Pike, a multi-millionaire entrepreneur with wide-ranging interests. He collected paintings and rare books, played the flute, wrote poetry, and built an opera house in his city. From childhood Alice was surrounded by the



*Alice Pike-Barney, Laura's mother, in 1913*



arts. Also at an early age, she was exposed to the robust creativity of Europe which increased her life-long passion for the arts.

Alice was an artist, writer, theater director, philanthropist, and prominent civic and social leader. With her wealth and social connections, she became a powerful ally for the arts when her family moved to the capital of the United States in 1889. She was a “willful, eclectic, and ‘eccentric,’ a term used to explain her lack of conformity to many conventions and mores.”<sup>7</sup> In Washington and Paris, her name was synonymous with an unwavering commitment to the culture of creativity.

Laura’s father, Albert Clifford Barney, was a wealthy Dayton, Ohio manufacturer and financier. They were married in 1876. Their first child, Natalie, was born the same year. Laura was born 3 years later. They had a rich and privileged childhood, enjoying “satin-lined sheets and flower-bedecked baby carriages.”<sup>8</sup> They had French governesses and private tutors for the early years of their education. They were accustomed to wealth and luxury from early years of their lives. Their summer residence was a house with twenty-six rooms!



*Natalie and Laura, c. 1900*

Laura’s parents decided to send their daughters to boarding school in France and sent them to Les Ruches (in France) in 1886 for their studies.<sup>9</sup> Their mother approved of this decision since her marriage to Albert was not a happy one. Her husband had a difficult personality. She decided to accompany the

daughters. By moving to Paris, she could be near her daughters and pursue her own interests such as taking painting lessons.

As to the characters of the two sister, they were as opposite in personality as they were in coloring. Natalie was blond and fearless. Laura was brunette, dark and serious; spending many days quietly posing for her mother. "While Laura looked upon her parents with adoring eyes, unable to recognize that they might be less than perfect, Natalie harbored no illusions."<sup>10</sup>

While growing up, Laura never caused any problems for her parents. She had an over developed sense of duty. Her mother would look at "her somber dark-haired daughter in amazement."<sup>11</sup> Laura was a diligent student and she always tried to improve. She was thirteen years old when she returned to America and entered a Catholic convent school in Washington. A few years earlier, her father had moved the family to Washington, DC.

Though Laura was younger than her sister, their roles were reversed in their youth. It was "Natalie who sought out the practical younger sister to take care of mundane matters."<sup>12</sup>

Even in her youth, Laura was quite different. The signs of her keen intelligence and curious nature had started to emerge at a very young age. There were only serious thoughts in her head which was not a family characteristic. She showed a keen intelligence and inquisitive nature with insightful observations from an early age.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it was the daily presence of physical pain from a leg injury which left her with a limp that had made her "both introspective and practical in equal doses."<sup>14</sup>

When her family returned to Paris in 1898, Laura, then 19, and her sister often attended their mother's gatherings in Paris: Laura often participated in the intellectual discussions among influential writers and artists.<sup>15</sup> She studied dramatic arts and sculpture in Paris. She was very much intrigued with theater like her mother, which was surprising given her naturally quiet and retiring personality.<sup>16</sup> She later wrote 25 short stories and at least two plays.<sup>17</sup>

In those years, her parents' differences were becoming irreconcilable, with her father giving way to rages and excessive drinking.

## Second Period (1900-1928)

### Hearing about the Bahá'í Faith, her Family's Reaction and Meeting her Future Husband

In 1900, Laura's family was living in Paris. She heard of the faith of Bahá'u'lláh through May Ellis Bolles (later Maxwell) in Paris in that year and accepted it right away.<sup>18</sup> An early supporter of women's rights and world peace, Laura believed fully in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith and accepted it right away. This proved to be, as the Hand of the Cause of God, Dr. Ugo Giachery later wrote; "the spark that ignited a fire never to be quenched." He continued: "Her ideals and aspirations found fulfillment in her activities in the service of the Bahá'í Faith."<sup>19</sup> Soon after her acceptance of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh she made her first pilgrimage to Akka.

Upon her return to Paris, she became an active participant in that city's Bahá'í community and was instrumental in establishing a significant Bahá'í presence in Washington, DC later.<sup>20</sup> Laura and her mother helped find housing for Mirza Abul-Fazl, the celebrated Bahá'í scholar and teacher. Her mother had heard about the Bahá'í Faith from Laura and had become a Bahá'í.

She joined her daughter on one her visits to Akka. Upon Alice's return from Akka to Washington, she became active by opening her home, Studio House, for meetings of the Bahá'ís. In contrast to her previous gatherings, these were not the elite of politics and society: they were people of all walks of life who attended! Alice painted a portrait of Mirza Abu'l Fazl during his stay; she also painted Ali Kuli Khan. However, as an artist and given her social milieu, she may not have fully understood the Faith.<sup>21</sup> She did not view it as a conflict to be both an Episcopalian and a Bahá'í. Alice's biographer believes that "of the two, the Bahai faith with its emphasis upon women's equality was appealing to her. Moreover, the faith's Persian roots appealed to her sense of the exotic."<sup>22</sup>

The media of Washington were not very charitable when learning of their change of religion. A gossip magazine, the *Washington Mirror* wrote an article about Laura's conversion to the Bahá'í Faith and making fun of the "Mirza Abul Fazel Gulapaygan's" "own peculiar way of preaching" and considered it the family's "latest fad."<sup>23</sup>

Laura was not at all amused by this article, and she was disdainful of the ignorance it revealed.<sup>24</sup> But this was what she had to tolerate. Yet none of this would weaken her devotion and perseverance. She was a staunch and firm believer in her faith from the beginning. Laura “with characteristic single-mindedness” continued her hard work to further the cause of her faith in Washington whenever she returned.<sup>25</sup>

Not long after that, Alice was yet again shocked to see an issue of *'The Washington Mirror'*, making fun of Laura and the Bahá'í Faith. The article had painted a very “exaggerated scene of an incense-filled room where the audience was waiting for the appearance of and contact with Bahá'u'lláh!”<sup>26</sup> It was filled with incorrect descriptions. At the end it printed the address of the Bahá'í meeting place. As a result, crowds gathered to gawk and laugh at those who came to hear the teachings of Abu'l Fazl.

Albert, Laura's father, who cared about people's opinion of him and what was said about his family, decided to close the house where the meetings were held. The outrage at his wife and Laura was limitless and this came as a blow to his pride and to his poor health. He, who had had a heart attack several years earlier, suffered another heart attack. His doctors advised him to go to a spa to rest and recuperate. He traveled to Europe with his eldest daughter. But unfortunately he died in Monte Carlo on December 5, 1902. Laura was twenty three years old at the time. The family was saddened by his death, even though Alice was perhaps relieved that it was finally over. For the first time in “twenty-six years, Alice, Natalie, and Laura were completely free of the man who had tried to rule their lives.”<sup>27</sup> He was quite a rich man at the time. His ashes were buried at a funeral service in his hometown of Dayton.

It was in the middle of the same year that Laura and her mother moved to Studio House.

## Meeting her Future Husband

Laura met Hippolyte Dreyfus in Paris in 1900. Like Laura, he was introduced to the Bahá'í Faith the same year by May Bolles. He was a Frenchman six years her senior. He had studied law and had a doctoral degree and was practicing before the Paris Court of Appeals.<sup>28</sup> He became the first French citizen to believe in Bahá'u'lláh. He visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Akka in 1903.

He gave up his legal career to devote himself to oriental studies, comparative religion, plus Arabic and Persian, intending to translate the Bahá'í Writings. His accomplishments are numerous and well-documented.

Let us hear in Laura's own words of their encounter:

The first meeting with Hippolyte Dreyfus that I can recall was in 1900 in Paris on the threshold of May Bolles' apartment near l'École des Beaux Arts. He was leaving; I was arriving to hear more of the Bábí epilogue. Though I was away from France almost constantly from 1901 to 1906, I knew that he had become an outstanding Bahá'í and that his father and mother, his sister and brother-in-law had all joined the Cause.<sup>29</sup>

It was not an ordinary man that Laura had met. Shoghi Effendi later spoke of him as a man who had "qualities of genial and enlivening fellowship," and was of "sound judgment and distinctive ability."<sup>30</sup> He was an outstanding man.

Laura and Hippolyte collaborated on different projects and took several trips at the request of the Master before they were married years later.

### Her Visits to the Holy Land and the Middle East in the Early 1900s

As soon as Laura heard about the Bahá'í revelation in Paris, she began traveling to Akka, and stayed for months at a time during several of those trips. During her first trip she was twenty-one years old. In those days, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was confined to the city of Akka and was permitted to receive only a few visitors. Imagining a refined young western woman from a wealthy family in the city of Akka of those years is difficult; however, she had special attraction to living in those surroundings.<sup>31</sup>

She traveled several times to the Holy Land. Her third trip was in 1904. The next year, she traveled with her future husband to the native land of Bahá'u'lláh at the request of the Master. They were the first Western Bahá'ís to do so.<sup>32</sup> They visited Tabriz and Maku and Ishqabad in Russian Turkistan where the first Bahá'í House of Worship had been built.<sup>33</sup> Madame Lachenay, a Bahá'í from France, was her travel companion.<sup>34</sup> Further research may yield details of this trip to Persia. While

in Tehran, Laura sent a letter to her mother, stating that the believers there were “wonderfully sincere and kind” and they were among “the most important people” of Persia.<sup>35</sup> What inadequate information that I have found is from Fazil Mazandarani’s recorded it in Zohuru’l-Hagh.<sup>36</sup> Laura and Hippolyte also met with Sadr-u Sodour while in Iran and sent a report to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In response He revealed a Tablet for Sadr-u’l Sodour. In that Tablet, He refers to Miss Barney.<sup>37</sup>

In order to meet the Bahá’ís, Laura also traveled to Egypt and Turkey.<sup>38</sup> In the autumn of the same year she returned to Akka. This time Laura was accompanied by her mother.<sup>39</sup> It was after her departure from Akka on one of these trips that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá revealed a Tablet for Laura, giving her the title of ‘Amatu’l-Baha,’ “*Handmaiden of Baha.*”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

*I will henceforth address thee the ‘Handmaiden of Bahá’ so that it may indicate that thou hast attained to a new assignation.*<sup>40</sup>

These visits to Akka became the center of Laura Barney’s life and sources of stimulation and inspiration. She became acquainted with the immediate family of the Master and met Shoghi Effendi when he was a young child. Of her first meetings she wrote: “Shoghi Effendi! How well I remember the first time I saw him in the Holy Land. He was then a little boy of five or six years of age, clothed in a brown Persian garment, chanting a prayer in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s presence; his earnest eyes, his firm mouth looked predestined.”<sup>41</sup> Laura learned about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interest to find a tutor for His grandson to teach him English literature. It was Laura who secured the services of a cultured and refined English lady.<sup>42</sup>

### *Some Answered Questions*

Details of her visits and travels to Akka, between 1904 and 1906, require further research and are of great significance. This period described by Shoghi Effendi as “the most troublous and dramatic of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ministry. He was still as a prisoner of the Turkish government.”<sup>43</sup>

As Hassan Balyuzi stated:

It is of particular interest to know the details of Laura Clifford Barney’s repeated and extended visits to the

Holy Land, because it was during those months, stretched over several years, that a book unique in the entire range of the Writings of the Founders of the Faith took shape. The book was *Some Answered Questions*. Questions came from Laura Barney and 'Abdu'l-Bahá answered them.<sup>44</sup>

This being, Laura Barney's most outstanding achievement which "immortalized her name the [Bahá'í] world over."<sup>45</sup>

A summary of the accounts of those years will be given. These are based on the memoirs of Dr. Youness Afroukhteh. He was the secretary and translator to the Master who rendered Laura Barney's questions from English into Persian and converted the Master's answers from Persian to English.

Dr. Youness Khan recorded:

In the heat and confusion of Akka, she [Laura Barney] joyfully pursued her solitary task of collecting the Writings of the Master. And as she meditated and soared in the realms of spirit, she beheld the light of the celestial flame in the Sinai of her heart and discovered many divine realities.<sup>46</sup>

Youness Khan recalled that the Master would sit at the head of the dinner table and Laura Barney sat on His left and Ethel Rosenberg, an early English Bahá'í, who had accompanied Laura, sat to her left. Often, several pilgrims and friends were also present. He himself was sitting to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's right.<sup>47</sup>

In 1904 when Laura began posing her questions, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was concerned about the approach of turmoil and upheaval, therefore no permission was granted to anyone to enter Akka. "Miss Barney hardly ever left the House of 'Abdu'l-Bahá except on certain occasions to visit the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, which was undertaken with great care and caution."<sup>48</sup>

"Like the other Western friends," Youness Khan wrote, "this lady received her share of spiritual education at the dinner table." He continued: "the Master's excessive workload only allowed time allotted for such question and answer sessions at the dinner table and then only at lunch time, at about 1 pm."<sup>49</sup>



*Hippolyte Dreyfus, Laura Barney and Mme Lachenay in Iran, c. 1906*

Dr. Afroukhteh recorded that Laura Barney “was endowed with an avid enthusiasm for acquiring spiritual qualities and heavenly attributes” and that is why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá honoured her with the title of *Amatu’l-Baha*.<sup>50</sup> She had shown a keen intelligence and inquisitive nature with insightful observations from an early age. She was a shy woman: the “quintessence of purity and piety.”<sup>51</sup> And her reserved and quiet way had a powerful impact on the followers of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

In his words she immersed “herself in the ocean of divine knowledge, where she discovered many a precious pearls.”<sup>52</sup> “In her eagerness to grasp the realities of the teachings, she considered the Prison City of Akka and the small house of the Beloved of the world preferable to the most splendid mansions of Western countries.”<sup>53</sup>

In the introduction of *Some Answers Questions*, Laura Barney writes that one day the Master said ‘I have given to you my tired moments,’ as He rose from the table after answering her question. Sometimes weeks [would] pass before she would get her instructions. She said: “But I could well be patient, for I had always before me the greater lesson – the lesson of his personal life.”<sup>54</sup> She continues: “In these lessons He is the



teacher adapting Himself to his pupil, and not the orator or poet.”<sup>55</sup>

She was greatly favored by the Master because of her spirituality and He was content and happy with the process. The fact that He had no time to eat or enjoy His meals was not a problem. On one of these occasions, when the Master was showing a little tiredness, He rose and happily remarked:

*It is encouraging that after all this labour, at least she understands the concepts. This is refreshing. What would I have done if after all this effort she still failed to comprehend the issues?*<sup>56</sup>

As the table talks continued the Holy family realized the significance of the precious gems coming to light, decided to have a writer attend the meetings and take down in Persian what was said.<sup>57</sup> Miss Barney arranged for one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s son-in-laws or for one of the Persians of His secretariat of that period to make sure that the recording or the replies are made in an accurate way.<sup>58</sup> When Dr. Afroukhteh went on a trip, one of the daughters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took the task of translation.<sup>59</sup>

Laura Barney became quite fluent in Persian “from her continual practice of it, as well as her study of the Holy Writings. And because of her familiarity with Bahá’í terminology and Persian expressions, it was easier for her than some other western believers who visited the Master in those years. Dr. Afroukhteh states that the discussions “were concluded in an atmosphere of joy and amity.”<sup>60</sup> He also writes of numerous references and interesting episodes of the Master’s manner of expression and utterance that enchanted Miss Barney.<sup>61</sup>

Then the time of compiling came. In the first months when she started compiling her book, the situation in Akka had eased somewhat.<sup>62</sup>

The task of correcting and rereading by the Master and translation and comparison were very difficult both for the Master and Miss Barney, especially when the compilation time arrived. Laura states that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá decided that they should be recorded in Persian as well. She describes how the Master corrected Mirza Munir’s first draft and then the corrections were reviewed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and then approved and singed each corrected subject.<sup>63</sup> The Master read the

transcriptions and altered as needed with His red pen, then signed and stamped each one with His seal. Laura later wrote that it was the same stamp that 'Abdu'l-Bahá used for His revealed Tablets.<sup>64</sup> Dr. Afroukhteh explains that: "...the Amatu'l-Baha, due to her strong faith and intense devotion, was able to compile her book properly and this received 'Abdu'l-Bahá's approval. Therefore, each word and line of that book should be considered as the revealed Word."<sup>65</sup>

The original Persian texts are in the Bahá'í archives of Haifa. Laura Clifford Barney was able to complete the work and present this great service to the Bahá'í world, a gift that will cause her to be remembered eternally."<sup>66</sup>

The book was first called the 'table talks.' She did not intend to publish them at the time and were simply for her future reference. She requested permission from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to publish them in 1907 which was granted. She published them in English and Persian in 1908.<sup>67</sup> A copy of Mufavezat was sent to Edward G. Browne the British Orientalist after its publication in 1908.<sup>68</sup> She also later collaborated with Hippolyte Dreyfus to translate *An-Nuru'l-Abha-fi-Mufawadat* into French.<sup>69</sup>

This is how this work "unique in all religious literature" came into existence.<sup>70</sup> In that same year, she went yet on another Pilgrimage to Akka.<sup>71</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá was also freed that year after the revolution in the Ottoman Empire and the overthrow of the Sultan.

Now we examine the developments of her family. In 1909, Laura's mother met a popular bachelor, Christian Dominique Hemmick, thirty years her junior in Washington. He was a few years younger than her younger daughter, Laura! They became engaged and planned to get married. Both daughters strongly opposed it when they heard the news of their upcoming marriage.

In the same years, Natalie, Laura's sister had followed a different path. She was living in Paris and was leading a very unconventional life style, befriending prominent women artists of the time. She was also holding salons for prominent authors, artists, poets. Laura's mother did not approve of her life style, but then accepted it since she believed it had brought happiness to her life.<sup>72</sup> The two sisters were living completely different lives.

## God's Heroes

In 1909 Laura wrote the script of a play.<sup>73</sup> This was Laura's defensive reaction to protect the Faith and the Bab.<sup>74</sup> Let us see why. A well-known Great Russian Playwright, Ms. Isabella Grinveskaya had written a play on the life of the Báb which had successful runs in St. Petersburg.<sup>75</sup> A French playwright intended to write a play about the Báb also and to have Sarah Bernhardt play the role of Tahirih. Laura Barney was shocked by the thought of what they would show on the Paris stage with the life of the Báb that caused her to write a play called "*God's Heroes: A Drama in Five Acts.*" The protocol among artists was that if someone was planning and working on a play, other creative people would not use the same subject. The following year, it was published in London.

## Year 1911: Her Marriage to Hippolyte

Another significant year in her life was the year 1911.

First let us talk about her marriage. She had known Hippolyte since 1900 and it was through their collaboration on the translation of *Some Answered Questions* and their travels together that they realized how well they could work together. They discovered their common aspirations. Hippolyte was a scholar and active member of the Bahá'í community in Paris. He was an intellectual who tempered his brilliance with humor. "He was also a gentle and compassionate man possessed of infinite patience when it came to Laura."<sup>76</sup>

Her mother suggested a double wedding ceremony for herself and for Laura! Laura, in a gesture of harmony agreed. Laura and Hippolyte had a joint civil ceremony with Laura's mother on April 15, 1911. Laura was 32 years old at the time.<sup>77</sup> They adopted the last name of Dreyfus-Barney. Laura and Hippolyte traveled to his summer house called 'Daru'l-Salam' on Mont Pelerin and Montreau both in Switzerland for their honeymoon.

Their life, both before and after their marriage, was filled with partnership and untiring activities and travels. Her Bahá'í activities intensified after this union. It was after her marriage that for the first time she seemed almost relaxed and untroubled.<sup>78</sup>

## Accompanying the Master in Europe

The other significant event of that year was that of Mr. and Mrs. Dreyfus-Barney joining 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His first visits to Europe. Laura wrote: "...when the Master visited Europe I again gained admittance to His presence."<sup>79</sup>

They were in the presence the Master to London, Paris and Switzerland. Juliet Thompson has recorded her memories of those days with several references to Laura and her husband.<sup>80</sup> She wrote that Laura and Hippolyte were confidants of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The Dreyfus-Barneys were present with the Master at Hotel du Parc in Thonon, France and Hotel de la Paix in Geneva.<sup>81</sup> Juliet Thompson remembers that in Geneva the Master was either with Laura and Hippolyte in her room or they were in His "in the most charming informality."<sup>82</sup>

In a story, she writes:

...we did the most amazing thing: the Master, Laura, Hippolyte, and I went for an automobile ride!

"Did you ever think, Juliet," said the Master, laughing, as we got into the car with Him, "that you and Laura would be riding in an automobile with me in Europe?"

They drove to a country inn. Several children were selling bunches of violets and 'Abdu'l-Bahá bought all of them. The Master paid them but they held out their hands for more. Laura did not want the Master to be bothered. "Don't let them impose!" cried Laura. The Master said: "Tell them, that they have had their share."<sup>83</sup>

They walked to a bridge where the Master was very excited over the beauty of the forest and the bridge. When they returned to the inn, the children again swarmed around Him asking for more money. Laura firmly ordered them to leave since she thought they were imposing. "He would give away everything He has," she whispered to Juliet. But the Master had seen a child much younger than the others, a newcomer with a very sensitive face, who was looking at Him. "But," He said: "to this *little* one I have not given." He made sure that He has given coins to all the children who were there.<sup>84</sup>

During their drive, they stopped at a water-fall and the Master left the car and walked towards it. Juliet said that tears

came to Laura's eyes and mine as we watched that "rapt Face delighting in some secret way in the beauty of the waterfall."<sup>85</sup>

In September of that year, the Dreyfus-Barneys traveled from Paris to London to assist the Master with translations during His stay at Cadogan Gardens, the home of Lady Blomfield, an early Irish believer who had visited the Master in the Holy Land. They were among the scores of friends who arrived during His stay.<sup>86</sup> Lady Blomfield, wrote that: "Foremost amongst our visitors were Monsieur and Madame Dreyfus-Barney, the brilliant French scholar and his no less brilliant American wife, who spoke Persian with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, translated for Him, and were altogether helpful, courteous, an charming."<sup>87</sup>

The Master's visit to Paris began on Oct 3. Lady Blomfield referring to the Dreyfus Barneys as the "Friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" stated that they found an apartment for Him in the French capital.<sup>88</sup> His residence was a delightful and sunny apartment at 4 Avenue de Camoens. The Dreyfus-Barneys were again serving as interpreters for Him and for several other people. The Master's every word and exhortation was noted by several people. And it is through their effort that His addresses were later published in English under the title *Talks By 'Abdu'l-Bahá Given in Paris*, later know as *Paris Talks*.<sup>89</sup> Laura assisted with the translation from Persian to French and for subsequent French publication of this book in Geneva.<sup>90</sup>

During His stay in Paris, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spent a good deal of time at the Dreyfus-Barney home. On Oct. 25, the Master recounts: "Yesterday evening when I came home from the house of Monsieur Dreyfus I was very tired – yet I did not sleep, I lay awake thinking. I said, O God, Here am I in Paris! What is Paris and who am I? Never did I dream that from the darkness of my prison I should ever be able to come to you, though when they read me my sentence I did not believe in it."<sup>91</sup>

These were some brief references to the Master's visits to Paris with only those where the Dreyfus-Barneys were present. It does not report His triumphant trip to that city.

### Year 1912: With 'Abdu'l-Bahá's in the US

It was in 1912 that 'Abdu'l-Bahá traveled to the United States. Laura was in New York, New Jersey, and in Washington, DC, her American home.<sup>92</sup> On the Master's first visit, the Dreyfuses were not in Washington. But Laura's

mother, now Mrs. Alice Barney-Hemmick, whom the Master had met in 1905 in Akka, was living at Studio House with her second husband. She was actively working for women's equality, a new interest of hers.<sup>93</sup>

Agnes Parsons, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's hostess in Washington, who has left her diaries of those days, mentions Laura's mother several times. She records that in 1912, the weekly Bahá'í Sunday Schools were held at Studio House, and it was at this regular meeting that 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke.<sup>94</sup> She also records that on April 21, 'Abdu'l-Bahá talked at an event, then drove for an hour after the meeting before going to lunch at Mrs. Hemmick's.<sup>95</sup> Again after a talk on April 23, the Master went for a drive with Laura's mother. The Turkish ambassador was also in the car and was "much interested in the conversation."<sup>96</sup> Two days later, after a meeting the Master went out motoring during the afternoon and met with people at Mrs. Hemmick's and Mme. Ali-Kuli Khan's.<sup>97</sup>

It was on this Sunday of April 28, as noted at the outset, that the carriage of this gentle noble man, that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá stopped at Studio House to say goodbye to Laura's mother, but she was out! She, thus, did not have the bounty of receiving the Master on His way to the railway station!<sup>98</sup>

The second visit of the Master to Washington was in May of the same year. Laura in a letter wrote that she "had the honour of attaining His presence" during this visit, as did her husband.<sup>99</sup> They went to the railway station to welcome the Master. It was Laura's car that took the guests over to Agnes Parsons' home for tea.<sup>100</sup>

During this visit, 'Abdul-Baha spent a large portion of His time speaking to the believers. He also met with several people of prominence. One afternoon He addressed a group of women, and then visited a home for the poor which had been established through the efforts of Mrs. Alice Barney Hemmick. Laura was present at both events and had accompanied the Master in the car afterwards. He had a ten o'clock dinner at her mother's home.<sup>101</sup>

After leaving the United States in December 1912, the Master stopped in London. Dreyfus-Barneys were again present. It is recorded that the closing remarks following a speech made by the Master were made by Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney.<sup>102</sup>

### Year 1913: With 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris

'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Paris a second time in January of 1913. His home in Paris was an apartment in 30 rue St. Didier that Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney had rented for Him.<sup>103</sup>

Laura and her husband were again present during this visit and attended many of the significant gatherings. Dreyfus-Barneys were among those who hosted meetings in Paris where seekers and enquirers were welcome. On January 31, they hosted such a gathering where the Master was present.<sup>104</sup> On March 9<sup>th</sup>, one of His talks had to be curtailed because Professor and Mrs. Edward Browne had called. 'Abdu'l-Bahá talked with Edward Browne for more than an hour. "He was very tired that evening and spoke of hastening to the Holy Land."<sup>105</sup> Hippolyte was present at this meeting but Laura had to be excused and accompanied Mrs. Browne.<sup>106</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá celebrated the Festival of Naw-Ruz on March 21st. The same evening He addressed the friends at a gathering at the home of the Dreyfus-Barneys. The celebrations for the Anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb were held on May 23rd again at the home of Laura and Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney.<sup>107</sup>

A few days later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá moved yet another time in Paris. He was taken to a secluded hotel to rest. He was very tired and needed to relax. The Dreyfus Barneys knew where He was and knew that the meals at the hotel did not suit Him. They arranged for food to be cooked at their home and delivered to Him. But the Master asked them not to do this.<sup>108</sup> Gatherings were again organized after the Master gained some strength. An important meeting took place at the home of Dreyfus-Barneys when Consul Schwarz of Germany spoke.<sup>109</sup>

These were some of the references to the visits of 'Abdu'l-Bahá where Laura and her husband were present.

### The Years from 1913 to 1928

Towards the end of that year (November 1913), Laura and Hippolyte arrived in Washington on the first leg of a planned a visit to Indo-China and other regions of eastern Asia.<sup>110</sup> They left Washington in January of 1914.<sup>111</sup> They asked Laura's mother to join them as far as San Francisco. Laura was hoping the trip might provide an opportunity to find out if her mother was still happy in her marriage. Laura continued to be displeased with her mother's re-marriage.<sup>112</sup>

By March, Laura and Hippolyte had reached San Francisco and boarded their ship for Japan. They were going around the world visiting several countries in response to the wishes of the Master. They stayed in Japan for a short time.<sup>113</sup> They had planned to travel to Korea, China, India, Persia and France.<sup>114</sup> When they arrived in China, rumors of war had followed them from Japan to Korea. Laura recalled that when they were in China ready to go on Yangzi River and to visit Yunnan, the war broke out. They were forced to return to the United States and then to Paris, arriving in France after two months of waiting in New York. By the end of December, Hippolyte assumed his military obligations as a member of the French Army.<sup>115</sup> During the war, Laura served with the American Ambulance Corps as a night nurse in Paris.<sup>116</sup> After the war, Laura was subsequently made a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor, the highest French decoration created by Napoleon, for her work among the wounded.<sup>117</sup>

It was after the World War II that Laura Dreyfus Barney placed a great importance on the League of Nations and as a result became the representative of the International Council of Women in that body and played an important role in cultural exchange.<sup>118</sup> Laura was the co-founder of the first children's hospital in Avignon and worked in a hospital with war refugees in several different departments.<sup>119</sup> She was also engaged in re-education of the mentally and physically handicapped at the Military Hospital in Marseilles.<sup>120</sup>

The Dreyfus-Barneys' next visit with the Master was in 1918. They were the first pilgrims to arrive from the West after the war.<sup>121</sup>

Her mother's sagas continued. In 1919 a rift developed between Alice's mother and her second husband. Laura heard of her mother's serious marital problems, and with her sister Natalie, tried to give her advice as to how to dissociate herself from him. She was divorced in 1920.<sup>122</sup>

It was in the same year that Shoghi Effendi visited the Dreyfus-Barneys in Paris. Madame Barney's affection for Shoghi Effendi had grown into "an ever-deepening sense of admiration and respect."<sup>123</sup> It was she who introduced him to an American Bahá'í artist, Mr. Edwin Scott and his wife, who were living in Paris and whose studio 'Abdu'l-Bahá had visited in 1911. Shoghi Effendi met them on one of his stops on the way to Oxford. This visit triggered a new interest in Shoghi



Effendi: he became captivated by the art world. His interests in architecture, sculpture and paintings opened up a vast field of knowledge under the guided supervision and attention of this renowned artist.<sup>124</sup>

Laura and Hippolyte's last visit to Akka was in 1921 on their way to the Far East. During this visit, Laura had plenty of time with 'Abdu'l-Bahá to discuss social issues and she writes that these matters "have come to pass and revolutionized the present social order."<sup>125</sup> It was in Rangoon, Burma, that they heard of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing.<sup>126</sup> There is no doubt that this was shocking news to Laura and her husband had devoted their lives to His Cause.

Not long after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi made the decision to call a number of capable and experienced Bahá'ís to Haifa. He wanted to consult with them on the future of the Bahá'í Faith. Laura and Hippolyte were among those honored ones who went to share their grief in the company of the friends.<sup>127</sup> In a letter to her sister, she wrote that the Master's family was "filling the great vacancy left in their lives by continual activity in carrying out His wishes."<sup>128</sup> Shoghi Effendi discussed with these believers the needs to develop the foundation of the Universal House of Justice.<sup>129</sup>

Laura and her husband traveled widely in those years to spread the Bahá'í teachings. They joined with Martha Root and George Townshend in giving a series of talks in Europe.<sup>130</sup> In 1925, at the request of the Guardian they traveled to the United States and attended Convention of the Bahá'ís of America at Green Acre Bahá'í School in the state of Maine.<sup>131</sup>

Madame Barney spent the next few years in service to humanity and to her faith. She was a true pioneer in these fields of activities.<sup>132</sup> She formed, under "the aegis of the League of Nations, the Liaison Committee of Major International Organizations to promote better understanding between peoples and classes, and became a permanent member of the committee as well as its liaison officer."<sup>133</sup> She was the only woman appointed by the League Council to sit on the Sub-Committee of Experts on Education, a post which she held for many years, beginning in 1926.<sup>134</sup>

## Third Period (1928-1974)

### Her life after the passing of her husband

The first event was the passing of her beloved husband. Hippolyte, Laura's life partner, whose 'distinctive and inestimable services', according to Shoghi Effendi, achieved for him 'a standing which few have as yet to be attained' died towards the end of 1928 after a slow and painful illness.<sup>135</sup> The Guardian, who knew them both intimately, sent letters of condolence to Laura.<sup>136</sup> In a letter dated Dec. 21, he wrote: "I can confidently assert, among the Bahá'ís of the East and the West, combined to the extent that he did the qualities of genial and enlivening fellowship, of intimate acquaintance with the manifold aspects of the Cause, of sound judgment and distinctive ability, of close familiarity with the problems and condition of the world – all of which made him such a lovable, esteemed and useful collaborator and friend."<sup>137</sup>

This loss caused her overwhelming sadness and sorrow; Laura had lost the closest person in her life. They had a rich life together. She was not yet fifty years old when she became a widow. After his death, she tried to overcome her loneliness by intensifying her efforts on behalf of the Faith and the cause of peace.<sup>138</sup> Even though this devotion to promoting human cooperation and bringing people together had started from the day she became a Bahá'í, they intensified after the loss of her husband.<sup>139</sup>

Three years later, she lost her mother. Her mother passed away a month after presenting her ballet, *The Shepherd of Shiraz* at the Hollywood Bowl, a prestigious and important outdoor amphitheater in Los Angeles!<sup>140</sup> Thus Laura lost the last person to whom she was truly close, the person she had loved and admired throughout her life.<sup>141</sup>



*Laura Dreyfus Barney*

**After 1928: Her Humanitarian Activities**

Despite her deep sorrow, she continued her activities. The same year, she organized, under the auspices of the International Institute of Educational Cinematography of the League of Nations, the first congress for women, held in Rome

in 1934.<sup>142</sup> She also became a member of the Advisory Committee of the League of Nations on Teaching; she was also a member of the French Committee on Intellectual Cooperation.<sup>143</sup>

It was in 1937 that Madame Barney was promoted to Officer of the French Legion of Honor; she became a Chevalier.<sup>144</sup> Later she became a member of its Board and an officer of the American Society of the French Legion of Honor. She was also a trustee of the President James Monroe Foundation in Fredericksburg, VA.<sup>145</sup>

As American citizens, Laura and her sister were forced to leave Paris at the outbreak of the Second World War. Laura returned to Washington. It was during that time that she represented the National Council of Women of the United States on its Coordinating Committee for Better Racial Understanding, and served on several other boards. She also established a portraiture prize in her mother's name for the Society of Washington Artists' annual exhibition and arranged several retrospectives of her mother's work. The first was held in 1941 and attended by First lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who had visited Studio House in 1913.<sup>146</sup> During World War II, Laura Dreyfus-Barney was a delegate of the French National Committee on Women to the Commission on Racial Affairs.<sup>147</sup>

At the request of the Guardian, she attended the celebration in Wilmette of the centenary of the birth of the Bahá'í Faith in 1944. As a brilliant speaker, she gave a moving address at this event.<sup>148</sup>

Upon her return to Paris, at the close of the war, Madame Barney found that some of her belongings were taken by the German secret police.<sup>149</sup> The most valuable of all: her memoirs and her notes from her trips!<sup>150</sup> She had many priceless notes which recounted her personal witnessing of the Bahá'í history. She had wished to compile and send it to Shoghi Effendi before publication and distribution but that did not prove possible!<sup>151</sup> She remained very active in her Bahá'í life in Paris, active by guiding and meeting with the prominent people of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>152</sup> She attended the opening of the first Hazirat'ul Quds in Paris on rue de la Pompe, in 1955.<sup>153</sup>

Laura Dreyfus-Barney was a widow for the majority of her life. She had no children. According to someone who knew her in those years, her life would have evolved differently had her

husband lived longer. It must have been difficult for her in Paris after the passing of her husband with no one close except an infamous sister.<sup>154</sup> She lived near her sister, but Natalie proved to be more burden than help. Toward the end of their lives, communication between them was mainly through letters and messages carried by common friends.<sup>155</sup> The memories of their mother and discussion of their finances, which was not easy for them, seemed to be their only emotional links.

In 1960, the sisters donated Barney Studio House to the Smithsonian Institution in memory of their mother to be used as an intimate venue for arts and cultural programs. Laura and Natalie also donated the paintings of their mother to that Institution's National Museum of American Art. Natalie died in Paris in 1972.

During last few years of her life Madame Barney stayed close to home. Friends visited her occasionally and she lived with the memories of her rich and fruitful life. Although her body was handicapped by rheumatism and a childhood physical handicap, her mind was as alert and brilliant as ever.<sup>156</sup> Her beautiful earthly life came to an end on 18 August 1974. She was 94 years old. She was buried in the Passy Cemetery of Paris.<sup>157</sup> An appreciative message was sent by the Universal House of Justice recognizing her outstanding achievement during the Heroic Age of the Faith. Her death was reported in the media both in Washington and Paris.<sup>158</sup>

Ugo Giachery, who knew Madame Laura Barney writes: "Those who had the rare privilege of knowing her over a period of many decades can testify that her undaunted zeal for the objective of the brotherhood of man remained alive and glowing to the very last day of her life on earth."<sup>159</sup>

## Closing Remarks

This brings to a close some highlights of this heroine of the Bahá'í Faith. Her unforgettable services to the Cause and to humanity were reviewed. Our time today gave us a glimpse of the life and work of this zealous and devoted Bahá'í – a true world citizen, lived a Bahá'í life both in her words and in her deeds.

Laura Dreyfus-Barney moved easily between two worlds: that of her wealthy and flamboyant family and that of her Bahá'í life, in particular her spiritual and intellectual partnership with

her distinguished husband. When others would have left one world for the other, she moved gracefully between the two. The worlds of the rich and the poor, the sojourns at summer resorts of Europe and America and that of her stays to the old prison city of Akka!

“With her keen intelligence,” Dr. Giachery wrote, “logical mind and investigating nature, she devoted her whole life, from adolescence, to improving human relations, bringing together people of the different races, classes and nations.”<sup>160</sup> Her services were “rendered joyfully with steadfastness and perseverance.”<sup>161</sup>

As her primary service to the Cause, “she left as a memento for future generations a significant book from the utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”<sup>162</sup> It was her greatest accomplishment and “achieved immortal fame” for her.<sup>163</sup> Shoghi Effendi refers to Laura Barney’s work as an “imperishable service” to be transmitted to “posterity.”<sup>164</sup>

Although Laura Dreyfus-Barney is perhaps best known throughout the Bahá’í world for her compilation of *Some Answered Questions*, her other services to the Faith are equally glorious. Here are a few:

1. Helped with the purchase of the land and plans for a suitable home for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His family on 7 Haparsim Street;<sup>165</sup>
2. Involved in gathering notes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s utterances in Paris which were later published as *Paris Talks*;
3. Secured the services of an English tutor who proved to be a great asset in the education of Shoghi Effendi;
4. Helped fund education of some young Bahá’ís (i.e. Badii Effendi Bushrui);<sup>166</sup>
5. Helped ladies of the Holy family with learning of the English language;<sup>167</sup>
6. Among the first Western Bahá’ís to visit the cradle of the Faith;
7. Consulted by Shoghi Effendi after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá;
8. Abiding devotion to the family of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá;<sup>168</sup>

9. Assisted her husband in many of his translations of the Writings;<sup>169</sup>
10. Translations of many of the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from Persian into English;<sup>170</sup>
11. Author or co-author of books, articles and monographs;<sup>171</sup>
12. Establishing a scholarship for a Bahá’í student in the name of her husband.<sup>172</sup>

Baha’ullah writes: “*The names of handmaidens who are devoted to God are written and set down by the Pen of the Most high in the Crimson Book.*”<sup>173</sup> It rests with the historians of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh to bring to the fore the accomplishments of those like Laura Dreyfus Barney.

Laura Dreyfus Barney, this *Handmaiden of Baha*, deserves honor in the annals of the history. Her services merit increased study and recognition that of a woman who broke down many barriers on two continents. The author is aware only of one event in the United States when she was honored by the Bahá’í community. That was the centennial celebration of the International Council of Women; Laura was honored at a luncheon at Studio House on 26 June 1988.<sup>174</sup>

Let us close by reading from a Tablet, among the many, written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to Laura Barney:

*To the honored & attracted [Handmaiden] servant of  
God*

*Miss Barney (Upon her be BehaUllah El-Abha!)*

*Washington*

*He is God!*

*O thou dear Servant of God!*

*If thou knowest how far thy confirmation, Abdu’l-Beha asks for help and assistance from the Kingdom of Abha, thou wilt undoubtedly put forth feathers & stretch wings by the dint of joy and happiness, & soar up to the Apex of exultation and felicity! I beg of the True One that thou mayst at every instant, witness the ray of a new Favor & be strengthen by a successive Confirmation. O thou dear servant of Beha! I will*

*henceforth address thee the '[Handmaiden] Servant of Beha', so that it may indicate that thou hast attained to a new assignation. This title is a crown of munificence upon thy head, the gems and pearls of which crown will scintillate forevermore! Consider the succeeding ages, & thou wilt know what a gift is this.*

*O thou [Handmaiden] Servant of Beha! Have joy and happiness and be in spiritual cheerfulness, & arise in such manner in the Cause, that thou mayst move the territory of America! Thy services are accepted and approved in the Threshold of the True One. Thou art indeed devoted (in service)!*

Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued in His own handwriting:

*O thou [Handmaiden] servant of Beha! The Power of the Holy Spirit is confirmatory: Be thou assured! At every moment, I seek heavenly Bounties, in the world of Spirit, in thy behalf, Turn thy face into the Kingdom of God at early dawns, & thou wilt find Abdul'Beha thy companion.<sup>175</sup>*

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Studio House is designated by the city of Washington as a historical site and thus preserved from destruction.
- <sup>2</sup> Smithsonian Institution who was the owner of the House auctioned the contents of the house and sold it in 2000. The current owner of Studio House is the Embassy of Latvia.
- <sup>3</sup> Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 178, p.189, p. 318.
- <sup>4</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 299.
- <sup>5</sup> Smithsonian Institution, research and education center, at Washington, D.C.; founded 1846 under the terms of the will of James Smithson of London.
- <sup>6</sup> Giachery, *La Penesee Bahá'ie*, no. 56, p. 24 and Anita Chapman, interview.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- <sup>12</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 116.
- <sup>13</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 150.
- <sup>14</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 116.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- <sup>17</sup> Manuscript of a play "From the Peace of the East to the War of the West" by Laura Clifford Barney, from Smithsonian Archives.
- <sup>18</sup> Glen Cameron, *A Basic Bahá'í Chronology*, p. 141.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 535.
- <sup>20</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 185
- <sup>21</sup> Chapman, interview.
- <sup>22</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 169.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169-170.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

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- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 172.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 135.
- <sup>28</sup> Rassekh, *Encyclopedia Iranica*.
- <sup>29</sup> From <http://bahai-library.org/essays/barney.html> referring to *the Bahá'í World* article by Laura Clifford Dreyfus Barney, vol. III, p. 210.
- <sup>30</sup> <http://bahai-library.org/essays/barney.html>
- <sup>31</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 315.
- <sup>32</sup> Cameron , *A Basic Bahá'í Chronology*, p. 162.
- <sup>33</sup> Weinberg, *Ethel Rosenberg*, pp. 87-88.
- <sup>34</sup> Moojan Momen by e-mail. May 2008 and Star of the West (in Persian), Vol. I, March-1910-1911, p.4.
- <sup>35</sup> Letter of Laura to Alice Barney, dated July 5, 1905, from the Smithsonian Archives.
- <sup>36</sup> Fazel Mazandarani, *Zurhur-l Hag* (in Persian), Vol. 8, p. 78 Iran: Moasseseye Melli Matbouate Amri, 131 Badii.
- <sup>37</sup> MASABIHE HEDAYAT (in Persian), Edited by Azizullah Soleimani, Iran: Moasseseh Melli Matbouat Amri, 118 Bdi, Vol. V, pp. 32-32..
- <sup>38</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 202.
- <sup>39</sup> Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 81.
- <sup>40</sup> Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from the Archives of the National Assembly of France, translated by A. K. Khan, Oct. 29, 1903.
- <sup>41</sup> 'Only a Word', *The Bahá'í World*, vol. V, p. 667. Cited in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 536.
- <sup>42</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 536.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 536.
- <sup>44</sup> Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 82.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 536.
- <sup>46</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 315.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 316.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 328.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 315.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 314.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 150.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp. 314-5.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 315.
- <sup>54</sup> *Some Answered Questions*, p. v.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. v.
- <sup>56</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 316.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 318

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<sup>58</sup> For additional commentary on this work, refer to Shoghi Effendi's statements in *God Passes By*, pp. 107, 260, 268, 305, 383.

<sup>59</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 328.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 316.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, pp. 316-18.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. pp. 318-19.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 328.

<sup>75</sup> Le lezioni de San Giovanni d'acri, Casa Editrice Bahai, Roma, 1976, pp. 374-5. Closing remarks by Laura Dreyfus-Barney written in 1961, translated by K. Mazlum.

<sup>65</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, pp. 341-344.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>67</sup> Weinberg, *Ethel Rosenberg*, p. 101.

<sup>68</sup> Letter or E.G. Brown handwritten dated, Sept. 2 1908 at the Archives of Smithsonian.

<sup>69</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 536.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 536.

<sup>71</sup> Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 82.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 220.

<sup>73</sup> In her play *God's Heroes*, she mentions that received help from Prof. E.G. Browne in translating some part of the quotes in one her chapters. Cited in N.B.

<sup>74</sup> Chapman, interview.

<sup>75</sup> She was a playwright of the time, wrote a play about the Báb which had two very successful runs in St. Petersburg. Grinevskaya became a Bahá'í and later met with Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. [www.bahaindex.com/documents/tolstoy.pdf](http://www.bahaindex.com/documents/tolstoy.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 223.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, pp. 224-5.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 223.

<sup>79</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 344.

<sup>80</sup> Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, pp. 159-160

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 175.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 175.

<sup>86</sup> Weinberg, *Ethel Rosenberg*, p. 130-1.

<sup>87</sup> Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 151.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 179.

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- <sup>89</sup> Weinberg, *Ethel Rosenberg*, p. 104.
- <sup>90</sup> Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 180-181.
- <sup>91</sup> *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 30.
- <sup>92</sup> Giachery, *La Pensee Bahá'ie*, no. 56, pp. 27-28.
- <sup>93</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, pp. 234-5.
- <sup>94</sup> Parsons, *Agnes Parsons' Diary*, p. 14.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.
- <sup>96</sup> *Agnes Parsons' Diary*, p. 35.
- <sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- <sup>98</sup> Parsons, *Agnes Parsons' Diary*, p. 58.
- <sup>99</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 344.
- <sup>100</sup> Parsons, *Agnes Parsons' Diary*, p. 61.
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.
- <sup>102</sup> Weinberg, *Ethel Rosenberg*, p. 148.
- <sup>103</sup> Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 373.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.
- <sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.
- <sup>106</sup> Mahmoudi, Houshang. Cited in *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. I. March 9, 1913: from page 175 of the *Safar Nameh* (in Persian), Vol. II Paris: pp. 370-371, translated by Mona Khademi.
- <sup>107</sup> Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 394.
- <sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.
- <sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.
- <sup>110</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 537.
- <sup>111</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 236.
- <sup>112</sup> Chapman, interview.
- <sup>113</sup> Sims, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze*, p. 5.
- <sup>114</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 237.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- <sup>116</sup> *Who's Who in America 1972-1973*.
- <sup>117</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 264. The Legion of Honor is created by Napoleon Bonapart and is the highest award given by the French Republic for outstanding service to France. It has different ranks: Chevalier, Officer, Commander, Grand Officer, Grand Crosses.
- <sup>118</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 537.
- <sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 537 and *Who's Who in America 1972-1973*.
- <sup>120</sup> *Who's Who in America 1972-1973*.
- <sup>121</sup> Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 433.
- <sup>122</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 277.

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- <sup>123</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI 16, p. 536.
- <sup>124</sup> Translated by the author from *La Pensee Bahá'íe*, no. 56, p. 27.
- <sup>125</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 344.
- <sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, p. 344.
- <sup>127</sup> Weinberg, *Ethel Rosenberg*, p. 207.
- <sup>128</sup> Letter of Laura to Natalie Barney, her sister dated Feb. 27, 1911 from Haifa; Smithsonian Archives, Washington, DC.
- <sup>129</sup> Weinberg, *Ethel Rosenberg*, p. 208-9.
- <sup>130</sup> Garis, M.R. *Martha Root: Lioness of the Threshold*, p. 256.
- <sup>131</sup> Giachery, *La Pensee Bahá'íe*, p. 27.
- <sup>132</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI 16, p. 535.
- <sup>133</sup> *Who's Who in America 1972-1973*.
- <sup>134</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 537.
- <sup>135</sup> Weinberg, *Ethel Rosenberg*, Ft. 375 p. 269.
- <sup>136</sup> Giachery, *La Pensee Bahá'íe*, p. 27 and on bahai-library.com/essays/barney.html
- <sup>137</sup> bahai-library.com/essays/barney.html
- <sup>138</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 537.
- <sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p. 537.
- <sup>140</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 226.
- <sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, p. 229.
- <sup>142</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 537.
- <sup>143</sup> *Who's Who in America 1972-1973*.
- <sup>144</sup> Rassekh, *Encyclopedia Iranica*.
- <sup>145</sup> *Who's Who in America 1972-1973*.
- <sup>146</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 301.
- <sup>147</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 538.
- <sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, p. 537 and p. 535.
- <sup>149</sup> Giachery, *La Pensee Bahá'íe*, p. 24.
- <sup>150</sup> Chapman, interview and Giachery, *La Pensee Bahá'íe*, p. 24.
- <sup>151</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 344.
- <sup>152</sup> Chapman, interview.
- <sup>153</sup> Giachery, *La Pensee Bahá'íe*, p. 27.
- <sup>154</sup> Chapman, interview.
- <sup>155</sup> Kling, *Alice Pike Barney*, p. 302.
- <sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, p. 302.
- <sup>157</sup> *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XVI, p. 538.

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- <sup>158</sup> Obituaries in The Washington Post, August 22, 1974; and “Star” dated August 22, 1974 at Smithsonian Archives and in Le Monde cited in Giachery, *La Pensee Bahá’íe*, p. 31.
- <sup>159</sup> *The Bahá’í World*, vol. XVI, p. 535.
- <sup>160</sup> Ibid, 535.
- <sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 535.
- <sup>162</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 315.
- <sup>163</sup> *The Bahá’í World*, vol. XVI, p. 535, from the Message of the Universal of House Justice on her passing.
- <sup>164</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 260.
- <sup>165</sup> *The Bahá’í World*, vol. XVI, p. 537.
- <sup>166</sup> Muayyad, *KHATERAT HABIB*, p. 60.
- <sup>167</sup> Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*, p. 315.
- <sup>168</sup> *The Bahá’í World*. vol. XVI, p. 537.
- <sup>169</sup> Giachery, *La Pensee Bahá’íe*, p.26.
- <sup>170</sup> Tablets of ‘Abdul-Baha Abbas, p. 19.
- <sup>171</sup> *Who’s Who in America 1972-1973*.
- <sup>172</sup> Letter of Shoghi Effendi to Laura-Dreyfus-Barney, dated march 12, 1929 from [bahai-library.com/essays/barney.html](http://bahai-library.com/essays/barney.html)
- <sup>173</sup> Bahá’u’lláh. From a Tablet translated from the Persian, in compilation, vol. 2, p. 358, cited in Weinberger, *Ethel Rosenberg*, p. 85.
- <sup>174</sup> E-mail dated May 12, 2008, from Fulya Vekiloglu, representative to the United Nations Office for the Advancement of Women, Bahá’í International Community.
- <sup>175</sup> Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Miss Barney. Translated by A. K. Khan. Dated Oct. 29, 1903. Original pdf file from National Spiritual Assembly of France. [Editor’s note: the alternate spellings in this version of the tablet come from the original translation and have been preserved here in their unaltered form.]

# In the Heart of All That Is

## The “Heart” in Bahá’í Writings and Science

Wolfgang A. Klebel

### Introduction

The title of this paper is taken from a prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which emphasizes the role of the heart as the center of the universe when He talks about *the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is*.<sup>1</sup> (CC 1 251)<sup>2</sup> This statement about the *heart of all that is*, is an echo to the Words of Bahá’u’lláh about the heart of the world:

*The Word of God hath set the heart of the world afire;  
how regrettable if ye fail to be enkindled with its flame!*  
(GWB 316)

It needs to be asked what role the heart plays, not only in the individual human, but also in humanity as a whole and in the world as a whole.

The topic of this paper is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s answer to a question of a physician regarding the sympathetic nervous system (which today is generally called the Autonomic Nervous System, hereafter referred to as ANS) of the human organism. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

*The powers of the sympathetic nerve are neither entirely physical nor spiritual, but are between the two (systems). The nerve is connected with both. Its phenomena shall be perfect when its spiritual and physical relations are normal.*

*When the material world and the divine world are well co-related, when the hearts become heavenly and the aspirations grow pure and divine, perfect connection shall take place. Then shall this power produce a perfect manifestation. Physical and spiritual diseases will then receive absolute healing.*



*The exposition is brief. Ponder and thou shalt understand the meaning. Although, on account of lack of time, the answer is short, by close reflection it shall be made long* (TAB 308)<sup>3</sup>

The present paper attempts to “ponder” the question of the sympathetic nervous system as well as the subject matter of the heart. The heart’s nervous system will be presented, as it has been developed in the new science of neurocardiology.

In the above referenced text ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the “physical” and the “spiritual” are “connected by the sympathetic nervous system” and that this “co-relation” affects the heart, which becomes “heavenly” and its “aspiration grows pure and divine.” This “perfect connection” of the spiritual and the physical in the heart “produces a perfect manifestation” and will lead to “absolute healing.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá promises that this short description will “be made long” by “close reflection.”

In this paper the understanding of the heart as a metaphor is look at and the difference and correspondence between the heart as a biological feature in the material sense and heart as a symbolic feature as is used in poesy, folklore and even theology will be explored. Furthermore, the close reflection will be based on another source of knowledge, which is the new findings of Quantum Mechanics and the philosophical and spiritual conclusions which have been drawn from this new branch of physics. The meaning attributed to the heart in the Bahá’í Writings will be explored to assure that the interpretation of this text is following the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.

In the following paper “In the Pure Soil of Thy Heart,” another, equally important question is discussed; the understanding of the physiology of the heart and of its nervous system, “the little brain of the heart.” Can the recent discoveries of neurocardiology help us to understand what the Bahá’í Writings say about the heart? What are the physical functions of the heart, which could be the corresponding natural elements for the spiritual aspect of the heart? It is the knowledge of God that is animating the human heart as Bahá’u’lláh said: *The spirit that animateth the human heart is the knowledge of God.* (GWB 290)

The findings of these papers will be tentative for not all aspects of this issue can be properly explored at this time. It is hoped that further studies of the function of the heart will shed

new light on this issue and will deepen the understanding, not only of the human heart, but also of what the Bahá’í Writings call “*the heart of all that is,*” and the “*heart of the world,*” which is the heart of the universe, also described as “*the city of the heart.*” This heart is the goal of human development and provides the mystical entry in to the attainment of the Manifestations of God. In the Bible this is the “*Word*” that was “*in the beginning*” with God<sup>4</sup>. It is furthermore the cosmic Christ or the point Omega<sup>5</sup>, towards which the whole evolution of humanity moves. The Manifestations, Who are described as the “*Alpha and Omega*” in the Bible are called the “*The First*” and “*The Last*”, the “*True One*” and the “*Beloved One*” of the worlds in Bahá’í Scripture.

Anticipating later explanations, it could be stated here that the heart functions as the physical center of unity of the spiritual and physical aspect of humans and humanity, i.e., the physical and spiritual center of the individual human being, as well as the center of humanity and the world as a whole. An excursion into some philosophical conclusion drawn from findings of quantum mechanics will round the picture and add heuristic features to this elaboration, which hopefully will entice future studies in this area in the field of theology, philosophy and biophysical sciences.

When God’s “beloved ones” acquire the “knowledge and the sciences and the arts”, for which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encourages us to pray<sup>6</sup> God will “make them to hear the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is.” This will introduce them into the “city of the heart,” or as Bahá’u’lláh writes at the closure of the Seven Valleys: “this station is the first gate of the heart’s citadel, that is, man’s first entrance to the city of the heart.” (SVFV 41)

## The Heart in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh

To study the concept “heart” in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh is not an easy task. It is made difficult mostly because it is not easy to describe what heart means in the languages of different cultures and how this concept is used in the Writings.

The Bahá’í Writings are understood in this paper according to the Báb’s explanation about the “Four Modes of Revelation.” These modes are described at length in a book written by Nader Saiedi,<sup>7</sup> and will be here summarized:

1. *VERSES* (áyát): “The mode of divine verses is the direct revelation of God, uttered in the voice of God as the speaker addressing His creation (an affirmation of ‘I am God’). This mode employs the language of divinity, ascendance and lordship ...” (Saiedi p. 42)
2. *PRAYERS AND SUPPLICATIONS* (*munáját, ad’íyih*); “The mode of prayers and supplications is the reverse of the mode of divine verses. Here the language of revelation is uttered in the voice of the Prophet, but now speaking in the station of the creation, addressing the Creator with an attitude of servitude and effacement (an affirmation of ‘Thou art God’). This mode emphasizes the poverty and powerlessness of the creatures before their Creator... The discourse of prayer is fundamentally an expression of servitude and love – the love of the created being for God...” (Saiedi p. 42)
3. *COMMENTARIES AND SERMONS* (*tafásír, khutáb*); “Commentaries and sermons are uttered in the voice of the Revelator speaking to human beings about God and His words (an affirmation of ‘He is God’). The commentaries are interpretative works that aim to explain, in expository form, the true meanings of the divine verses... The sermons praise and describe transcendental spiritual realities that are the cosmic manifestations of the Word. Often the Báb begins a work with a brief or lengthy sermon that endeavors to connect the reader’s heart and consciousness to the divine verities....” (Saiedi, p.43)
4. *RATIONAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE* (*shu’ún-i-ilníyyig va hikamíyyih*) “...rational, educational, and philosophical discourse – is again spoken in the voice of the Redeemer addressing human beings, but this time using rational arguments to demonstrate the truth of the Word of God and explain the message expressed in the prayers (an affirmation of ‘He is God Who is’). The fundamental function of this mode is to analyze the phenomenal world and to link it to the transcendental realm... The purpose of this mode is to show the signs of the unseen within the visible realm, and to prove the world of divinity and dominion through its manifestations in the earthly world... This mode frequently employs logical argumentation and analysis...” (Saiedi p.43-44)

It obvious that the majority of the quotes from the Bahá’í Writings used in this paper are related to the fourth mode, the rational, educational and philosophical discourse, especially as this discourse relates to the heart. Certain passages from the Verses and from Prayers and Supplications will be used also, especially if they shed light on the issues at hand.

There is one contention – that the concept of Heart is an analogy, taken from the fact that somehow the heart, described here as a muscle, seems to be central to the human body, so everything that is central to a human person is called heart.<sup>8</sup>

As the muscle which is the original source of these metaphorical applications brings life to the whole body, so heart refers to the core-force of personality at the center of its life. Because we do not want to limit the self with the name of intellect alone, or will alone, or feeling alone, nor to see these as separate, we have invented the sensibly opaque name of heart for the identifying core of our agency.

In this monograph the centrality of the heart is used as a metaphor, a figure of speech related to the area of the physical body as explained in medical science, which concept then is extended, or transferred into other areas of understanding. All of this is done with the assumed understanding that the heart is nothing else than a muscle, a medical machine, pumping blood throughout the body and that this function of the heart is regulated by the external nervous system, the autonomous and the central nervous system.

With this metaphorical understanding the attempt is made to explain all that is said in poetry, tradition and folklore about the heart. The religious statements about the heart are placed into a similar category. When we read the many statements of the Bible and in the Bahá’í Scripture, which include the heart, we can do the same, and read them as simple metaphors. This approach allows us to disregard the physical heart and its meaning, and develop an idea about the heart as a metaphorical and spiritual concept, which is not really related very much to anything in the body.

While this is possible, it appears not to be congruous with what Bahá’u’lláh means when He speaks in many ways about the heart, when He speaks about the City or Citadel of the heart and gives the heart functions that certainly not only surpass widely any possible relation to the medical blood pump, but

also goes far and beyond anything that is said in the tradition about the heart as a metaphorical concept.

Bahá'u'lláh for example speaks of the “*eye of thine heart*” (KI 90), or He mentions a person who has “*unstopped the ear of his inmost heart*” (SLH 86), implying that the heart has an ability that can somehow be compared to the senses of hearing and seeing. He states that hearts can be affected by touch telling us that “*hearts have been sorely shaken*” (PM 12). Bahá'u'lláh speaks of a “*wise and understanding heart*” (ESW 65). Bahá'u'lláh places the function of memory into the heart as well, when He lets us pray: “*to make my heart to be a receptacle of Thy love and of remembrance*” (PM 56). He further instructs us to think, meditate or ponder in our heart, saying “*Ponder this in thine heart*” (ESW 74).

The importance of the “Heart” in the Báb's Writings cannot be overlooked either, as He stated:

*Verily, all the letters of this súrih are but one single letter. All variations in the words and meanings therein revert to a single point. That point is, verily, the station of the heart and the sanctuary of unity.*<sup>9</sup>

To quote Saiedi:

To interpret something is to uncover its true meaning. The text that is to be interpreted consists of signs, specifically words, appearing as combinations of letters of the alphabet. The supreme task of interpretation, the Báb explains in this passage, is to elevate these alphabetical signs (which constitute the text) to the highest level of their own reality, the station at which they reveal their true essential nature, or “heart.” The concept of “heart” (fu'ad) is one of the most important principles in the writings of the Báb. The station of the heart is the highest stage of a created being's existential reality. It is the reflection of divine revelation itself within the inmost reality of things. (Saiedi, p. 50)

The task of true hermeneutics is to cause a fundamental transformation in the phenomenal realm: to elevate the phenomena to the station of the heart is to uncover the signs of divine revelation that are enshrined within the reality of those phenomena, and to connect that which is motionless to its true inner

reality of vibrant spiritual motion. This transformation is accomplished within the consciousness of the interpreter. (Saiedi, p. 51)

For the Báb the heart is the central place where the belief in God is centered and the heart encompassed the “expanse of heaven and earth.” When God cheers the heart of the believer this cheerfulness will overflow into the spirit, the soul and the body of the faithful.

*Indeed the hearts of them that truly believe in Him Whom God shall make manifest are vaster than the expanse of heaven and earth and whatever is between them. God hath left no hindrance in their hearts, were it but the size of a mustard seed. He will cheer their hearts, their spirits, their souls and their bodies and their days of prosperity or adversity, through the exaltation of the name of Him Who is the supreme Testimony of God and the promotion of the Word of Him Who is the Dayspring of the glory of their Creator. (SWB 145)*

In contrast to these rather specific references to the heart, the Bible and the Qur’an talk frequently about the heart, but mainly in the sense of the seat of feelings, or as the place of contact with God, like in Galatians 4:6 “*And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*”

Similar to that Pauline statement, Bahá’u’lláh attributes to the heart an exceedingly important capacity; it is the Seat of God’s Revelation in man as He said in many places:

*He hath chosen out of the whole world the hearts of His servants, and made them each a seat for the revelation of His glory. (GWB 296)*

*The one true God, exalted be His glory, hath ever regarded, and will continue to regard, the hearts of men as His own, His exclusive possession. (GWB 206)*

### 27. O SON OF DUST!

*All that is in heaven and earth I have ordained for thee, except the human heart, which I have made the habitation of My beauty and glory. (PHW 27)*

The human heart is therefore the special and exceptional place for the Revelation of God, it is the exclusive possession of the one true God and it is the habitation of God's beauty and glory. One can only wonder what it is about the human heart that it can function in these exalted ways and become such an exceptional and unique place for the Revelation of the Glory of God and the Mystery of God's approach to man. We will in the course of this paper find some answers to this question, which answers need to be developed to a deeper and improved understanding in the future.

Again, all of this can be understood simply as a metaphor, but it raises the question if there is more to say about the heart than it being a medical and mechanical blood pump. The metaphorical understanding has consequences, especially if the figure of speech is not related to any real property of the heart, but only to a tradition and an unscientific concept, from a time when the body was just not understood in its medical functioning. Or we could say the human body at previous times was not seen as a biological machine, which is its only function, according to the prevalent medical understanding.

This is a question which needs to be raised for any metaphor. Is there something that allows us to make this comparison and create a metaphor; is there an intrinsic reason for this figure of speech or is it purely a convention? Or is it just an accepted allegory, which has no reality except in the mind and culture of people using it? We must ask if the material world from which the metaphor is taken has any real connection to the spiritual world, which is described in these metaphors. The answer given in this paper is positive; there is an internal connection between spirit and matter, between soul and body, between mind and brain and between the heart as a physical organ and the heart as the seat of God's Revelation.

There is one issue that makes us wonder if that is all that can be said about the heart and how this word is used in different cultures, in poetry in folklore and even in common understanding. Since almost all languages use this figure of speech in a similar way, we have to assume that there is in most cultures a general human tradition that points to the heart in explaining all these properties of man. From there the question arises, is there more to it, than an external and cultural tradition? In other words, is there a reality underneath and embedded in the human organism that makes us think so? Medical science and biology certainly have not given an answer

to this question so far. It describes the heart simply as “a muscular organ responsible for pumping blood through the blood vessels by repeated, rhythmic contractions.”<sup>10</sup>

Another question needs to be considered here, and it is probably an even more difficult question, because there is not much in that tradition about the heart, which will help us in this case. I will make a comparison that could help. We have the same problem with the heart as we have with the brain. We used many different words which are related to the brain. For example we use mind, reason, intellect, we use consciousness, understanding, knowledge and even words like thinking, judging, willing and many other things that supposedly happen in the brain. And there are even people, especially scientists, who would say that all of those words and concepts mean nothing else than the electromagnetic and chemical processes that happen in the brain, or, more specifically in the synapses of the brain.

Nevertheless, the assumption is generally made that there is a difference between the brain and the mind. Then one might identify the physiology of the brain and claim that the mind is using the brain in order to function. If we assume that this distinction is correct then we have to follow with the assumption that what is happening in the mind has a reflection in the brain. In other words, when the mind is functioning something does happen in the brain, but what’s happening in the brain does not fully explain what’s happening in the mind.

It seems one can say that the brain is used by the mind as an instrument, which allows it to become materialized and be expressed in physical words or actions. That naturally assumes that the spiritual reality of the mind and the material realities of the physical world are connected somehow in the brain. And that is very similar to what Bahá’u’lláh has said, not only about the mind, but also about the spirit, the soul, and the powers of the senses:

*Say: Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments. As thou dost observe, man’s power to comprehend, move, speak, hear, and see all derive from this sign of his Lord within him. It is single in its essence, yet manifold through the diversity of its instruments. This, verily, is a certain truth. (SLH 154)*



Following this word we can say that spirit, mind, soul, and even the power of the senses must be differentiated from the physical and organic instruments they use. This is an interesting and rather new idea and it brings us right into the area of science, especially physical science, where many instruments are used to improve the understanding of reality. For example, physics uses the Geiger counter as an instrument to learn about subatomic particles and making conclusions about the reality of physical nature that were unexpected and revolutionary and even developing a new science called quantum mechanics.

In a letter to a person deprived of physical sight 'Abdu'l-Bahá has applied the meaning of the statement of Bahá'u'lláh that the sense organs are only the instruments of the spirit:

*O thou possessor of a seeing heart! Although, materially speaking, thou art deprived of physical sight, yet, praise be to God, spiritual insight is thine. Thy heart seeth and thy spirit heareth. Bodily sight is subject to a thousand maladies and assuredly will ultimately be lost. Thus no importance should be attached to it. But the sight of the heart is illumined. It discerneth and discovereth the divine Kingdom. It is everlasting and eternal. Praise God, therefore, that the sight of thy heart is illumined, and the hearing of thy mind responsive. (SWA 37)*

The blind man's heart sees, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, and his spirit hears, it sees and hears, it discovers and discerns the *divine Kingdom*. Here the instrument of the spirit, the sight, is lost, nevertheless the person's mind, the man's spirit can see and hear what is most important, because the sight of *the heart is illumined*. The thought that the human spirit can be in contact with the divine Kingdom, even if the senses are lost, is certainly a comforting thought, when considering the fate of children, dying early in life and the fate of all human beings with limited perceptual and even intellectual capacity.

When considering the concept "heart" in all its different uses, especially in its metaphorical uses, we have to be aware of another fallacy of understanding. Ken Wilber<sup>11</sup> has described this Pre/trans fallacy applying it to the development of reason, by saying: "since both, pre-rational states and trans-rational states are, in their own ways, non-rational, they appear similar or even identical to the untutored eye. And once 'pre' and

‘trans’ are confused, then one of two fallacies occurs.” Before describing these fallacies, it needs to be noted that this is a general principle of understanding evolution and it applies, even if the specific development of the mind, as Wilber describes it, is modified.

We all can agree with him about pre-rational states of evolution, such as the magic and mythic stages in the development of the thinking process of mankind. At the present time, we can be described as mainly living in the rational state, when reason and logic is prevalent in the thinking world. Wilber calls these stages the formal operational stage in the development of reason. He projects future stages such as vision logic as the first of several trans-rational stages. In the Viennese tradition<sup>12</sup> of Integral Logic, what Wilber calls vision logic could as well, and possibly better be described as integral logic.

This way of thinking will be described below; here the two possible consequences of the pre/trans fallacy will be described. One or the other of them follows consistently when the differentiation between pre-rational and trans-rational is not seen.

1. “Higher trans-rational states are reduced to lower pre-rational states. Genuine mystical or contemplative experiences, for example, a-dualism are seen as a regression or throwback to infantile states of narcissism, oceanic, in-dissociation and even primitive autism. This is, for example, precisely the route taken by Freud in *The Future of an Illusion*.”
2. “On the other hand, if one is sympathetic with higher or mystical states, but one still confuses pre and trans, then one will elevate all pre-rational states to some sort of trans-rational glory. ... Jung and his followers, of course, often take this route, and are forced to read a deeply transpersonal and spiritual status into states that are merely in-dissociated and undifferentiated and actually lacking any sort of integration at all.”<sup>13</sup>

It is important to apply this distinction to all writings, especially the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith. The expressions about the heart are not to be fallaciously mistaken for mystic or magic understanding; they are beyond these more primitive understanding and are only explicable after the modern distinction and separation of the human abilities have been

taken into account. Then, and only then, will the new insight presented by Bahá'u'lláh really be understood and its far-reaching meaning be appreciated.

Many people have mentioned that when they first became a Bahá'í they understood the Writings in a poetic sense and admired them on a symbolic level. Later, after thorough reading and meditating on what they had read, they found deeper meaning and developed a better sense of what the Writings convey.

It is this writer's opinion that we have to develop this integral thinking in order to understand the Bahá'í Writings. For example, Shoghi Effendi calls the Watchword of the Faith, "Unity in Diversity." This principle is a good an example of an integral concept that should never be confused with a primitive pre-logical way of fuzzy thinking, nor should it be assumed that prior mythical or magic thinking could have had a similar differentiated understanding of reality. On the other hand, the magic understanding can function as an introduction and preparation towards the higher and more differentiated understanding we have now.

This is, one needs to say, a totally new way of thinking about reality. Leo Gabriel has expressed this concept of the Integral Whole (Integrale Ganzheit), when he wrote (translated by this writer):

Talking about the Whole (Ganzheit) and Gestalt, as I emphasized before, is a methodological concept, a new way of thinking, a new way of perceiving reality, which breaks with a long tradition. It is therefore, an essential change in thinking and a true revolution, which started with this century and which anticipates a new epoch of the spirit. It is a "metanoia," a change for a new world vision and a new way of thinking.<sup>14</sup>

It is noteworthy to remember in this context of the "Integrale Ganzheit" the statement of the Báb about the difference between reason and the heart. Only the heart can understand the Divine Unity and Transcendence, a view that was not available to Leo Gabriel, who spoke about the new epoch of the spirit and a new way of thinking, about 100 years after the death of the Báb. The role of the heart in understanding Unity and Transcendence of God was described by Nader Saiedi in his book "Gate of the Heart" when he translates the Báb's statements (pp. 211-212):

*For, verily, reason, even in its utmost level of abstraction, is confined to understanding mere limited phenomena, which fail to guide humans unto the summit of the delight of their heart.*

*That which is beyond these two extremes, which is the Middle Path ... can be comprehended by naught save the heart. God hath created the heart to understand His unity and transcendence and it is through the heart that Divine Unity can be witnessed at the level of action.*

It appears to this writer that this new way of thinking, which the thinking world is slowly recognizing, was expressed in the Bahá’í Writings a century ago and is only now being identified by philosophy and psychology. To follow this process is the topic of these considerations. In order to summarize what has been said before, it must be stated that the Bahá’í Writings seem to provide the following understanding of the function of the heart.

The human spirit is a single reality that expresses itself in the different perceptual and executive organs of the human body, such as eye, ear, touch, smell, and movement, speech and touch. Furthermore, the same applies to the heart; it is as a human organ the instrument of the spirit, and it has the functions of the senses as well as of the brain. In other words, while life of the mind expresses itself through brain and the senses, the heart has the same function, except that we do not usually consider this fact and use these function in a metaphorical sense only. Yet, according to the Báb, mind or reason is confined to mere limited phenomena, while the heart is created by God to understand unity and transcendence which explains the new understanding of reality as Leo Gabriel has pointed out above.

There are some statements of Bahá’u’lláh that can be interpreted by assuming that there are two realities to the human existence, the *outward* and the *inmost* aspect. When Bahá’u’lláh talks about the *heart of my heart*, the *spirit of my spirit* and even the *tongue of my tongue*, should we not assume that He talks about different and yet connected realities, as above about the unity of the spiritual aspect of man and the variety of the instruments that express the human spirit in the physical reality? The statement below certainly has many meanings, but this interpretation might be one of them.

*O Lord! The tongue of my tongue and the heart of my heart and the spirit of my spirit and my outward and inmost beings bear witness to Thy unity and Thy oneness, Thy power and Thine omnipotence, Thy grandeur and Thy sovereignty, and attest Thy glory, loftiness and authority. I testify that Thou art God and that there is none other God besides Thee. (TB 114)*

The Physical Heart as a Metaphor for the “Spiritual Heart”

	<h1>The Heart</h1> <p>Physical Medical</p> <p>Spiritual Religious</p> <h2>In Thine Hearts of Hearts</h2>	
<p><b>Traditional View:</b> Medical-Biological Pump Physical Center of Body</p>	<p><b>Poetic, Ethical, Philosophical, Religious Idea</b> Center of Life and Meaning</p>	
<p><b>Neurocardiology</b> Able to Learn, Remember, and make Functional Decisions Independent of the Cranial Brain</p> <p><b>Quantum Mechanics</b> Connection to the Universe?</p>	<p><b>Bahá’í Writings</b> It t is Good, Pure, Cold, Hard, can: Understand, Ponder, Learn, See, Hear etc. Heart of All that Is Seat of Revelation from God</p>	

Later, when considering the new science of neurocardiology we will bring more light into this relationship. Additionally, we will apply Quantum Mechanics to this relationship between the spiritual and unified aspect of man and its instrumental and physical aspect.

Following this idea throughout this paper, it will carry us into different areas of understanding, such as the unity of the world, the relation between matter and spirit, and into some of the conclusions of quantum mechanics and neurocardiology.

A caveat has to be expressed here. All the findings of this paper are speculative and provisional, in other words, they are not expressed here with the certainty of science but, while based on scientific findings, they are extrapolations of these

findings. Since they are perceived as being in harmony with statements of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, it is assumed that they carry a certain validity, which needs to be further developed. Religious truth is relative as the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith claimed, meaning that it is progressively coming into the light of investigation, which process has been previously described by this writer as progressive theology.

## **The Unity of matter and spirit in philosophical and quantum mechanical considerations**

The question of unity of spirit and matter can be solved in different ways. The simplest solution is to deny that there is a question and to eliminate one or the other side of it. While today the elimination of matter as a reality is rather difficult to claim, to eliminate spirit is easy and has been done in the name of science quite generously.

In last year’s paper<sup>15</sup> the connection of consciousness with physical action as developed by Walker<sup>16</sup> was described at length. Here only a brief recapitulation will be given.

The astounding fact in this comparison is the new science of quantum mechanics, which according to Walker gives an explanation of the possibility of the spiritual affecting the material in quantum events in the synapses of the nervous system in the brain. These quantum effects, which are not deterministically defined by cause and effect, can be influenced by the observer, i.e., by the consciousness of the human mind.

Therefore, according to Walker, the spiritual mind can influence matter at the level of the undetermined quantum processes in the brain’s synapses that are small enough to allow quantum effects to happen. Walker describes this process in detail with the physics of quantum mechanics. In the context of this description he explains a number of functions of the mind, like sleep, ability to influence matter in rare cases, and why the power of the mind is usually restricted, as common sense experience tells us.

Another not yet considered question is the effect of the little brain of the heart (as described below), which does not have consciousness. Walker does not consider this, but it needs to be included in this equation, a rather new and difficult task. The difficulty is based on the fact that we do not know enough about this “little brain of the heart,” to make cogent

conclusions. In the following we will make some conclusions from known facts Quantum Mechanics and of Neurocardiology.

The concepts of Emergence, Enchantment, Entanglement, and Excellence of the Cosmos are used in explaining and interpreting the conclusions from quantum mechanics for the heart. What was said in the previous paper will here be applied to the heart.

## Emergence

The Nobel Prize laureate in physics, Robert B. Laughlin, developed the concept of emergence in his book: *A different Universe, Reinventing physics from the bottom down*.<sup>17</sup> In other words, reality is defined by a view that takes the whole into consideration, and this whole is a whole that integrates its parts; it is an integrated whole. If this concept is applied to the human heart, we can see that the heart is the unifying principle of the body as well as the spiritual principle that unifies reality and makes unity understood, while reason is concerned about particulars and parts. This was stated by the Báb in the following words:

*For, verily, reason, even in its utmost level of abstraction, is confined to understanding mere limited phenomena, which fail to guide humans unto the summit of the delight of their heart.*<sup>18</sup>

*That which is beyond these two extremes, which is the Middle Path ... can be comprehended by naught save the heart. God has created the heart to understand His unity and transcendence, and it is through the heart that Divine Unity can be witnessed at the level of action.*<sup>19</sup>

Modern neurocardiology does recognize the intellectual capacity of the “little brain of the heart” as will be shown below, but the contribution of the heart to human understanding and consciousness needs to be explored in the future and is a matter of psychology, rather than neurocardiology alone. According to the Bahá'í Scriptures, we can say that God has created the heart to understand His unity and transcendence and it is through the heart that Divine Unity can be witnessed at the level of action, i.e., in reality.

## Enchantment through Spirituality

Ervin Laszlo in his book *Science and the Reenchantment of the Cosmos, the Rise of the Integral Vision of Reality* <sup>20</sup> describes the changes quantum mechanics has made to the understanding of the cosmos:

The current finding of the universe’s wholeness is the fruit of sustained investigation, based on observation and tested by experiment. It provides an entirely different image of the world than the mechanistic, materialistic and fragmented image we were taught in school. A cosmos that is connected, coherent, and whole recalls an ancient notion that was present in the tradition of every civilization; it is an enchanted cosmos. (p. 2)

This view of the cosmos brings spirituality and enchantment into the understanding of reality and it can be directly applied in the description of the Báb as the summit of the delight of their heart.

*Verily, these are souls who take delight in the remembrance of God, Who dilates their hearts through the effulgence of the light of knowledge and wisdom.*  
(SWB 145)

Or as Bahá’u’lláh has described this enchantment in a Hidden Word:

*O FRIEND!*

*In the garden of thy heart plant naught but the rose of love, and from the nightingale of affection and desire loosen not thy hold. Treasure the companionship of the righteous and eschew all fellowship with the ungodly.*  
(PHW 3)

## Entanglement in Unity

Erwin Schrödinger, born near Vienna, Austria, (1887-1961) formulated the importance of this concept:

I consider [Entanglement or “Verschränkung”] not as one, but as the characteristic trait of Quantum Mechanics, the one that enforces its entire departure from classical lines of thought.<sup>21</sup>



In other words all parts of the universe are entangled, interwoven or intertwined with each other; the universe is a whole and is organized as mentioned above in emerging units on all levels of existence.

Consider this: In an experiment contrasting stimuli were randomly presented on a computer screen to the observer, one was presented to elicit feelings of love and acceptance, the other fear and anxiety. The hearts of the candidates responded accordingly as measured by the heart rate variability. The surprising fact was that they responded about 7 seconds before the computer started the random selection process.

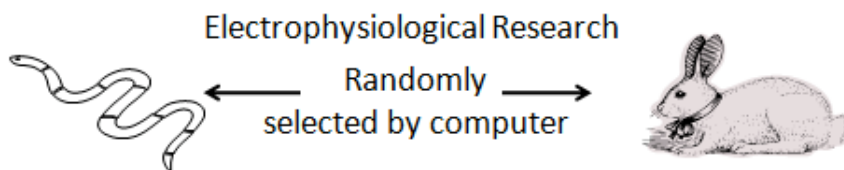
In other words, even before the computer started to select the respective picture, the heart already responded to what the senses would perceive only seconds later. This reversal of cause and effect cannot be explained in classical physics. Another fact of entanglement is the widely observed fact that people are aware of events that happen in distant areas, sometimes so far away that any physical connection must be excluded.

Consequently, it has been established scientifically that the heart is the first to perceive input from the perception through the senses. As a matter of fact, it could be proven experimentally that changes in sensual input are detected by the heart seconds before the random computer program is started that will select the presentation to the senses.

Of greatest significance here is our major finding, namely, the electrophysiological evidence that the heart is directly involved in the processing of information about a future emotional stimulus seconds before the body actually experiences the stimulus.” ... “The heart appears to play a direct role in the perception of future events.”<sup>22</sup>

Only quantum mechanics can explain the findings of neurocardiology that the heart has intuition, i.e. that it can perceive physical events before they are presented to the senses, and the other widely known fact that the heart can know of events that happen far away.<sup>23</sup>

# Intuition of the Heart



## Our major finding:

**The heart processes information of a future emotional stimulus seconds before the body actually experiences the stimulus.”**

**“The heart appears to play a direct role in the perception of future events.”** Rollin McCraty, 2004

**Intuition of the heart transcends time and space**

In the Seven Valleys Bahá’u’lláh describes this shining quality of the heart manifesting the oneness of the world.

*Whensoever the light of Manifestation of the King of Oneness settleth upon the throne of the heart and soul, His shining becometh visible in every limb and member.*  
(SVFV 22)

## Excellence of the Cosmos

Evan Harris Walker in his book “The Physics of Consciousness, The Quantum Mind and the Meaning of Life”<sup>24</sup> describes consciousness and its interaction with the brain:

Consciousness is the collection of potentialities that developed as these electrons and these structures of the brain interact (as quantum elements). (Walker 237)

By creating the possibilities that we experience as consciousness and by selecting – by willing – which synapse will fire, mind brings into reality each moment’s thoughts, experiences and actions (Walker 237)

Walker at a conference at Berkeley “New visions of reality” said “What we have been doing here is laying the foundations for a religion of the twenty-first century.” (Walker 328) He concludes his book:

Some have failed to see any place — any space — where God could reside, and others have failed to see where any consciousness could hide within the atoms of matter. But we have found that reality. We have found that hidden place. We have seen that the universe springs from every thought of God and matter from the very existence of mind. (Walker 337)

What needs to be emphasized is the fact that Walker does not talk about the nervous system of the heart, yet his thinking about the central nervous system must be applied, *mutatis mutandum*, to the heart as well. The most important change from the central nervous system to the so called “little brain of the heart” is the fact that the latter does not have consciousness, a fact we all know. Decisions of the heart become conscious only in the mind, and cannot be directly understood in our consciousness; therefore they often remain unchecked and not clarified by reason. Nevertheless, they are frequently followed and executed by the conscious mind in the life of people, sometimes with questionable results. This issue will be further pursued below.

The heart as the seat of the Revelation of God has been described above and needs to be incorporated here, consequently the place “where God resides” as Walker describes it, is not consciousness, but the heart, where consciousness is absent. The physical heart and its “little brain” is the center, where the spiritual and the material meets and it is in contact and constant communication with the brain and the mind, where consciousness is present. All of this is understandable only when we take the statement of Bahá'u'lláh serious — that the spiritual in man is one single reality, yet it is differentiated by its bodily instruments.

*Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments.*  
(SLH 154)

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This text is based on a compilation entitled “Education”, which is included in a two-volume set entitled *The Compilation of Compilations*, Volume I, p. 251, Copyright 1991 Bahá’í Publications Australia, Maryborough, Victoria, Australia: “O Lord, help Thou Thy loved ones to acquire knowledge and the sciences and arts, and to unravel the secrets that are treasured up in the inmost reality of all created beings. Make them to hear the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is.”

<sup>2</sup> In this paper the two or three letter abbreviations of the Bahá’í Writings are used compiled by Jonah Winters and Brett Zamir: bahai-library.com. All texts from *Scared Scriptures* are in italics.

<sup>3</sup> This e-text is based on “Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas” Bahá’í Publishing Committee, New York, Copyright (c) 1930 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States, All Rights Reserved, p. 308, a provisional translation. As to the authenticity of this tablet the following information from Roger Dahl, Archivist of the National Bahá’í Archives was provided:

That Tablet, which is on page 309, was to a Dr. E.H. Pratt of Chicago. The Archives does not have the original Tablet but we do have the translation that Dr. Pratt sent to Albert Windust which was used in publishing the book. From a note by Albert Windust apparently ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave permission for the Tablet’s publication, which Dr. Pratt had requested.

There is always the possibility that the World Center Archives has the original Tablet. The translation was done by Ameen Farid on October 4, 1905 in Chicago.

<sup>4</sup> The Gospel of John could be called the Gospel of the Manifestation in the sense of the Bahá’í Writings. This becomes apparent when we consider the eternal “Word” in the beginning (John 1:1) and the long discussion throughout the Gospel with the Pharisees and Jewish officials about the station of Jesus and the law of the Sabbath. Jesus claimed to follow Moses (see John 5:46): “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me,” which was referring to Deuteronomy 18:15 “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken,” and later in Deuteronomy 18: 20, “But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.” Jesus was crucified when the high priest claimed the same passages to Pontius Pilate (see John 19:7): “When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye

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him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, we have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.” The law they quote must have been this law of Deuteronomy quoted above. This connection is typically not followed up in the Christian literature, and the specific reference is not provided in the translations of the Bible. The Jerusalem Bible (Doubleday and Co., New York 1966) for example, a completely reference edition, only refers to Leviticus 24:16 (where it is stated that the community has to stone such a man, which they had tried in the past to do to Jesus) and not to the passage of Deuteronomy. This connection and understanding of the station of Jesus becomes only apparent when we consider the Gospels in the light of the Bahá’í Revelation and the concept of Manifestation.

<sup>5</sup> Book of Revelation 1:8, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. but Christ is all, and in all.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 1

<sup>7</sup> Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart, Understanding the Writings of the Báb*, Wilfried Laurier University Press, (Bahá’í Study Series), Canada 2008, ISBN 978-1-55458-035-4 in the Chapter “The Modes of Interpretation, pp. 39-66, especially pp. 42-45

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Taaffe, in *Cross Currents*, Fall 95, Vo. 45, Issue 3, “Education of the Heart” p. 380-392, It needs to be stressed that Taaffe in his article contributes very important aspects to the “Heart”, even if this definition seems to limit him.

<sup>9</sup> Saiedi, *ibid.* p. 113

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia see under “heart”

<sup>11</sup> Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality, The Spirit of Evolution*, Shambhala, Boston & London, 2000, ps. 210-230

<sup>12</sup> Leo Gabriel, *Logic der Weltanschauung (Logic of the world view)*. Verlag Pustet, Graz-Salzburg, Wien (Vienna Austria), 1949,

<sup>13</sup> Wilber, *ibid* p. 211

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel *ibid.* p. 16

<sup>15</sup> The Paper was presented at the Irfán Colloquia in Bosch 2007 under the Title “The emerging Universe, Emergence, Enchantment, Entanglement, and Excellence of the Cosmos.”

<sup>16</sup> Walker, Evan Harris, *The Physics of Consciousness, The Quantum Mind and the Meaning of Life*, Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, New York, 2000, pp. 165-214

<sup>17</sup> Laughlin, Robert B., *A Different Universe, Reinventing Physics from the Bottom Down*, Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, New York 2005

<sup>18</sup> Saiedi, *ibid.* p. 211

<sup>19</sup> Saiedi, *ibid.*, p. 212

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<sup>20</sup> Laszlo, Ervin, *Science and the Reenchantment of the Cosmos, The Rise of the Integral Vision of Reality, Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont, 2006*

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Ghirardi’s, *ibid.* p. 165

<sup>22</sup> Rollin McCraty, Mike Atkinson and Raymond Trevor Bradley: “Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition: Part 1. The Surprising Role of the heart” in *The Journal of Alternative and complementary Medicine*, Volume 10, Number 1, 2004, p. 140

<sup>23</sup> This writer “knew” of his father’s death while listening to an opera many miles away from the hospital where he died. It was not a thought; it was nothing unusual, it was just a sure knowledge, simple and clear that stood up in the mind and it was verified minutes later when I called my brother. This is explained as the knowledge of the heart communicated to the mind. Events like this are reported by many people and can only be explained by the quantum concept of Entanglement.

<sup>24</sup> *Basic Books*, New York 2000, henceforth pages are indicated as W p.#

# “In the Pure Soil of Thy Heart”

## The Heart in Bahá’í Writings and Neurocardiology

Wolfgang A. Klebel

### Introduction

The title of this paper is taken from the Hidden Word of Bahá’u’lláh, talking about *the pure soil* of the heart, and indicating that the seeds of divine wisdom and the water of certitude will make the soil fertile with divine knowledge. This beautiful metaphor can be understood in many ways; in this paper we will try to understand how the physical heart in its new discovered properties can actually be the seat of knowledge and right decisions.

#### 33. O MY BROTHER!

*Hearken to the delightful words of My honeyed tongue, and quaff the stream of mystic holiness from My sugar-shedding lips. Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green in the sacred city of thy heart. (PHW 33)*

In the previous paper the connection of the physical heart with the spiritual aspect of man was described, here a more close comparison of the scientific findings of the last decades will be introduced and used for a better understanding of the concept of heart as is presented in the Bahá’í Writings

The new science of Neurocardiology has reestablished the importance of the heart for mental, emotional and physical well-being. It has reaffirmed the deeper meaning of the statement of Lucretius (circa 55 B.C.):

The dominant force in the whole body is that guiding principle which we term mind or intellect. This is firmly lodged in the mid-region of the breast. Here is the place where fear and alarm pulsate. Here is felt the

caressing touch of joy. Here, then, is the seat of the intellect and the mind.<sup>1</sup>

The findings of this science are new, as described in an article on Neurocardiology<sup>2</sup>; and will here presented in some length, as the information is rather unexpected, even in scientific circles.

In the last twenty years, evidence has accumulated for the presence of a functional heart brain — first described as the “little brain of the heart.” From a neuroscience perspective, the nervous system within the heart, that is intrinsic to the heart, is made up of populations of neurons capable of processing information independent of extra cardiac neurons (including those of the CNS<sup>3</sup>).

This collection of neurons can sense alterations in the mechanical and chemical milieu of various regions throughout the heart. With every beat of the heart, changes in heart rate and regional dynamic changes are detected and transduced into neuronal impulses that are processed internally. Such information is also sent to neurons in the base of the brain via afferent axons in the vagus nerve and to the spinal column neurons via afferent axons in sympathetic nerves. This information is returned via efferent neurons controlling the heart. Furthermore, circulating hormones influence the behavior of the little brain of the heart.

It must be noted here that this “little brain” of the heart can function independently from the cortical brain, as is evident in heart transplants, where the heart continues functioning, even when it is not yet connected to the brain.

Another aspect to be considered anew is the function of the ANS, or what 'Abdul-Bahá called the sympathetic nervous system. “This nervous system has been assumed to be independent of reason, beneath consciousness, functioning in an *autonomous* fashion.” And further “the fact that our ANS rarely impinges on our consciousness, however, should not be interpreted as indicating that it is ‘primitive’ or that we can exert no conscious influence on it.”<sup>4</sup>

And further it is stated that the ANS regulates the internal environment in concert with neurons in the Central Nervous System (hereafter abbreviated as CNS) that senses the external



environment. This paper further describes the function of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system in detail and reveals its close connection and interaction with the heart.

The paper concludes in stating:

An understanding of the complex anatomy and function of the heart’s nervous system contributes an additional dimension to the newly emerging view of the heart as a sophisticated information processing center, functioning not only in concert with the brain but also independent of it. Further exploration of the part that neurocardiological interactions play in sustaining healthy functioning may permit a more comprehensive understanding of the heart’s multidimensional role in facilitating successful adaptation to the challenges of daily living.<sup>5</sup>

These findings directly support ‘Abdu’l-Bahá statement about the function of the heart in the maintenance of health, when He states that “Physical and spiritual diseases will then receive absolute healing.”

From the above findings of the recent research from the Institute of HeartMath it can be concluded that the importance of the heart and the sympathetic nervous system for one’s health proves ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rather brief statement in the initial quote above.

What about the other statement, indicating that the sympathetic nervous system is between the physical and spiritual and is connected to both? Can this statement be proven by modern research as well?

## The Appreciative Heart

The HeartMath Institute published a paper in 2003 with the title “The Appreciative Heart” and it carries the subtitle: “The Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning”<sup>6</sup>. Some of the findings of this paper bring us closer to the above quoted statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the connection of the physical and the spiritual and of the in-between of these two areas.

In the abstract of this paper the authors explain that they “review research that has identified new physiological correlates

associated with the experience of heartfelt positive emotions with a specific focus on appreciation.” The question of positive versus negative emotions and how these concepts can relate to the nervous system is intriguing, to say the least.

Until recently, medicine and physiological research would not have admitted the distinction between positive and negative emotions, and both sciences would have discarded any value statements in relation to the understanding of the nervous system. Some emotions like fear, which leads to the flight or fight response, have been studied extensively, but they were not contrasted with positive emotions, such as love and acceptance, in these studies.

Even psychology, trying to posture as hard science in behaviorism, had no use for such value statements. On the other side, in psychoanalysis, Freud talked about the mental freedom allowing change to a higher and better level of functioning after the dissolution of the neurosis in therapy. This mental freedom, which is guided by the value system of a person, allows changes towards health to be made, changes that will result in positive emotions and a better and less troubled life. In spite of this finding, Freud was unable to integrate this idea of freedom into his theoretical understanding of the psyche and strangely enough the term freedom did not find its way into the subject index of the standard edition of Freud's work<sup>7</sup>.

Physiology was not good or bad or even correlated to good and bad, to positive and negative emotions; the best one could defend was the survival value of emotions in a strictly Darwinian sense. While it might be possible to connect positive emotions with survival of the fittest, it would certainly be hard to prove. For example, while many regard the Crucifixion of Christ as the highest value in the Christian religion, it certainly does not follow the Darwinian understanding of the survival of the fittest. On the other hand, if good and bad have an intrinsic correlation in the physiological sphere, we are closer to understanding the value of sacrifice and of positive emotions like acceptance.

Good and bad, positive and negative emotions are moral concepts, are concepts that fit possibly into the mind, but how could they have correlates in the brain, or the heart? This question will remain open for the time being. After this

philosophical excursion let’s follow the research in the quoted article, where it is stated:

Recent work in the relatively new field of Neurocardiology has firmly established that the heart is a sensory organ and a sophisticated information encoding and processing center.

Its circuitry enables it to learn, remember, and make functional decisions independent of the cranial brain.<sup>8</sup>

The findings of this paper are based on the measurements of heart rate variability (hereafter abbreviated as HRV), which is a measure of the naturally occurring beat-to-beat changes in heart rate. When this HRV or heart rhythm was measured it was found that there is an important link between emotions and changes in the patters of both efferent and afferent autonomic activity. The paper concludes in stating:

In contrast, sustained positive emotions, such as appreciation, love, or compassion, are associated with highly ordered or coherent patterns in the heart rhythms, reflecting greater synchronization between the two branches of the ANS, and a shift in autonomic balance toward increased parasympathetic activity.

We have found that during the experience of emotions such as anger, frustration, or anxiety, heart rhythms become more erratic and disordered, indicating less synchronization in the reciprocal action that ensures between the parasympathetic and sympathetic branches of the autonomic nervous system (ANS).<sup>32</sup>

In other words, emotions like love, appreciation and compassion have a direct influence on the physiological reaction of the heart, which in turn influences the brain and the whole body. (See Table 1 below) Research has further shown that the change between negative and positive emotions can be produced rather quickly in any person who has learned to use the biofeedback system of Freeze-Frame, which has been developed, tested and researched extensively in different populations by the Institute of HeartMath. These heartfelt positive emotions, such as love, appreciation, care and compassion, have long been associated with spiritual experience. Doc Children and Rolling McCraty, Ph.D. have explored this connection in the article “Psychophysiological Correlates of Spiritual Experience,” where they conclude:

We believe that heart rhythm coherence training holds promise as a practical and potent approach to empower individuals to improve the quality of their lives. By enabling the intentional self-generation and reinforcement of physiological states that are correlated with increased love, care, compassion, inner harmony, vitality and flow, in essence this intervention helps individuals create an internal environment that is conducive to fostering spiritual experience. Some might indeed describe the end result as being able to live more “from the heart” in alignment with their deepest core values, or with greater connection to spirit.

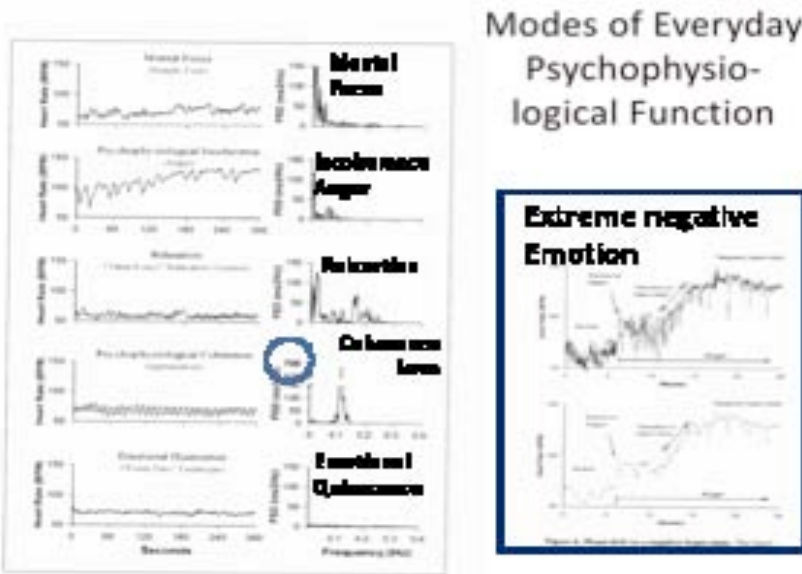


Table 1

The different emotional states of the heart are here depicted, on the left is the Heart Rate Variability described, in the middle the corresponding frequency of this variability. It is rather remarkable that in the emotional situation of Love and Acceptance a coherence frequency of 700 is achieved, while in all other states the frequency is about 150. On the right side of the picture the heart’s reaction to extreme negative emotions is shown, where a critical statement of a marital conflict was presented to the patient, throwing him into a fit of anger.<sup>21</sup>



Table 2

This picture combines a multiple emotional response pattern of the heart as it is presented by the Heart Rate Variability in different emotional situations.

This spiritual dimension of positive emotions, and what this means in terms of religious and spiritual experiences, needs to be followed up elsewhere. What is here called a correlate between physiological states and emotions was expressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the correlation between the material and divine world and He explains the position of the heart and the ANS as connecting both worlds<sup>10</sup>.

The question remains: how can an intentional change of a person in a moral category affect the physiology of that person? Since Descartes and before, this issue has been a thorn in philosophical and scientific questioning of the relationship between the soul and the body, the mind and the brain, or however the split is conceived. The fact that science was philosophically based on a prevalent materialistic and reductionistic foundation was the source of this omission, and this situation can be best described by the term scientism as a philosophical rather than scientific approach.<sup>11</sup> Certainly a

new understanding of these issues is required to explain the findings reported.

At this point this issue of philosophy will not be further pursued. What is important here is the fact that the experience of the human mind and body has created a new paradigm and a new therapeutic activity that has been proven to be very helpful in many areas. McCraty states in this paper:

During states of psycho-physiological coherence, bodily systems function with a high degree of synchronization, efficiency, and harmony and the body's natural regenerative processes appear to be facilitated. Psychologically, this mode is associated with improved cognitive performance, increased emotional stability, and enhanced psychosocial function and the quality of life. Additionally, many people report experiencing a notable reduction in inner mental dialogue along with feelings of increased peace, self-security, and sustained positive emotions after practicing maintaining this mode even for short periods such as a few days or weeks.

As reported, these described effects are staggering and they match what 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated when He talked about "*physical and spiritual diseases will then receive absolute healing.*" Or, as the researchers say, "the body's natural regenerative processes appear to be facilitated."

## The Inner and Outer in Bahá'í Theology

In the Bahá'í writings the inner and outer aspects of reality and of the human condition are a familiar topic. Many terms are used to express these opposing characteristics, such as: physical and spiritual, manifest and hidden, seen and unseen, immanent and evident, internal and external, inner and outer, inwardness and outwardness. We find these different translations for the original concepts in the Arabic and Persian languages.

In the above quoted passage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá this understanding is presumed. Here He uses the concepts of physical and spiritual, or material and divine world. He states a surprising fact, namely that the relations between these two have to be normal for perfect appearance. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains this relationship in the next paragraph again; where He

states that the two worlds have to be well co-related. This fact will make the hearts become heavenly and the aspirations pure and divine so that a perfect connection shall take place. This situation is called a perfect manifestation and results in healing of physical and spiritual of diseases. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly states that these two aspects have to be well coordinated, and He calls this coordination normal. Everything else seems to be abnormal and the cause of spiritual and physical abnormalities or diseases.

This fact is expressed in the studies of autonomic function and balance. Clinical correlates of Autonomic Dysrhythmias are mentioned as being:

Fatigue	Migraine
Depression	Fibromyalgia
Irritable Bowel	Panic Disorder
Nausea	Dizziness
Arrhythmia	Hypertension
Hypoglycemia	Sleep Disorder
Anxiety	Asthma
Premenstrual Syndrome	Mitral Valve Prolapse <sup>12</sup>

The conditions in this veritable list of ailments of modern life are all related to the disturbance of the autonomic nervous system and of its disharmony. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá these “*physical and spiritual diseases*” are the consequence of what He describes as a lack of coordination between the material and divine world in the “*sympathetic nervous system*” of the human person.

The conclusions of this brief description are obvious: physical and spiritual diseases are caused by an abnormal relation between the spiritual and physical and by disorganization of these two aspects of man. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá further states that this correlation affects the heart and, if it is co-related normally (according to the norm) it will make the heart heavenly and grow the heart’s aspirations pure and divine, making a perfect connection. In a way the argument is circular; it states that if these two worlds are coordinated well, then the heart makes a perfect connection between these two worlds. And as we will see below, this circular relationship is truly a fact of the relationship between the mind and the heart of man, as well as between the different aspects of the reality of the universe.

Here we will consider three texts of Bahá'u'lláh, which are the key to this question of the inner and outer of the human person. The first two passages were revealed before the Announcement of Bahá'u'lláh at the Garden of Ridván (1863). The third text was written in Adrianople and later in 'Akká, where Bahá'u'lláh arrived in 1868.

The first text is from the Seven Valleys, i.e., from the central valley – the fourth valley – the valley of Unity.<sup>13</sup> After giving several examples of the relative world of attributes, Bahá'u'lláh presents the following explanation which He introduced with the words “that the full meaning be manifest.”

*And thus firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness are, in the sense referred to, true of thyself, that in these four states conferred upon thee thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states, and that the nightingale of thine heart on all the branches of the rose tree of existence, whether visible or concealed, should cry out: “He is the first and the last, the Seen and the Hidden...”* (SVFV 27)

Bahá'u'lláh explains that the human reality, the “truth about thyself” is expressed in these four states, Inwardness and Outwardness, First and Last.<sup>14</sup> The inwardness and outwardness can be interpreted with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement of physical and spiritual aspects of man. In the picture of the nightingale of the heart and of the branches of the rose tree of existence, the essential nature of this understanding is presented in poetic and mystic language.

That these four divine states refer to the comprehension of the Manifestation is clearly expressed by Bahá'u'lláh in the next quote from His book of Certitude, where He explains what it means to comprehend and attain to the Manifestation, which He calls “holy Luminaries:”

*By attaining, therefore, to the presence of these holy Luminaries, the “Presence of God” Himself is attained. From their knowledge, the knowledge of God is revealed, and from the light of their countenance, the splendour of the Face of God is made manifest. Through the manifold attributes of these Essences of Detachment, Who are both the first and the last, the seen and the hidden, it is made evident that He Who is the Sun of Truth is “the First and the Last, the Seen, and the Hidden.”* (KI 141)



The next quote explains the effect of this harmony of the four states of man,

*O people! Fear God, and disbelieve not in Him Whose grace hath surrounded all things, Whose mercy hath pervaded the contingent world, and the sovereign potency of Whose Cause hath encompassed both your inner and your outer beings, both your beginning and your end. Stand ye in awe of the Lord, and be of them that act uprightly. Beware lest ye be accounted among those who allow the verses of their Lord to pass them by unheard and unrecognized; these, truly, are of the wayward. (SLH 40)*

Bahá’u’lláh speaks of the Divine potency of His Cause, which encompasses our inner and outer being, our beginning and end. To stand in the mercy of the Lord, to act uprightly is required; otherwise one truly is counted among the wayward. In other words, the acting uprightly, the leading a life of compassion, care, love and acceptance is the requirement to be able to accept the message of Him Whose grace surrounds all things. Living uprightly and experiencing the inner balance of the physical and spiritual is a precondition to achieve the unity of the inner world in the harmony of the heart and the unity of the outer world, expressed in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá formulation about “the heart of all that is.”

## Consequences of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation

These passages of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh give us a gleaning of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated in the short passage about the sympathetic nervous system. The more the science of medicine explores the human condition the more the words of the Bahá’í Writings become obvious and understood. What has been given us in spiritual language can now be found in scientific research. And this is not by accident. Bahá’u’lláh explained:

*Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. ...*

*All the wondrous achievements ye now witness are the direct consequences of the Revelation of this Name. In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before. (GWB 14)*

What is here described about the effect, which the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has on the development of the world, can equally be applied to the “inwardness” and “outwardness” of man and the unity of all four states of man as expressed in the human heart. Following the above quoted statement of Bahá'u'lláh we can say that the energies released by this Revelation have a century later resulted in the discovery of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá has already briefly stated.

The sympathetic nervous system is between the spiritual and physical aspect of man and the harmony and coherence of this system is a cure for all disharmonies in life, which is expressed in the pathologies of the dysrhythmias of the human organism. With gratitude and in a spirit of appreciation we can study and use what human research has made available for the healing of humanity as ordered by the Divine Physician, Bahá'u'lláh.

Returning to the twofold meaning of the concept “heart”, what was called the physical or medical heart and the metaphorical concept of the spiritual heart, the following conclusions can be made from the findings described in this paper. One is specific; the other conclusion is more general.

Specifically, the finding of neurocardiology have demonstrated that the heart is much more than a physical or medical blood pump, so any metaphorical use of this term can draw on a whole host of abilities and functions of this physical body organ, called the heart. Consequently, the concept “heart” as used in the Bahá'í Writings becomes not only more transparent and meaningful, it furthermore directs the meaning and understanding of this word towards the underlying unity and oneness of the world, indicating that matter and spirit are fundamentally one and not to be seen in opposition or mutual exclusion.

In general, even the physical heart participates in the newly developed understanding of the world. The cosmos, which modern physics and cosmology describes, is not at all a mechanical machine, totally regulated by cause and effect, but it is an emerging, enchanted, entangled and excellent world, where spirit and matter must be seen in their unity, where the

parts constitute the whole, and the whole equally constitute the parts in mutual dependence and support.

The new view of the cosmos and of the heart brings together what the Bahá’í Writings describe, when they talk so frequently and eloquently about the heart. The Heart is described not only as constituting the unity of the individual human person, not only as the place where man is in contact with God and His revelation, but the word heart is used as well in a cosmological sense, describing the unity of the universe in phrases like “the heart of all that is” and the “heart of the world.” The spiritual unity of this world will be described in the following chapter and what the meaning of this unity is in human experience.

## The Human Spirit and the Spirit of Faith

The following question has to be raised at this point, how can the results of a physiological exercise be related to the spirituality that is expressed by the Bahá’í Faith? Is using the Freeze-Frame technique the same as praying, or as believing in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh? Certainly not! We must ask what the difference is and in what way can a physiological exercise have value in the expression of religious faith? We must distinguish between the human spirit and the spirit of faith as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains:

*The human spirit, which distinguishes man from the animal, is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror, which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets. (SAQ 208)*

Clearly, the human spirit or the rational soul can become cognizant of the qualities and properties of beings. Applied to this situation, the human spirit can detect the importance of

the heart and the variance of the heartbeat, can develop the science of neurocardiology and can develop a technique to improve the harmony and health of the human body and spirit. 'Abdu'l-Bahá summarizes this activity as clearing and polishing the mirror of the human mind.

He does not underestimate this task; He only puts it in the right perspective. Only when the human mind is polished and clear, only if people practice positive emotions and action in their lives, can the light of the divine Revelation reach the human soul.

Bahá'u'lláh expresses this in frequent statements, for example, when He says in the Arabic Hidden Words:

*O SON OF SPIRIT!*

*My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. (HW Ar1)*

and again in the Persian Hidden Words:

*O MY BROTHER!*

*Hearken to the delightful words of My honeyed tongue, and quaff the stream of mystic holiness from My sugar-shedding lips. Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green in the sacred city of thy heart. (HW Pr33)*

Here again the heart is the center of the meeting of the divine and the human, of the revelation and the wisdom presented to man. And again, the heart has to be pure, has to be prepared to receive the seeds of the divine wisdom of the Manifestation.

Any means that can assist in this process of preparing the heart is helpful. Any technique that brings the heart in harmony with the body and with the world around a person; any process that can stop the disharmony and dysrhythmias that are the hallmark of modern spiritual and physical pathology, must be used to prepare a pure, kindly and radiant heart.

Nevertheless, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly states, this is only the pre-condition, only the preparation of the heart, the human mirror of the rational soul, which makes it ready to receive the

spirit of faith, the spirit of the Manifestation of God. It is not accidental that feelings of love, appreciation, care and compassion are the hallmark of this process—they are the cleansing of the heart. These feelings purify the heart and make it kind to one’s fellow man. When our hearts are in sync with our bodies, with humanity and the world, we can, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated in His prayer, “*hear the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is.*” “*The heart of all that is*” is the same as the *city of the heart*, the acceptance of the Manifestation, functioning as the Divine Physician who has come to cure a sick humanity.

## Conclusion

We will conclude with a word of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in which the whole of this paper is summarized:

*Man has two powers, and his development two aspects. One power is connected with the material world and by it he is capable of material advancement. The other power is spiritual and through its development his inner, potential nature is awakened. These powers are like two wings. Both must be developed, for flight is impossible with one wing. Praise be to God! Material advancement has been evident in the world but there is need of spiritual advancement in like proportion. We must strive unceasingly and without rest to accomplish the development of the spiritual nature in man, and endeavor with tireless energy to advance humanity toward the nobility of its true and intended station. For the body of man is accidental; it is of no importance. The time of its disintegration will inevitably come. But the spirit of man is essential and therefore eternal. It is a divine bounty. It is the effulgence of the Sun of Reality and therefore of greater importance than the physical body. (BWF 262)*

We need to use both wings, the one provided by science and human progress and the other provided by Revelation, following the spiritual aspect of man, leading to the “Sun of Reality.” The harmony does not originate from a biofeedback technique, but in reverse. The biofeedback technique works because of this inherent harmony, which is “true of thyself,” which is given to us, so we can recognize the Divine States. Love and Care, Acceptance and Compassion are not only tools

to promote harmony through the biofeedback technique as has been discovered by modern science. Obviously, the system works even without any recognition of higher truth. Nevertheless, it will only bring fruit if the inner capacity to recognize true spirituality by the user of this technique is activated.

What 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts so convincingly, is the need to develop the spiritual nature of humanity in order to take advantage of modern scientific findings, such as the HeartMath procedure. On the other hand, it can be hoped that the increased focus on positive emotion, given in this scientific biofeedback technique, will awaken the spiritual potential in people and direct them away from negative emotions to positive ones.

This emotional shift increases spirituality in general and hopefully will lead to the expression of spirituality in moral action and religious affiliation as well. The mutual complementation of the two wings is the most effective way to improve the fate of humankind, and the need to develop both aspects in harmony is a major focus of the Bahá'í Faith. This Faith is the first religion in the history of humanity that combines these two aspects of the human capacity. All previous major religions have mainly focused on the spiritual and moral capacities. Science did not exist then and human scientific and material progress was unknown in their times, compared with what we have experienced since the Advent of the Báb.

The Bahá'í faith is the religion for our time, primarily because this faith responds to the material development of humanity, giving it a new meaning in the spiritual dimension. Today this spiritual dimension is in the process of being discovered, even by the material progress of science. In the presented practice and research of HeartMath, the value of positive emotions for physical health and inner peace and harmony has been demonstrated. The connection is based on the sympathetic nervous system and the heart, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá noted, and pondering upon this issue results in recognizing the value and prophetic power of these statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Humanity is at the beginning of this development and its future should be seen in this improved harmony of scientific and religious progress. According to the Bahá'í Faith the

Manifestation of God brings this Progressive Revelation to the world.

The Divine Physician, who has been sent to cure the problems of mankind, is the initiator, the originator, and the sustainer of this creative process. The universality of this new message, the catholicity of this new religion, and the spirituality of the human reality, as promoted by this Faith of Divine origin – and nothing else – is the future of humanity.

The combination of science and religion, of human research and divine revelation will allow “the nightingale of thine heart,” the human soul, to wing its way into the unity of mankind, “on all the branches of the rose tree of existence.” (SVFV 27) This unity of man, of humankind, of all of their personal and scientific abilities, as well as all of their social and cultural achievements, is the promise made to all of humanity by the Manifestation of God, by Bahá’u’lláh. He is the return of Christ and one with all previous Prophets.

This unity is nothing else than the promise of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth as predicted in the Lord’s Prayer for the world’s future. And this future is starting now in the Bahá’í Faith and in all men of good will.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of things, Book III* quoted from “Neurocardiology, Anatomical and Functional Principles” J. Andrew Armour, MD., PhD., University of Montreal. Published by the Institute of HeartMath, 14700 West park Ave, Boulder Creek, California 95006
- <sup>2</sup> Armour, *ibid.* page 5, See previous footnote
- <sup>3</sup> Central Nervous System
- <sup>4</sup> Armour, *ibid.*, p. 2
- <sup>5</sup> Armour, *ibid.*, p. 15
- <sup>6</sup> Rollin McCray, Ph.D. and Doc Childre, *The Appreciative Heart, The Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning*, Published by the Institute of HeartMath, 14700 West Park Ave., Boulder Creek, California 95006, 2003 [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org)
- <sup>7</sup> Confer this author’s dissertation: Wolfgang Klebel, “Transference and Culture, towards a New Understanding of this Concept of Depth-Psychology” (Fuller Graduate School of Psychology, Pasadena, 1976), where it is stated; “at this point it is sufficient to state that Freud could not, at least theoretically, combine his scientific determinism with this

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clinical observation of mental freedom. This ability to decide is increased through analysis and Freud described it as the task of this procedure. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that these statements about choice, freedom etc., are only a metaphor in Freud's writing, since without them he cannot describe what happens in analysis. Without these concepts, the whole system of psychoanalysis does not make sense."

<sup>8</sup> Rollin McCray, Ph.D. and Doc Childre, *The Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning*, *ibid.* p. 1

<sup>9</sup> This article was found at the [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org) website and it is a reprint from AAPB/Biofeedback Magazine, Winter 2001 pp. 13-17 [www.aapb.org](http://www.aapb.org)

<sup>10</sup> From personal experience and from others, who have tried it, it should be mentioned that using prayers instead of "heartfelt emotions" during this exercise is equally, if not more effective to achieve the inner harmony.

<sup>11</sup> This reductionistic background of the scientific world view was extensively pointed out by Ken Wilber, among others,

<sup>12</sup> Rolling McCraty, Mike Atkinson, Contributors; "Autonomic Assessment Report," HeartMath Research Center, Institute of HeartMath, *ibid.* Publication No. 96-028, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> This verse of Bahá'u'lláh was the central theme of a paper of this author; "True of Thyself: The Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Ken Wilber's System of Integral Philosophy," in *Lights of Irfán*, book Six, 2005, pp. 87-120

<sup>14</sup> In a paper printed in *Lights of 'Irfán* (Book Six, Bahá'í National Center, Evanston IL, 2005, pp. 87-120), "True of Thyself. The Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Ken Wilber's System of Integral Philosophy" this writer has presented a comment on this passage in the light of the philosophical and psychological implications following some of the description of Ken Wilber.



# Some Answered Questions

## A Philosophical Perspective

Ian Kluge

### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify and explore the philosophical positions explicitly and implicitly embedded in *Some Answered Questions* (SAQ) which celebrates the centenary of its publication this year. Such a study of SAQ is valuable for at least five reasons. First, it facilitates a deeper and more precise understanding and appreciation of the philosophical foundations of the Bahá'í Writings. Indeed, SAQ itself clearly invites examination from a philosophic perspective not only by the way it implicitly incorporates philosophical concepts or ideas in its explanations but also by its explicit discussions of such topics as the “reality of the exterior world,”<sup>1</sup> the nature of God, proofs for God’s existence, the difference between emanation and manifestation and the four-fold analysis of causality to name only the most obvious. While these examples all refer to ontological issues, SAQ also deals explicitly with issues in onto-theology, epistemology, personal and social ethics as well as in philosophical anthropology and psychology. Second, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that “in this age the peoples of the world need the arguments of reason”<sup>2</sup> also invites a rational, i.e. philosophical analysis of SAQ (and the Writings) in order to make our teaching more effective by meeting people’s need for the “arguments of reason.” Bahá’u’lláh’s exhortation to “*be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in*”<sup>3</sup> reinforces our obligations in this regard.

Third, a philosophic understanding of SAQ is extremely useful in conducting rational inter-faith dialogue, not only to discover the foundational similarities we would expect to find since religions are essentially one, but also to give precise formulations and analyses of historically developed doctrinal differences. By putting such dialogue on a rational,

philosophical footing, we are more likely to generate genuine understanding than by mere exchanges of competing views. Fourth, a philosophic understanding of SAQ (and the Writings as a whole) also facilitates the task of apologetics, of explaining and defending the teachings against critique or even outright attack. This is difficult to accomplish without a good understanding of the philosophic foundations of the Bahá'í teachings and the issues they involve. Even if opponents are not convinced, it will at least be possible to demonstrate that the teachings have a rational foundation and form a coherent world-vision or *Weltanschauung*. A philosophically based, rational apologetics will be an increasingly useful, too, as the Faith becomes better known and subject to more sophisticated critiques. Finally, a philosophical understanding of SAQ will help scholars determine the nature of the ideas that inform the Bahá'í Faith, and to identify those philosophical schools with which it shares the greatest affinities. Conversely, it will help us discover which schools are the most difficult to reconcile with SAQ (and the Writings in general) and why this is so. Such understanding also helps us to determine what makes the Bahá'í teachings philosophically unique and uniquely fitted to meet "the needs of the age [we] live in."<sup>4</sup>

In studying SAQ from a philosophic perspective, we shall examine not only the explicitly given philosophical statements but also their wider implications or extensions in order to show their applicability to a wide variety of areas. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes use of Aristotle's theory of four-fold causality — a concept often misunderstood by modern philosophers and scientists — and says that this analysis of causality applies to "the existence of everything."<sup>5</sup> Thus, as we shall demonstrate, it is possible to extend its application to the analysis of the family, society in general or even the Bahá'í community. Moreover, implicit in this causal analysis is an entire ontology of matter and form, essence, substance, essential and accidental attributes and teleology. These terms and categories exemplify a particular way of observing and analysing reality that differs dramatically from other schools of thought such as modern empiricism or postmodernism. Bahá'ís wishing a more complete philosophic understanding of SAQ (and the Writings) should be familiar with this way of analysing reality which has clear affinities to the philosophical tradition begun by Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus — what this paper calls 'the Athenian tradition' — and continues most

actively in our time in the work of Whitehead and in the works of the various schools of neo-Aristotelians and neo-Thomists.<sup>6</sup>

This study will also begin the process of extracting implicit philosophical principles and implications from SAQ, such as, for example, a version of intelligent design theory inherent in the teaching that “Nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design.”<sup>7</sup> This statement clearly rules out the more militant forms of Darwinism promulgated by such writers as Dawkins<sup>8</sup> and Hitchens,<sup>9</sup> which claim that the universe, and life, especially human life, are merely a result of blind fortuitous accidents. This does not imply that SAQ embraces the Christian versions of intelligent design, but it does imply that SAQ accepts some variation of intelligent design theory. Consequently, in light of the teaching of harmony between religion and science, Bahá’ís are faced with a new philosophic challenge of how to reconcile the acceptance of intelligent design with vehement scientific rejection of any such concept. The resulting investigations will inevitably lead us to further explorations of the Writings and the philosophy of science.

## 1. SAQ’s Ontology: Some Basic Principles

In its simplest terms, ontology concerns our theory of being i.e. what we mean when we say that something ‘is’ or ‘is real’ as opposed to being ‘unreal;’ ontology also explores the nature of real things and how they are related to each other. Doing ontology is unavoidable since, either explicitly or implicitly, every statement about the world contains ontological assumptions that guide our understanding and action. For example, the simple statement, ‘I shall walk the dog’ assumes (a) that ‘I’ exists in some way, (b) that ‘I’ have could make such a decision, (c) the dog exists in some way, (d) that ‘I’ and the dog are distinct and separate entities, exterior to each other, (e) that motion is possible and real and that (f) the city street outside also exists. It is, of course, possible to dig much, much deeper, but this simple example illustrates that we cannot avoid doing ontology even in our simplest thought processes and actions.

This certainly applies to religious texts. For example, if a religion teaches that there is a transcendent God Who is the source or ground of the material world, it has made several ontological claims. The most obvious is that reality contains two different kinds of entities. On one hand we have a

contingent, material world that depends on something else for its existence and on the other, an entity which is non-contingent, independent and not material. It follows therefore that ontologically speaking, existence has at least a dualistic, two part structure involving two radically different kinds of entities and that the existence of one 'part' i.e. God, is a logically necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of the other, i.e. creation. This, in turn, has implications for our relationship to non-contingent, independent source as well as its contingent and dependent world this Source created. At this point, ontology reveals practical implications for our lives because how we conduct our lives is a determined by how we understand reality. Ontology begins to show its onto-theological and ethical implications.

We shall begin our exploration of the ontology embedded in SAQ by asking a fundamental question: is the exterior world real or is it unreal i.e. a dream, illusion, fiction or construction created either by Descartes' demon, Maya or even by ourselves? The belief that the exterior world is a mere fantasy may be called 'maya-ism' after the veiling or illusion creating power (sometimes portrayed as a goddess) in the Hindu religion. In SAQ, 'Abdu'l-Bahá flatly rejects the view that reality is a phantasm.

*Certain sophists think that existence is an illusion, that each being is an absolute illusion which has no existence – in other words, that the existence of beings is like a mirage, or like the reflection of an image in water or in a mirror, which is only an appearance having in itself no principle, foundation or reality.*

*This theory is erroneous.*<sup>10</sup>

It is noteworthy that 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to those who maintain that the world is an "absolute illusion" as "sophists," a term traditionally associated with flawed and deceptive reasoning. Use of this term signals His rejection of maya-ism which is confirmed by His statement that "[t]his theory is erroneous." Consequently, for any Bahá'í-based philosophy, the unqualified assertion that "existence is an illusion" is not an option for understanding reality. This limitation is significant because it helps establish the view that SAQ contributes to laying out guidelines within which any Bahá'í-based philosophy must work.

## 2. Ontological Realism

Three closely related far-reaching consequences follow from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement. The first and most obvious is that "each being"<sup>11</sup> in the exterior world is real, i.e. possesses some "principle, foundation, or reality"<sup>12</sup> which give it some degree of existence "in itself." In other words, "each being" has at least some degree of innate existence, is individual, is distinct and possesses some detachment or independence from other beings and is, in that sense, unique. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá' says in a later section of this passage, "in their own degree they [things in the exterior world] exist."<sup>13</sup> Each thing "in the condition of being [] has a real and certain existence."<sup>14</sup> They are not mere "appearances" of something else, i.e. epiphenomena, passive side-effects or by-products that possesses no "principle, foundation or reality" of their own. This idea is re-enforced by the following statement:

*for though the existence of beings in relation to the existence of God is an illusion, nevertheless, in the condition of being it has a real and certain existence. It is futile to deny this. For example, the existence of the mineral in comparison with that of man is nonexistence ... but the mineral has existence in the mineral world ... Then it is evident that although beings in relation to the existence of God have no existence, but are like the mirage or the reflections in the mirror, yet in their own degree they exist.*<sup>15</sup>

This statement makes it unequivocally clear that according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá while degrees of reality differ, every being is, in its own degree, undeniably real. It is worth noting that He flatly rejects any contradictory viewpoint: "It is futile to deny this," He says, thereby foreclosing any argument to the contrary. He emphasises the reality of creation elsewhere by stating "Now this world of existence in relation to its maker is a *real* phenomenon."<sup>16</sup> In other words, it has its own, undeniable degree of reality. The reason for this will be discussed in the section on "Existence and Nonexistence."

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that each thing has its degree of existence provides a realist foundation for Bahá'í ontology and epistemology. If "each being" has its own "principle, foundation or reality" and reflects one of the names of God in its own way, it is, therefore, not only genuinely distinct from all other things but also independent from them, i.e. has its

own principle or foundation of existence “in itself.”<sup>17</sup> Having this principle or foundation “in itself” establishes a basis for the ontological independence of “each being” (except, of course, from God) including independence from human observers, which is to say, the ontological status of “each being” is does not depend on being observed by humans or on human beliefs or linguistic practices. As we shall have occasion to discover in later discussions, the realist orientation to reality has enormous implications for epistemology especially in regards to the concept of ‘essence.’ It also has far-reaching implications for the relations between Bahá’í philosophy and contemporary postmodernism.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Ontological Pluralism

The second major consequence is that in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement we find the ontological basis for ontological pluralism, i.e. the belief that reality is made up of a multiplicity of individual things each of which “proclaims to us one of the names of God”<sup>19</sup> in its own way and to the limits of its capacity. In other words, reality is made up of genuinely distinct beings whose differences are real and fundamental and not merely an appearance, illusion or matter of perspective. Their individual existence is not merely a “mirage” or reducible to something else that is ‘more fundamental’ such as a ground of being, or God.

Accepting some form of ontological pluralism entails the rejection of ontological monism according to which there are no fundamental divisions or distinctions among things – including the distinction between the independent Creator and the dependent creations. In other words, the things of created world can ultimately be reduced to particular modes of being or appearances of God who is the only real thing or substance in existence. All distinctions are illusory for those possessing the enlightenment to see through the unreal distinct surface phenomena to the one reality underneath. According to SAQ, however, the distinctions between individual beings are real, i.e. “each being” has its own “principle, foundation or reality”<sup>20</sup> though, of course, ultimately, this multiplicity of beings operates “under one law from which they will never depart.”<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, as we shall see, in our discussion about the nature of God, SAQ categorically rejects any suggestion that God, the independent and non-contingent Creator can in any way be

ontologically one with dependent and contingent creation. The distinction between the independent and non-contingent and the dependent and contingent cannot be undone or overcome. The reason is obvious. For humans to become ontologically one with the absolutely independent and non-contingent God would be to lose their particular identity as the kinds of beings they are, and the same would hold true for God were He to unite with the contingent. Not only would this deny ontological pluralism by vitiating real differences, but it would also imply that there can be change in God insofar as He could be unified with His creation in some way.

The belief that the existence of the exterior world and its beings are an illusion vis-à-vis God's absolute existence is not an inadvertent re-admission of monism into Bahá'í ontology. It might be argued that since only God really, i.e. absolutely exists, then all other things are not real, illusory or mirages. Consequently, only one being remains – God – as real, and that, of course, is precisely the monist position, i.e. there is only one real substance, or being or will and that everything else is ultimately, unreal, mere epiphenomena. In other words, the distinctions between things are unreal or illusory, including the distinction between God and His creation. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly rejects this position; speaking of the things of this world, He says, "in their own degree they exist."<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere He says,

*So man exists; the animal, the plant and the mineral exist also – but the degrees of these four existences vary. What a difference between the existence of man and of the animal! Yet both are existences. It is evident that in existence there are differences of degrees.*<sup>23</sup>

These statements indicate that although the existence of things is bestowed by God, it nevertheless is real in its own right and not merely a chimera. Like a gift, it really belongs to the recipient though it originates from the wealth and bounty of another. Here again, we see the commitment to ontological pluralism re-enforced since from this perspective, the reality of different grades of being are guaranteed by God's perfections.

*The Creator always had a creation; the rays have always shone and gleamed from the reality of the sun, for without the rays the sun would be opaque darkness. The names and attributes of God require the existence of beings, and the Eternal Bounty does not cease. If it*

*were to, it would be contrary to the perfections of God.*<sup>24</sup>

Pluralism is guaranteed because the “names and attributes of God require the existence of beings,” i.e. require the existence of beings genuinely different from God. The fact that God is the origin of this difference does not make it any less real.

#### 4. Distinctions of Being and Power

According to SAQ, the distinctions between the various kinds of being are based on differences in powers or ability. For example, “The vegetable spirit is the power of growth ... [t]he animal spirit is the power of all the senses”<sup>25</sup> and “human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul”<sup>26</sup> which

*embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings.*<sup>27</sup>

In other words, ontological differences in the degrees of being are reflected in the various capacities and powers with which each kind of being is gifted. Each station includes the powers possessed by the preceding station and adds a new power as illustrated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertion.

*As well as having the perfections of the mineral, of the vegetable and of the animal, he [man] also possesses an especial excellence which the other beings are without – that is, the intellectual perfections.*<sup>28</sup>

Also,

*there is no doubt that from its effects you prove that in the animal there is a power which is not in the plant, and this is the power of the senses – that is to say, sight, hearing and also other powers; from these you infer that there is an animal spirit. In the same way, from the proofs and signs we have mentioned, we argue that there is a human spirit. Since in the animal there are signs which are not in the plant, you say this power of sensation is a property of the animal spirit; you also see in man signs, powers and perfections which do not exist in the animal; therefore, you infer that there is a power in him which the animal is without.*<sup>29</sup>



In other words, the degree of being possessed by an entity manifests itself in the kind of powers and capacities it has. We shall have more to say about this in our discussion of the essences of things. For now, suffice it to note that this image of successively more inclusive levels of being establishes the concept of creation as having an underlying order, of being a hierarchy of successively more expansive capacities which ultimately ends or finds its origin in God. In this way, the cosmic order itself becomes evidence for God's existence. Finally, it should be noted that this cosmic order reinforces the pluralist ontology exemplified by SAQ because it shows the existence of different kinds of being.

It is also worth noting that the terms 'being' or 'existence' cannot be applied univocally to God and His creation, i.e. they do not have exactly the same meaning in each case. Indeed, the 'being' of God and man are so dissimilar that there is a difference of kind between them insofar as God is non-contingent and independent and man is not. Consequently, in SAQ the concepts of 'being' or 'existence' are applied in an equivocal manner to God and man; there is some analogous similarity insofar as in both Creator and creatures, the word 'existence' distinguishes them from 'non-existence' but the manner or mode of this existence is radically different in each case. This is important to keep in mind because it is one of the reasons for saying that God is essentially unknowable to humankind.

## 5. Ontological Hierarchism

The third consequence that follows from the teaching that all things have various degrees of being is the establishment of an ontological hierarchy with God's absolutely independent, non-contingent and incomprehensible being at the top and matter at the bottom. All beings between have existence "in their own degree,"<sup>30</sup> i.e. their own place in this universal hierarchy of being:

*the beings, whether great or small, are connected with one another by the perfect wisdom of God, and affect and influence one another. If it were not so, in the universal system and the general arrangement of existence, there would be disorder and imperfection. But as beings are connected one with another with the greatest strength, they are in order in their places and perfect.*<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, in Bahá'í ontology, 'to be' or 'to exist' means possessing one's own degree of reality and having one's own unique place in the hierarchy of being based on the degrees of existence possessed by various kinds of things such as minerals, plants, animals or humans. Indeed, in discussing the various kinds of "beings which inhabit the world, whether man, animal, vegetable, mineral,"<sup>32</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá says the following

*all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings.*<sup>33</sup>

Our main point, of course, is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's image of a chain or order made up of different kinds of beings can be viewed as support for the underlying concept of an ontological hierarchy in SAQ. Just as a chain needs links in different positions, so creation requites higher and lower degrees of being with the inevitable result that "as the degrees of existence are different and various, some beings are higher in the scale than others."<sup>34</sup> The mineral, plant and animal are of a lower degree than man, whom God "selected for the highest degree,"<sup>35</sup> though, of course, "material beings are not despised, judged and held responsible for their own degree and station."<sup>36</sup> This hierarchy of being is also reflected in the differences among humankind, among whom there may be a "difference of station ... [which] is not blameworthy."<sup>37</sup> This station, just like the station of minerals, plants and animals is given and is not alterable by our action. In contrast, what can be affected by our actions are the "difference of faith and assurance"<sup>38</sup> and therefore, "the loss of these is blameworthy."<sup>39</sup> SAQ adds, "man is praiseworthy and acceptable in his station, yet as he is deprived of the perfections of that degree, he will become a source of imperfections, for which he is held responsible."<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, no being has the right to complain of the station or degree of being into which we have been placed.

*the mineral, has no right to complain, saying, "O God, why have You not given me the vegetable perfections?" In the same way, the plant has no right to complain that it has been deprived of the perfections of the animal world ...No, all these things are perfect in their own degree, and they must strive after the perfections of their own degree. The inferior beings, as we have said, have neither the right to, nor the fitness for, the*

*states of the superior perfections. No, their progress must be in their own state.*<sup>41</sup>

It should be immediately noted that “inferior” here does not mean inferior in value but less comprehensive in powers, as for example, the mineral lacks of powers of growth or the plant, and the plant lacks the powers of movement of the animal. However, all are “perfect in their own degree.” The idea that differences in degree do not imply differences in valuation is evident, for example, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s discussion of the various characters of human beings.

*Hence it is clear that in the original nature there exists a difference of degree and varieties of worthiness and capacity. This difference does not imply good or evil but is simply a difference of degree. One has the highest degree, another has the medium degree, and another the lowest degree.*<sup>42</sup>

No moral evaluation is associated with any degree of being in and of itself. To assert otherwise would be tantamount to claiming that creation has inherent imperfections — a claim which impugn the “Divinity Who has organized this infinite universe in the most perfect form, and its innumerable inhabitants with absolute system, strength and perfection.”<sup>43</sup> Such imperfection is not conceivable from God.

The concept of ontological hierarchy also appears in the following:

*this limitless universe is like the human body, all the members of which are connected and linked with one another with the greatest strength. How much the organs, the members and the parts of the body of man are intermingled and connected for mutual aid and help, and how much they influence one another! In the same way, the parts of this infinite universe have their members and elements connected with one another, and influence one another spiritually and materially.*<sup>44</sup>

Here, too, we observe not just the idea of mutual connection and inter-action at work, but also the idea of hierarchy as indicated in the simile associating the universe and “the human body,” i.e. a hierarchically structured organism in which everything is interconnected. In this passage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also alludes to the idea that the universe functions like an organism and is not merely an unorganised collection or

aggregate of isolated individual parts working in isolation. Instead, they are all parts working with an organised whole for their own well-being and for the well-being of the whole. This vision lays the ontological foundation for the Bahá'í social vision of each person functioning as part of an organic community for mutual benefit in a balance of interests between part and whole.

## 6. Hierarchy After Death

The hierarchical nature of existence is also continues in life after death. Punishment consists of “falling into the lowest degrees of existence”<sup>45</sup> where “He who is deprived of these divine favours, although he continues after death, is considered as dead by the people of truth.”<sup>46</sup> The same idea is at work in the following statement:

*In the same way, the souls who are veiled from God, although they exist in this world and in the world after death, are, in comparison with the holy existence of the children of the Kingdom of God, nonexistent and separated from God.*<sup>47</sup>

Here, too, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear that the conduct of our lives determines our degree of existence in the next life; in comparison to those who receive God's favours those who do not are as “dead” or “nonexisting” – just as, analogously, creation has no existence compared to the absolute existence of God. This ontological hierarchy also lays the foundation for the epistemological principle that “the difference of conditions in the world of beings is an obstacle to comprehension,”<sup>48</sup> which is to say, that the lower degrees of being cannot comprehend the higher. Humankind, for example, cannot comprehend the Essence of God because our degree of being is too low and God is too different from us. We shall explore this further in our discussion of the epistemology inherent in SAQ.

It is important to emphasise that these statements about a chain of being refer to the ontological nature of different *kinds* of beings – “man, animal, vegetable, mineral”<sup>49</sup> – and are not statements about the value of these kinds of beings; no kind of being is devalued, as SAQ makes clear by referring to their “reciprocal help, assistance and interaction.” All beings in all stations play a necessary part in the cosmic process, though these parts are very different. In short, the ontological hierarchy does not of itself imply inherent unimportance of

any station. As noted above, “all beings” take part in the cosmic process of influencing and being influenced.

## 7. Kinds and their Perfections

As indicated each link in the chain, each degree or station of being is necessary:

*Know that the order and the perfection of the whole universe require that existence should appear in numberless forms. For existing beings could not be embodied in only one degree, one station, one kind, one species and one class; undoubtedly, the difference of degrees and distinction of forms, and the variety of genus and species, are necessary – that is to say, the degree of mineral, vegetable, animal substances, and of man, are inevitable; for the world could not be arranged, adorned, organized and perfected with man alone.<sup>50</sup>*

Here we find an unmistakable proof that all the various kinds of being are necessary for the perfection of the created universe. We also find in this statement an indication that SAQ accepts the principle of plenitude, i.e. the belief that all possible forms of being will be actualized at some time and in some way. That is why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ says that “the whole universe require[s] that existence *should appear in numberless forms*.” These forms are numberless because degrees of being are numberless, though, of course, they may be divided into groups or kinds. They are all needed for the universe to achieve its evolutionary perfection.

## 8. A Dynamic Ontology

The fact that each thing has particular degree of being suggests that all things must strive for the perfections appropriate to their kinds, or for “their own degree.” These perfections differ: the vegetable world finds perfection or purpose in growth and supporting animal and human life<sup>51</sup>; the animal finds perfections in achieving a comfortable physical existence and in supporting human life; finally, the perfection of the human world is to attain “the good attributes and virtues which are the adornments of his reality.”<sup>52</sup> Each station or place in the hierarchy of being has its own characteristics and its own perfections.

We should also note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's concept of this chain or hierarchical order of being is dynamic insofar as "reciprocal help, assistance and interaction"<sup>53</sup> is concerned. Indeed, SAQ asserts unequivocally the general principle that all existence is dynamic:

*Know that nothing which exists remains in a state of repose — that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence.*<sup>54</sup>

The exact nature of this dynamism is not only motion, coming into existence, growth, decline and going out of existence but also either direct and/or indirect involvement in the existence of other beings. According to SAQ "every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association."<sup>55</sup> 'To be,' therefore, not only means that a thing has the principle or foundation of its existence "in itself" but also means that 'to be' involves an active relationship with other beings, i.e. to influence and to be influenced, to be active and receptive. This on-going interaction among things means that all beings communicate their existence and the particular nature of their existence to the world around them; they 'share' themselves as part of a cosmic community of such 'sharing' or self-communication. In creation, existence is relational or social and this fundamental fact, which encompasses all created reality, provides the ontological foundation for Bahá'í social philosophy. To keep the relational aspects of human existence in good order is precisely one of the tasks of the Manifestations.

## 9. A Nested Hierarchy

The foregoing considerations strongly suggest the conclusion that according to SAQ, creation is not an ontological flatland in which all things possess the same degree and manner of existence. In other words, existence is arranged in a successively transcendent levels of reality, with successively higher degrees of being, until we come to God Whose being is of another kind completely. From the perspective of the degrees of being, creation is not arranged on egalitarian principles with each kind of thing possessing the same degree. Of course, as seen above, from the perspective of valuation all things have an equally necessary part in the cosmic process although their function and place in the hierarchy of being differs.

The kind of hierarchy observed in SAQ is a nested hierarchy i.e. hierarchy in which higher levels contain lower levels. This is evident in the statement that

*the Divine Essence surrounds all things. Verily, that which surrounds is greater than the surrounded, and the surrounded cannot contain that by which it is surrounded, nor comprehend its reality.*<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere He says, “the Essence of Unity surrounds all and is not surrounded.”<sup>57</sup> The same situation holds true in regards to the Manifestations: “the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities.”<sup>58</sup> This is also true of humankind:

*The most noble being on earth is man. He embraces the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms – that is to say, these conditions are contained in him.*<sup>59</sup>

To “embrace,” is, of course, to include or surround. The same situation holds true in the case of the spirit and the human body: “for the spirit surrounds the body,”<sup>60</sup> and idea repeated in the assertion that “This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings.”<sup>61</sup>

As we have observed in our discussion of the degrees of being, each ontologically higher level includes the powers of the lower and adds some new power, as humankind includes the powers of vegetable growth, animal motion and sense and adds the powers of the rational soul. Thus, it embraces or surrounds the lower within itself but also transcends it by being more. Therefore SAQ suggests a nested ontological hierarchy that starts with the most inclusive and transcendent, i.e. God, and ends with the least inclusive and least transcendent.

God  
The Manifestation(s)  
Humankind  
Animal  
Vegetable  
Mineral/matter

Refinements and subdivisions may, of course be added if we take other Writings into consideration, but SAQ itself provides warrant for only these.

## 10. Panentheism

The nested hierarchy proposed by SAQ has an important implication for the Bahá'í concept of God. The belief that God ontologically surrounds, embraces and includes all created things and at the same time transcends it is one form of a doctrine known as panentheism.<sup>62</sup> This is not to be confused with pantheism (or monism) according to which God and creation are identified as one substance and the diversity of created beings are ultimately no more than “mirages” or illusions. (We have seen how SAQ categorically rejects this view.<sup>63</sup>) Panentheism, however, admits that all created beings have their own degree of existence, even though they are contained within God.<sup>64</sup> The universe is within God, God is not within the universe. Thus God's presence is everywhere in creation but He transcends this presence and thus remains unknowable to humankind.<sup>65</sup> This transcendence is what differentiates pantheism and monism from panentheism which is distinguished from deism by the fact that it does not see God as completely unconnected from nature or creation.

There is more here than just a change of wording. Panentheism provides a rational alternative to pantheism and monism which reduce the plurality of beings to the divine – and thereby create problems for the concept of free will. How can we be free if we are only mirages or illusions and God is the only real source of action? It also provides a rational alternative to the forms of theism in which God seems disconnected from His creation and often so distantly transcendent as to be remote and beyond interest for human beings. In panentheism, God is both present throughout all creation, and still personal and transcendent. Later in this paper we shall demonstrate the effect panentheism has on the epistemological teachings promulgated in SAQ.

## 11. Ontology: Causality

Causality is one of the most important issues in ontology, one that has been controversial since Hume's reduction of causality to regular succession. This is most commonly understood to mean that when we say 'A caused B' we really mean 'Whenever A occurs, B immediately follows.' He rejects the idea that somehow A 'does something' to make B happen. There is no necessary objectively real connection between the two; any connection is human inference or projection based on



mental habits. Hume's understanding of causality has gained acceptance in light of some interpretations of quantum mechanics, though there has recently been a revival of Bohmian, i.e. causal interpretations.<sup>66</sup>

There is no question that SAQ rejects Hume's analysis of causality and accepts the traditional concept of causality being the influence or affect of one thing or event on another.

*It is confirmed through evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association. Finally, the perfection of each individual being – that is to say, the perfection which you now see in man or apart from him, with regard to their atoms, members or powers – is due to the composition of the elements, to their measure, to their balance, to the mode of their combination, and to mutual influence.*<sup>67</sup>

Here 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that beings affect or influence one another and that these affects have certain results, in this case, the "perfection" of individual beings which is "due to," i.e. caused by these influences among other things. Elsewhere He says,

*There is no doubt that this perfection which is in all beings is caused by the creation of God from the composing elements, by their appropriate mingling and proportionate quantities, the mode of their composition, and the influence of other beings. For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings.*<sup>68</sup>

Not only does 'Abdu'l-Bahá state that "reciprocal help, assistance and interaction" affect all beings but also, in the image of a chain, he conveys the idea of a necessary order and connection among these mutually interacting beings. Such necessary connection is precisely what Hume and his followers deny.

### 11.1 Four-Fold Causality

In SAQ, one of the most radical and far-reaching statements about ontology concerns the subject of causality:

*the existence of everything depends upon four causes – the efficient cause, the matter, the form and the final cause. For example, this chair has a maker who is a carpenter, a substance which is wood, a form which is that of a chair, and a purpose which is that it is to be used as a seat. Therefore, this chair is essentially phenomenal, for it is preceded by a cause, and its existence depends upon causes. This is called the essential and really phenomenal.*<sup>69</sup>

This assertion is radical because it is a revival, both in conception and in terminology, of Aristotle's much misunderstood theory of causality as expounded in his *Physics*<sup>70</sup> and *Metaphysics*.<sup>71</sup> Here, too, Aristotle discusses the four causes, using precisely the terminology confirmed later by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: the material cause, or matter of which something is made; the formal cause, or form which makes an entity the particular thing it is; the efficient cause, i.e. mover or maker which directly brings the entity into being, i.e. "brings form to the matter"<sup>72</sup>; and the final cause, or purpose of the entire activity of making. Not only does 'Abdu'l-Bahá employ Aristotle's terms, He uses them exactly as Aristotle used them in order to analyze causality and, furthermore, He uses them to draw a general conclusion about the nature of how causality works in creation. It is interesting to note that SAQ contains no suggestions of the Muslim philosopher Ibn Sina's four subspecies of the efficient cause.<sup>73</sup>

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify exactly what Aristotle means by four-fold causality lest we entrap ourselves in philosophical misunderstandings that have dogged science and philosophy since the time of Descartes and Galileo. To produce any kind of real change in something, there must be matter or what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "substance"<sup>74</sup> because there must be something in which the change happens. There must also be a form *from* which the change begins and *to* which it proceeds; in the case of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example, we have the substance in the form of wood being changed into a substance in the form of a chair. There must also be an efficient cause which initiates the change when a new form emerges from an old one, as the chair 'emerges' from the block of wood by way of the carpenter's action. Finally, there is the final cause or purpose which determines how the efficient cause will act, i.e. whether it will act one way or another depending on what is compatible with the goal. All four of these causes must be present for any change to occur. It should be noted that in

'Abdu'l-Bahá's illustration, the final cause is in the mind of the carpenter, i.e. is extrinsic to the material and substantial causes.

This fact leads to a major complaint about four-fold causality, namely, that it is anthropomorphic, applies to conscious and deliberative human actions, but does not apply to natural processes. Indeed, since the time of Descartes and Galileo, accepting final causality has been regarded as an identifying feature of unscientific thinking. Nature, it is said, does not operate with a purpose towards final goals. Only higher animals and humans can conceive of objectives to work for, but the rest of nature certainly does not. Therefore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of four-fold causality does not harmonize with the accepted science of the last four centuries. Unfortunately, as numerous experts on Aristotle have pointed out, this view is predicated on Descartes' and others' misunderstanding of Aristotle.

The problem with Descartes' and all subsequent misinterpretations of final causality is that they assume that Aristotle meant the term in the sense of an extrinsic conscious, deliberative finality even in the case of natural processes. However, Aristotle never thought that such an extrinsic deliberative cause was at work in all changes. Such is obviously not the case in the growth of a plant, or the digestive process, but because there is no extrinsic and conscious final cause at work does not logically mean that there is not mean there is no final cause at all. As Aristotle writes, "It is absurd to suppose that purpose is not present because we do not observe the [conscious] agent deliberating."<sup>75</sup> He was clearly aware that in natural processes, we see no such extrinsic agent guiding the changes. According to Aristotle, in natural processes "the form [formal cause], the mover [the efficient cause], 'that for the sake of which' [the final cause] ... often coincide."<sup>76</sup> In other words, the efficient cause or mover, the final cause and the formal cause may be one, i.e. three principles operating at once, which is to say, that the final cause may be intrinsic to the process of change. That is why John Wild, a neo-Aristotelian, says that "the only final cause in subhuman processes is the natural form,"<sup>77</sup> a view echoed by Aristotle expert, Abraham Edel: "Thus in nature the final cause and formal causes are one."<sup>78</sup> The form at whatever stage of development it may be, limits the actions of the efficient cause, and these successive limitations in turn, effectively close and open various paths of development, thereby leading to a

particular result. As Aristotle scholar Henry B. Veatch points out that in nature,

*Aristotelian final causes are no more than this: the regular and characteristic consequences or results that are correlated with the characteristic actions of the various agents and efficient causes that operate in the natural world.*<sup>79</sup>

Veatch's example is strikingly simple: we expect sunlight to warm a window sill, we do not expect sunlight to fragment the sill into thousands of pieces, turn it blue or to make it float in the air and fly around like a cloud. Those are not the "regular and characteristic" effects that the laws of physics allow sunlight to have on window sills. Indeed, the laws of physics clearly limit or characterize the action of energy transfer that we observe and this characterization or limitation is what Aristotle means by 'final cause' in regards to non-human nature. As W. Norris Clarke, S.J. points out, this means that the "final causality is necessarily inherent in every exercise of efficient causality."<sup>80</sup> This final cause must be inherent in every efficient cause because

*[i]f the efficient cause at the moment its productive action is not interiorly [inherently] determined or focused towards producing this effect rather than that, then there is no sufficient reason why it should produce this one rather than that.*<sup>81</sup>

Efficient causes always lead to particular effects, and if there is no reason why an efficient cause should produce one or another effect, then any effect might follow: a window sill might flight after being touched by sunlight. However, we know that efficient causes do not produce random results, but rather particular results on a regular basis according to the laws of nature as described by physics and chemistry. "This inner determination of the causal agent [efficient cause] towards the effect-to-be produced is precisely *final causation*."<sup>82</sup> In nature, the efficient cause and the final cause are unified because the efficient causes obey the laws of nature, i.e. fall within the limits imposed by these laws and this conformity to law shapes the outcome. Because the final cause may be implicit in the formal and efficient causes, we cannot simply avoid or side-step the issue of final causes.

## 11.2 Consequences of Four-Fold Causality

What does 'Abdu'l-Bahá's acceptance of Aristotle's four-fold causality mean for our understanding of the philosophical positions inherent in SAQ? The first and most obvious effect is that if understood correctly, four-fold causality and particularly final causality do not place religion in conflict with science which rejects the notion that subhuman processes are shaped by deliberately formulated goals extrinsic to the processes themselves. While processes involving human intervention are guided by such consciously developed goals, natural processes are not. However, nowhere does Aristotle say that final goals must be always be conscious and deliberative, and indeed, as we have seen in *Physics*, he explicitly denies that they are.

The concept of final goals only becomes problematical when it is misunderstood anthropomorphically as a consciously intentional, extrinsically determined goal. However, as shown above, this is not what Aristotle promulgated. Therefore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's acceptance of final causes does not create disharmony with science once Aristotle's teaching is correctly understood. After the long-term and widespread misrepresentations (originating with Bacon, Descartes and Spinoza) of Aristotle's doctrine, it will, unfortunately, be a difficult struggle to overcome deeply entrenched misinterpretations of Aristotle.

Four-fold causality also provides us with the intellectual tools by which to analyse and explain all aspects of reality except God and the Manifestations Who are not subject to such analysis. In other words, four-fold causality is a particular way of understanding reality and is, therefore, an embryonic ontological world-view with all kinds of implications for various human endeavours.

## 12. Teleology

The second conclusion we may draw from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's acceptance of four-fold causality is that in Bahá'í ontology, reality is teleological, i.e. informed or guided in its processes by intrinsic and/or extrinsic final causes. The ubiquity of final causes means that creation is not random or anarchic but rather law abiding and organised. On this topic, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states regarding nature,

*This composition and arrangement, through the wisdom of God and His preexistent might, were produced from one natural organization, which was composed and combined with the greatest strength, conformable to wisdom, and according to a universal law. From this it is evident that it is the creation of God, and is not a fortuitous composition and arrangement.*<sup>83</sup>

If a series of events is not fortuitous or accidental, then some principle of order or lawfulness must be at work in nature either extrinsically or intrinsically or both to shape events and their consequences. If there were no ordering principle or guiding law, then any results might follow an action. Aristotle's four-fold causality is simply a philosophical explanation of why this does not happen, i.e. why results are regular unless disturbed by other extraneous factors. Hence, order, pattern i.e. organisation emerge from the action of intrinsic final causes (and thus establish the very conditions for the existence of science).

### 13. Intelligent Design

However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes much further than the assertion of order, pattern and organisation. Nature, He says,

*is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart – to such a degree, indeed, that if you look carefully and with keen sight, from the smallest invisible atom up to such large bodies of the world of existence as the globe of the sun or the other great stars and luminous spheres, whether you regard their arrangement, their composition, their form or their movement, you will find that all are in the highest degree of organization and are under one law from which they will never depart.*<sup>84</sup>

In other words, nature as a whole shows “finished design,” i.e. is not “a fortuitous composition and arrangement”<sup>85</sup> – phrases suggesting not only that existence is organised and lawful, but more strongly, that existence is characterised by a design. This, of course, brings up a sensitive question: does SAQ promulgate a variation of intelligent design theory? From these statements, and others we shall examine later, it is clear that the answer is affirmative, though the variation of intelligent design

in SAQ is not that of Biblical literalism. If the natural world is not “a fortuitous composition and arrangement,” if it is “conformable to wisdom”<sup>86</sup> and if it is “subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design,”<sup>87</sup> then it is clear that nature is not a result of undirected accidents and random events but of some ordering principle however complex its workings may be. This design requires the existence of an extrinsic consciously deliberative final cause. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

*the least change produced in the form of the smallest thing proves the existence of a creator: then can this great universe, which is endless, be self-created and come into existence from the action of matter and the elements? How self-evidently wrong is such a supposition!*<sup>88</sup>

Here, too, the subject of change and by implication, causality, emerges, since without the guidance of final causality inherent in the efficient and formal causes of change, change would be undirected and accidental. However, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, this change is so far from being random that it “proves the existence of a creator,” i.e., an ultimate source of the laws manifest in the changing process. The universe cannot have come into existence only “from the action of matter and the elements” because this matter requires form in order to be the particular kind of matter it is and act in the particular way it does – and form, as Aristotle points out, intrinsically includes final causality in natural processes. This intrinsic form of final causality of course leads to the question about the source of order and lawfulness, i.e., to God. It is worth noting how hylomorphism (see below) is implicitly assumed in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s argument as well as His explicit endorsement of the foundational principle of intelligent design, namely that we can legitimately reason our way from events in nature to the existence of “a creator.”<sup>89</sup> In other words, we have moved from a final cause intrinsic to natural processes to an extrinsic, deliberative and conscious final cause. That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regards such a reasoning process as correct is rhetorically shown by His categorical rejection of the contrary view: “How self-evidently wrong is such a supposition!” Even though some Bahá’ís may find this association with some form of intelligent design theory uncomfortable, intelligent design, albeit not in its Biblically literal version, is a fact of Bahá’í ontology in SAQ.

However, this does not necessarily cause a conflict with science insofar as science concerns itself with intrinsic final causality as evident in the operation of empirically verifiable natural laws, whereas religion's concern is extrinsic final causality as known through revelation and rational reflection. Each explores aspects of final causality appropriate to its methods. If conflict develops, it is a consequence of choosing to let this happen.

#### 14. Hylomorphism

The acceptance of four-fold causality is an important contact point between SAQ and the philosophical tradition begun by Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus (the Athenian tradition) and continued in various forms in the modern world. This would be even more apparent if we were to embark on a detailed analysis of what is entailed in four-fold causality, for example the implication that any entity is made up of matter (as in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example) and form, the latter being provided by the carpenter in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's illustration. SAQ itself makes a passing reference to this view, stating, "The sun is born from substance and form, which can be compared to father and mother."<sup>90</sup> SAQ then proceeds to say that darkness, which, as an absence of light has no existence in itself, i.e. "has neither substance nor form, neither father nor mother, and it is absolute imperfection."<sup>91</sup> This suggests that in order for entities to exist requires substance or matter and form, or to put it another way, all things existing in nature are made of substance and form.

Those familiar with the history of western philosophy will, of course, recognise the doctrine of hylomorphism which asserts that all sensible things exemplify a union of matter and a form that makes it a certain kind of thing.<sup>92</sup> The hylomorphic theme is not explicitly developed in SAQ, but the statement that "the existence of everything depends upon four causes"<sup>93</sup> strongly suggests its universal applicability in our understanding of reality and thus creates an unmistakable contact point with the Athenian tradition both in its European and its Muslim branches as seen in the philosophy of Aquinas and such Muslim philosophers as Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd.



## 15. An Application of Four-Fold Causality

In order to understand the versatility of four-fold causality as an analytical tool, we shall briefly outline how it may be used in the analysis of society or any other community. The matter or material cause of a society are the individuals who make up the society or group. The final cause (which may or may not be explicitly conscious in all members) is the common good for which the individuals work, either deliberately or though being enlisted by the rules, customs and trends in that society. For example, the final cause of Communist society was to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessary step to the abolition of all rulers. The formal cause of a society is made up of the rules, duties, obligations, rights and offices required to achieve the common good. These give society its particular form or shape. The efficient cause is the people's willingness to achieve the common good, their willingness to abide by the rules and fulfill their obligations, i.e. the love of the common good. For a society or community to be healthy requires that all of these four causes are working appropriately. If, for example, a community loses sight of its final cause i.e. the common good towards which it is dedicated, it will soon lose its way and dissolve into rampant individualism where the pursuit of the good of individual persons dominates lives.

## 16. Platonic Trends in SAQ

Another contact point with the Athenian tradition is the suggestion scattered throughout SAQ that the world in which we live is or will be mirror of a superior, spiritual world. Such a view is usually described as Platonic, i.e. reminiscent of Plato's teaching that the world is only a shadow, imitation, reflection or image of the superior real world of ideas. These shadows or reflections are embodied in the ever-changing world of matter. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "the earth is the mirror of the Kingdom; the material world corresponds to the spiritual world."<sup>94</sup> It is "the outward expression of the inward,"<sup>95</sup> i.e. the material expression of the spiritual or the expression of the "spiritual world" in the material realm. Such views are certainly Platonic in nature insofar as they posit a material world which is a counterpart or copy of a spiritual or non-material model. The Kingdom, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "is not a material place; it is sanctified from time and place. It is a spiritual world, a divine world ... it is freed from body and that which is corporeal."<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, this material world is all-to-often

a distorted reflection of the spiritual world, a condition that the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is intended to remedy: "The world will become the mirror of the Heavenly kingdom."<sup>97</sup> Here, too, the Platonic theme is evident. Platonism also has applications for their key doctrine of progressive revelation and ethics. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "what is meant by the term Holy of Holies is that spiritual Law which will never be modified, altered or abrogated; and the Holy City means the material Law which may be abrogated."<sup>98</sup> The "material Law" is an earthly image of the eternally unchanging "spiritual Law" which is reflected in varying material conditions. In this case, Plato's Ideas – such as the Idea of the perfect horse – has been transferred into ethics; instead of perfect Ideas of things, we have perfect Ideas of eternal ethical principles which we try to imitate or reflect as best we can.

If the material world reflects or corresponds to the spiritual world, one of the consequences is that reality is structured as a series of correspondences between the spiritual and the material. This is illustrated by the statement that "The Sun of Reality", like the material sun, has numerous rising and dawning places."<sup>99</sup> As we shall see in the section on epistemology, these correspondences have far-reaching consequences for the epistemology explicitly and implicitly present in SAQ. It means, for example, that we cannot understand the phenomena of material reality fully without taking into account what has been revealed about their spiritual counterparts. This is most readily illustrated in the case of human nature which cannot be properly understood only on the basis of material studies but must also take into consideration the divine ideal of which actually existing man is a reflection, image or shadow.

## 17. The Reality of Universals

The subject of Platonism raises another important ontological question for SAQ, namely, does SAQ recognise the reality or existence of at least some universals? Universals are the

*supposed referents of general terms like 'red', 'table', 'tree, understood as entities distinct from any of the particular things described by those terms.*<sup>100</sup>

For example, 'dog' is a universal but 'Otto' is a particular example or instantiation of this universal. All individual dogs

have certain characteristics in common that make them members of the universal class 'dog.' There are three possible viewpoints (and variations thereof) about universals. One is extreme realism espoused by Plato, which holds that universals i.e. Ideas, are real entities in themselves in "a non-spatio-temporal existence distinct and separable"<sup>101</sup> from all particular instantiations. The second is moderate realism held by Aristotle which maintains that universals are real but only in their individual instantiations. The human mind abstracts them – but it abstracts from something real in the individuals. The third view is nominalism, "the view that things denominated by the same term share nothing in common except that fact."<sup>102</sup> In other words, there are no such things as universals and all so-called universal terms are arbitrary constructions.

The reason this ontological issue is so important well beyond its technical philosophic aspects and receives considerable attention is that it has an enormous impact on personal and social ethics, psychology, philosophical anthropology as well as positive and natural law. For example, it concerns whether or not there is such a thing as human nature, what it is and what role is its role in individual and social ethics. Does human nature establish norms in behavior and ethics? Postmodernism and *some* forms of existentialism, adopt the nominalist view and deny that any such thing as human nature exists; in their view, it is nothing short of totalitarian to establish ethics or laws on the basis of standards based on so-called human nature. Only individuals are real and any concepts of universal essences, natures or attributes are constructions of fictions imposed upon individuals. Perhaps Sartre sums up this attitude best when he writes, "As we have seen, for human reality, to be is to choose oneself; nothing comes from the outside or from within which it can receive or accept."<sup>103</sup> There is no 'pre-made' human nature or any other nature, there are only individuals making themselves.

SAQ rejects the nominalist position. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*spirit is universally divided into five categories: the vegetable spirit, the animal spirit, the human spirit, the spirit of faith, and the Holy Spirit.*

*The vegetable spirit is the power of growth which is brought about in the seed through the influence of other existences.*

*The animal spirit is the power of all the senses, which is realized from the composition and mingling of elements ...*

*The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets.<sup>104</sup>*

Here we have a virtually self-evident demonstration of belief in universal attributes and powers that define different kinds, species or essential; attributes things. These essential attributes and powers are present in and identify all members of a kind as vegetable, animal or human. Germane to our discussion is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's categorical declaration about the spirit being "universally divided into five categories," indicating that this division is an objective fact of creation or nature and not merely a product of human intellectual construction. They are simply given facts we have to work with as we explore the world. The "five categories"<sup>105</sup> are real – manifested in differences of composition and capacity – and are not merely arbitrary man-made contrivances. Their essential attributes always appear in individuals and are known by the human mind, but they have an objective basis in reality.

The reality of universals is emphasised from another perspective when 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*Know that the order and the perfection of the whole universe require that existence should appear in numberless forms. For existing beings could not be embodied in only one degree, one station, one kind, one species and one class; undoubtedly, the difference of degrees and distinction of forms, and the variety of genus and species, are necessary – that is to say, the*

*degree of mineral, vegetable, animal substances, and of man, are inevitable; for the world could not be arranged, adorned, organized and perfected with man alone. In the same way, with only animals, only plants or only minerals, this world could not show forth beautiful scenery, exact organization and exquisite adornment. Without doubt it is because of the varieties of degrees, stations, species and classes that existence becomes resplendent with utmost perfection.*<sup>106</sup>

Here the issue of universals is taken up from the perspective of the ontological principles of plenitude and perfection. The principle of plenitude and perfection as given in this quotation asserts that for creation to be perfect (How could it not be given its origin in God?) requires diversity, i.e. more than “one degree, one station, one *kind*, one *species* and one *class*.” Degrees, stations, kinds, species and classes are all references to universals, i.e. to terms that refer to types of beings, to categories or collectives united by common essential attributes. The fact that kinds are considered necessary for the perfection of God’s creation demonstrates that they are real and not mere human constructions of fictions.

A third indicator that Bahá’í ontology exemplifies some form of realism in regards to universals are ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements about the evolution of humankind:

*But from the beginning of man’s existence he is a distinct species ... But even when in the womb of the mother and in this strange form, entirely different from his present form and figure, he is the embryo of the superior species ... For the proof of the originality of the human species, and of the permanency of the nature of man, is clear and evident.*<sup>107</sup>

Throughout His discussion of the inalterability of human nature, He makes clear that humankind represents a different kind of species from minerals, plants and animals. References to humankind’s existence as a distinct species with characteristic capacities are also found in his discussion of life after death:

*When we consider beings with the seeing eye, we observe that they are limited to three sorts – that is to say, as a whole they are either mineral, vegetable or animal, each of these three classes containing species.*

*Man is the highest species because he is the possessor of the perfections of all the classes – that is, he has a body which grows and which feels. As well as having the perfections of the mineral, of the vegetable and of the animal, he also possesses an especial excellence which the other beings are without – that is, the intellectual perfections. Therefore, man is the most noble of beings.*<sup>108</sup>

These statements are quite categorical about the objective reality of these different “sorts” or “classes” and their various species. Humankind’s differences from the others and its position as the peak of this hierarchy are also presented as facts of creation or nature and not merely as artefacts of human subjectivity. They do not exist merely as thoughts without any connection to reality.

Since classes, categories and species are ontologically real, it remains to determine whether or not SAQ indicates if they exist in a Platonic or Aristotelian manner. If they exist Platonically, these universals exist objectively as part of a non-spatio-temporal realm separate from the ever-changing material world. If their existence is Aristotelian they exist objectively but only in particular instantiations from which our ideas of them are abstracted by the human mind.

This paper contends that on the issue of universals, the interpretation most consistent with SAQ (and the Writings in general) is the Platonic interpretation although it is not developed in any great detail. In this connection, it should be recalled that “the earth is the mirror of the Kingdom; the material world corresponds to the spiritual world.”<sup>109</sup> In other words, the kinds, species and classes that exist physically on the earth are the material reflections of their spiritual, i.e. non-spatio-temporal counterparts. Their key point is that the ideal spiritual prototypes exist in the “Kingdom” and these are reflected over time. A similar concept is found in the following statement:

*The Prophets, on the contrary, believe that there is the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of Creation: three things. The first emanation from God is the bounty of the Kingdom, which emanates and is reflected in the reality of the creatures.*<sup>110</sup>

Here, too, 'Abdu'l-Bahá shows that the "world of Creation" reflects or corresponds to the "world of the Kingdom," which thereby functions as an ideal Platonic realm to the former. It is, of course, also possible to argue that these universals, the kinds, classes or species exist as ideas in the "First Mind"<sup>111</sup> and then gradually actualised in the evolution of the material world. Both of these alternatives would be in harmony with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements that creation exemplifies design i.e. something in which there is conscious deliberation and forethought. That these universals may somehow pre-exist their appearance in the material realm is suggested by the following quote:

*the terrestrial globe from the beginning was created with all its elements, substances, minerals, atoms and organisms; but these only appeared by degrees: first the mineral, then the plant, afterward the animal, and finally man. But from the first these kinds and species existed, but were undeveloped in the terrestrial globe, and then appeared only gradually. For the supreme organization of God, and the universal natural system, surround all beings, and all are subject to this rule.*<sup>112</sup>

In other words, the earth was created "from the beginning" with all its potential beings and species within it. This implies forethought and ideas for "these kinds and species" insofar as specific plans are necessary to make such detailed provisions for the future. The evidence provided by SAQ suggests that such 'Platonic' ideas or models were present in the Kingdom or the "First Mind" before the earth was created or any of them had been turned into materially manifest realities.

## 18. Reflection and Participation

The 'Platonic' affinities in SAQ are also strengthened by the teaching that all existing beings and kinds reflect one or more of the names of God. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

*The world, indeed each existing being, proclaims to us one of the names of God, but the reality of man is the collective reality, the general reality, and is the center where the glory of all the perfections of God shine forth.*<sup>113</sup>

Elsewhere He states,

*Without doubt each being is the center of the shining forth of the glory of God – that is to say, the perfections of God appear from it and are resplendent in it ... The world, indeed each existing being, proclaims to us one of the names of God, but the reality of man is the collective reality, the general reality, and is the center where the glory of all the perfections of God shine forth.*<sup>114</sup>

He also says, “all beings express something and *partake* of some ray and portion of this [divine] light.”<sup>115</sup> These quotations assert that every being has within itself a reflection of one or more of the names of God which is to say that every being has a direct connection with the ideal or spiritual power of the names of God. As a species human kind is distinguished from other species because we reflect or participate in all of the names of God: it is the “collective reality” which reflects or participates in “all the perfections of God.” Other kinds, classes or species of being only reflect one of these names.

In the language of the Athenian tradition in philosophy, the reflection of one of God’s names in every being means that each being ‘participates’ in the names of God, it instantiates or exemplifies these names in its own way. Thus ‘to be’ means to reflect one of the names of God, just as we have seen before that ‘to be’ means to have one’s particular degree of being and one’s appropriate place in the chain of being. In regards to reflecting the names of God we might also say that beings imitate the names of God in their instantiations of them, and thus, collectively make the signs of God’s power present or establish God’s presence in creation. This helps lay the ontological foundations for a Bahá’í natural theology, since such reflection, participation, imitation allows us to argue from the created world to the Creator because “[a]ll the creatures are evident signs of God.”<sup>116</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reasons from the created to the Creator in His various proofs of God’s existence in SAQ. Indeed, some of His arguments such as the argument that the creator must be more perfect than the created – as the Kingdom is more perfect than the material world – make no logical sense outside of a Platonic ontology in which higher levels of being are more perfect than lower levels<sup>117</sup> and the lower participate in the higher.

In this Platonic ontological schema, each being is also a “pointer towards the Infinite.”<sup>118</sup> Thus, the study of God’s creation by the sciences takes on a religious significance



insofar as such study will bring us closer to God — if understood spiritually and not in strictly positivist, empiricist and materialist terms. Such spiritual understanding of science is justified because the material world and the metaphysical or spiritual world are closed to each other, but inter-act through reflection, imitation or participation. In this way, the doctrine of reflection and participation provides an ontological basis for the Bahá'í emphasis on science. It also lays the ontological foundations for a Bahá'í philosophy of man or philosophical anthropology. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*The reflection of the divine perfections appears in the reality of man, so he is the representative of God, the messenger of God. If man did not exist, the universe would be without result, for the object of existence is the appearance of the perfections of God.*<sup>119</sup>

In other words, the universe is incomplete without man, who represents a necessary degree of perfection which gives the universe a goal and purpose (note the teleological thinking) just as the fruit is “is the reason”<sup>120</sup> for the existence of the tree. Humankind has a necessary place in the existence of the universe which is why 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, “it cannot be said there was a time when man was not”<sup>121</sup> and adds that the belief that there was a time when man did not exist in some form in the universe is “false and meaningless.”<sup>122</sup> In short, humankind has a cosmic role.

## 19. Existence and Nonexistence

In SAQ, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes a number of extremely important and far-reaching statements about existence and nonexistence.

*The second proposition is that existence and nonexistence are both relative. If it be said that such a thing came into existence from nonexistence, this does not refer to absolute nonexistence, but means that its former condition in relation to its actual condition was nothingness. For absolute nothingness cannot find existence, as it has not the capacity of existence ... Though the dust — that is to say, the mineral — has existence in its own condition, in relation to man it is nothingness. Both exist, but the existence of dust and mineral, in relation to man, is nonexistence and nothingness.*<sup>123</sup>

We have already discussed one aspect of this teaching in our consideration of the degrees of being of different kind of things. Our focus at this point, however, is the categorical denial that anything can be produced or produce itself from “absolute nothingness.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá offers two kinds of reasons why the *ex nihilo* interpretation of creation is in error. The first is onto-theological in nature i.e. bases its ontological argument on our understanding of God’s nature. According to this view, “absolute nothingness” cannot even theoretically exist as implied in the doctrine that “the Eternal Bounty does not cease. If it were to, it would be contrary to the perfections of God.”<sup>124</sup>

Since God’s “Bounty” or emanations never stop and have always been forthcoming, there must always have been a creation in some form. This is reinforced by the argument that

*the names and attributes of the Divinity themselves require the existence of beings ... a creator without a creature is impossible ... for all the divine names and attributes demand the existence of beings. If we could imagine a time when no beings existed, this imagination would be the denial of the Divinity of God ... Therefore, as the Essence of Unity (that is, the existence of God) is everlasting and eternal – that is to say, it has neither beginning nor end – it is certain that this world of existence, this endless universe, has neither beginning nor end.*<sup>125</sup>

The questions underlying this argument are, ‘How can God be the Creator if He has no creation?’ and ‘If God has no creation, how can He claim perfection?’ Thus, the Christian and Muslim doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* contradicts the belief that God is perfect. This issue constitutes a major difference between Bahá’í, Muslim and Christian onto-theology.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s second reason for rejecting *ex nihilo* creation is more philosophical in nature, i.e. is based on the logical problems inherent in this concept. He says that “it is impossible that from absolute nonexistence signs should appear – for the signs are the consequence of an existence.”<sup>126</sup> How could nothingness actively give a sign, i.e. take action and communicate? What could it communicate? How could it receive action? In order to receive, there must be a receiver, something to receive. The whole concept dissolves into

nonsense. Nor could “absolute nothingness” become anything since there would not even be a capacity or potential for something new to come into existence. Thus, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “Moreover, absolute nonexistence cannot become existence. If the beings were absolutely nonexistent, existence would not have come into being.”<sup>127</sup>

Therefore, the concept of “absolute nonexistence” must be rejected and replaced by a concept of relative nonexistence, which is exactly what he does: “existence and nonexistence are both relative.”<sup>128</sup> The diverse kinds and species that exist potentially in the earth are only relatively nonexistent, i.e. they exist “potentially”<sup>129</sup> like the various attributes of the plant hidden in a seed. They exist in a hidden plane, just like the natural powers before they are brought “out from the plane of the invisible and the hidden into the realm of the visible”<sup>130</sup> by humankind.

The denial of “absolute nothingness” lays the ontological foundation for the belief that a creation, a universe of some kind has always existed: “the world of existence has always been”<sup>131</sup> and can never fall into absolute annihilation although particular worlds may do so. There is no ontological ground in SAQ to believe that one day God will choose to bring about the end of the world as many Christians have interpreted *Matthew 24:35-36*. On the basis of SAQ, it is also possible to reject similar interpretations of such Qu’ranic suras as 20:15.<sup>132</sup>

The denial of “absolute nothingness” also lays the ontological foundations for the belief that whatever manifests itself over a period of time was the result of the actualization of potentials inherent in a being. Furthermore, it becomes the basis for the teaching that all things have an essence and that essences are real. Obviously, every being does not have all potentials – the proverbial sow’s ear cannot become a silk purse, a ski-boot cannot become an alligator. In other words, both individual things and kinds of things have a limited array of potentials available to them – as already seen in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanations about the mineral, plant, animal and human degrees of spirit. One aspect of essence is precisely this limited collection of potentials which determine what kind of thing a particular being is and what it can or cannot become. Thus, we are led to the conclusion that the rejection of “absolute nothingness” is the ontological foundation for the essentialist nature of the philosophy embedded in SAQ.

## 20. The Structure of Beings

Every being has a structure of actuality and potentiality, i.e. what it is at the moment and what it could be in the future. The actuality is what we encounter first but, nonetheless, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá informs us, every being has its potentials. Speaking of a seed, He says, "So it is first the shoot which appears from the seed, then the branches, leaves, blossoms and fruits; but from the beginning of its existence all these things are in the seed, potentially, though not apparently."<sup>133</sup> There is more in the seed than what is manifest to us. The same is true of the earth as a whole: "the terrestrial globe from the beginning was created with all its elements, substances, minerals, atoms and organisms; but these only appeared by degrees."<sup>134</sup> In other words these beings existed potentially in the earth and gradually were actualized. In reference to humankind, He says,

*In the same way, the embryo possesses from the first all perfections, such as the spirit, the mind, the sight, the smell, the taste – in one word, all the powers – but they are not visible and become so only by degrees.*<sup>135</sup>

Various perfections are potentially present in the embryo. With this teaching of the reality of potentials, SAQ aligns itself with the Aristotelian branch of the Athenian tradition in philosophy in which all beings are a composite of actuality and potentials, i.e. what is manifested (actuality) and what remains to be manifested in the future (potentiality). This is why beings are capable of change, i.e. they still have potentials left to actualize, and why God is changeless, i.e. He has no potentials to actualize and is absolute actuality; He needs no additional completion. Except for God, every being is incomplete and requires the realization of its potentials to be complete. The potentials inherent in every being are the reason for the active and evolutionary nature of each being as it actualizes its innate potentials. This, in turn, re-emphasises the dynamic and teleological nature of all beings. Indeed, these potentials or "perfections"<sup>136</sup> which gradually appear show that one aspect of a being's development is a self-perfecting process in which it strives to maximise its being.

Every being is also a composite of substance or essence and accidents, qualities or attributes as shown in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement

*Know that there are two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of the essence of a thing and the knowledge of its qualities. The essence of a thing is known through its qualities; otherwise, it is unknown and hidden.*<sup>137</sup>

He expresses the same idea when He says,

*Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, 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.*<sup>138</sup>

In this statement, the spirit is the substance, i.e. the essence which is the basis of a thing's existence as the kind of it is (in this case, human) and possesses certain "accidental" qualities.<sup>139</sup> In both quotations, a being is composed of an essence or substance as well as of particular qualities or attributes. As the second quotation shows, some of the attributes are "accident[s]," i.e. they are not absolutely necessary or essential to the existence of the substance or essence. When applied to humankind, this becomes the ontological basis for the immortality of the soul which, being a substance, can exist without its accidents. This leads to the conclusion that some attributes are "accidental" and not necessary, while others, such as immortality or rationality in the case of humankind, are necessary or essential attributes. They cannot be removed without changing the essence into some other kind of being. It should be noted that here again, SAQ analyses reality in the terms established by the Athenian tradition, particularly by Aristotle.

In SAQ, we observe even God is discussed in these terms:

*for the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension. If the attributes are not identical with the Essence, there must also be a multiplicity of preexistences, and differences between the attributes and the Essence must also exist.*<sup>140</sup>

The gist of this statement is a philosophical demonstration of God's unity: He is one because His Essence and His "essential names and attributes" are identical. If they were not, then God's unity would be undermined by the difference between

God and His attributes. An additional implication of this statement is that, unlike all other beings, God possesses no unnecessary or accidental attributes that could be separated from Him. All of His attributes are essential – but such is not the case with any other kind of being all of which are made up of both essential and accidental attributes.

Each being is also a composite of matter and form. Since we have already touched on this in a foregoing discussion, there is no need to repeat the relevant evidence here. Suffice it to say that this acceptance of hylomorphism also places the philosophy embedded in SAQ in the Athenian tradition.

## 21. Essence and Existence

SAQ provides reason to claim that each being is a composite of existence and essence. We cannot imagine a being which has pure existence but no essence. Even God, according to SAQ, has an essence.<sup>141</sup> The moment we enquire 'What is it like?' we are already asking for its nature, its essence and attributes. There is no such a thing as simple 'existence'; existence is always the existence of some particular thing. On the other hand, just because we can imagine an essence with all its attributes e.g. a unicorn, does not mean it actually exists. Existence and essence are clearly two different things. In every real being they are joined.

All other beings, as we have seen above, possess varying degrees of existence in contrast to God's absolute existence and independence from all other things. In other words, they are contingent, i.e. not necessary: it is possible to conceive of their not existing without tangling ourselves in all kinds of logical difficulties. As contingent, they exist only by the will of God Who chooses to bestow existence on them but Who was obviously under no obligation to do so. They are utterly dependent on God for their existence and lack any capacity to bring themselves into being.

The fact that beings are contingent means that existence is a freely given bestowal from God Who did not have to confer it. Therefore, it is God's gift to give existence as a real being to a particular essence, even though this essence could have remained either potential or imaginary. This gift is distinct from the gift of our particular essence. Existence and essence are two principles that are found at work in every actually existing being, i.e. they are not things in any material sense but

rather requirements that must necessarily be fulfilled for any thing to be and which can be observed in any real being.

This composition of essence and existence is worth noting first, because it provides an ontological foundation for the Bahá'í teaching of the contingency of all beings except God and second, because it provides an ontological foundation for our gratitude to God for the gift of existence. Our obligation for gratitude is rooted in the ontology of being-in-general. As we can see from this, our ethical relationship to God also has ontological roots.

## 22. God – an Epistemological Preview

Any discussion of God in regards to SAQ (and the Bahá'í Writings in general) must deal with the limitations on our knowledge of God. This requires a preview of some epistemological issues. On the subject of knowing God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*the essence and the attributes of the Lord of Unity are in the heights of sanctity, and for the minds and understandings there is no way to approach that position. 'The way is closed, and seeking is forbidden.'*<sup>142</sup>

Later He adds, “the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension.”<sup>143</sup> Such strictures raise the inevitable question, ‘What, if anything, do SAQ and the Writings allow us to say about God?’

If we analyse the first statement, it is clear that we cannot “approach” God, i.e. discover Him directly as He is in Himself i.e. in His essence. The same applies to His names and attributes because God is one with these.<sup>144</sup> In other words, there is no direct knowledge of God because such knowledge requires comprehension or ‘surrounding’ of the object to be understood. In the case of God, this is impossible because humankind lacks the capacity to ‘surround’ what is ontologically higher.

*It is evident that the human understanding is a quality of the existence of man, and that man is a sign of God: how can the quality of the sign surround the creator of the sign? – that is to say, how can the understanding, which is a quality of the existence of man, comprehend*

*God? Therefore, the Reality of the Divinity is hidden from all comprehension, and concealed from the minds of all men. It is absolutely impossible to ascend to that plane. We see that everything which is lower is powerless to comprehend the reality of that which is higher.*<sup>145</sup>

However, SAQ (and the Writings) do not fall into the trap of claiming that God is unknowable in any way whatever; were that the case, we would have the problems created by a disappearing God Whose very existence is unknowable and ultimately irrelevant to humankind. However, SAQ provides for knowledge of God indirectly, through the Manifestations:

*all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations. There is no access to anything else: 'the way is closed, and seeking is forbidden.'*<sup>146</sup>

In other words, we can know about God through the Manifestation and we can reason about this knowledge but we cannot know God directly without an intermediary. Indeed, all of this knowledge about God

*refer[s] to the Holy Manifestations – that is to say, all the descriptions, the qualities, the names and the attributes which we mention return to the Divine Manifestations; but as no one has attained to the reality of the Essence of Divinity...*<sup>147</sup>

However, we must not make the mistake of concluding that this limited knowledge *about* God, is untrue or merely a fiction or construct. Limited and indirect knowledge about something is not necessarily untrue or a man-made fiction, especially when it comes from a Manifestation. Thus, we may conclude that while we have knowledge about God via the Manifestation, we have no direct knowledge of God as He is in Himself. Furthermore, we may reason about God from the information provided us by the Manifestation.

It should be noted in passing that humankind's inability to know God's essence decisively negates any claims that man and God can be ontologically united in mystic states and the suggestion that God and creation or any part of creation can be one. Unity with God is forbidden by the extreme ontological



differences between the independent and the dependent and all claims to having achieved such unity are delusions.

### 23. The Existence of God: The Argument from Contingency

The ontology of SAQ is premised on the existence of God Who is the ultimate source of all beings. To support His case, 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides various proofs for the existence of God. The first of these is a variation of the proof from contingency:

*One of the proofs and demonstrations of the existence of God is the fact that man did not create himself: nay, his creator and designer is another than himself.*<sup>148</sup>

Humankind is contingent, i.e. humankind cannot be responsible for its existence and essence; therefore, logically, its cause must be outside itself in something else. After all, a thing that does not exist, cannot bring itself into existence, since to do so would be to imply that it can act before it actually is in existence. This is logically and physically impossible. For this reason, human existence necessarily requires an external cause. At this point it is important to digress briefly to note what 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not say, namely, that God is the immediate cause for the existence of humankind. The kind of processes studied by science may well be the immediate or proximate causes by means of which humankind evolved but these proximate causes do not necessarily exclude the ultimate cause which begins and guides the evolutionary process through its varying vicissitudes. In other words, once we distinguish proximate from ultimate causes, there is not an inevitable conflict with science on this issue.

From 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement we also learn that God is our ultimate efficient cause or "creator" and our ultimate final cause or "designer." As the final cause, He would also be our formal cause, i.e. the source of our form or essence as human beings. However, He is not our material cause since God is not the matter or substance from which we are constituted as is asserted by pantheism and monism according to which God and creation are ultimately one substance. Finally, it is worth noting 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of the term "designer" in regards to humankind strengthens the argument that SAQ supports some variation of Intelligent Design theory in regards to human origins. (See the Introduction.) Humankind, and creation as a whole, is not merely a "fortuitous composition and arrangement."<sup>149</sup>

## 24. The Ontological Argument

In SAQ 'Abdu'l-Bahá combines the argument from contingency with the argument of perfection when He states,

*The contingent world is the source of imperfections: God is the origin of perfections. The imperfections of the contingent world are in themselves a proof of the perfections of God.*<sup>150</sup>

The argument from contingency was discussed above, so let us turn our attention to the argument from perfection. It is based on the degrees in which beings possess certain attributes. For example, qualities like goodness and truth are found in greater or lesser degrees in various beings. In other words, they exist on a scale according to which some approach more closely than others the greatest possible degree of a certain quality, i.e. some approach perfection more closely than others. To say that something is imperfect or approaches perfection more than something else implies the existence of a perfect standard by which to measure imperfection. Such a perfect standard ultimately can only refer to God. Since we observe imperfection around us, the perfect standard i.e. God must exist.<sup>151</sup> If God, or this perfect standard did not exist, it would not be perfect since it would lack the perfection of existence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes use of this argument in SAQ, referring to the attributes of power, knowledge and wealth, which, in their imperfects become weakness, ignorance and poverty. The existence of these imperfections proves that a supreme degree of these qualities must exist, and since qualities cannot exist by themselves they must exist in someone or something. Since things cannot have wealth, knowledge, goodness or truthfulness, these qualities must exist in someone, i.e. God:

*Therefore, it becomes evident that there is an Eternal Almighty One, Who is the possessor of all perfections, because unless He possessed all perfections He would be like His creation.*<sup>152</sup>

When this argument is applied to 'being' or 'existence,' it is known as the 'ontological argument,' first propounded by Ibn Sina, but also by St. Anselm, Descartes, Leibniz and in our time, Charles Hartshorne and Alvin Plantinga. This argument, still hotly debated today, exists in various forms, one of which is:

1. God possesses all perfections.
2. Existence is a perfection.
3. Therefore God possesses existence, i.e. God exists.

In the terms of `Abdu'l-Bahá's argument above, all beings are contingent, i.e. their degree of being is not absolute and necessary. However, the existence of these lesser degrees means there must be a perfect standard of existence, something that exists absolutely and necessarily. This being is God.

The root assumption of `Abdu'l-Bahá's argument from perfection grows out of the Platonic position that the material world is a less perfect, i.e. contingent and subject to all kinds of vicissitudes. Even among members of a kind or species, some members exemplify the perfections of that species or kind better than others, as, for example, a healthy as opposed to a crippled dog, a well-functioning car versus a 'beater.' The deficient examples lack the perfection of the Kingdom. The existence of these lesser degrees of perfection requires the existence of an ultimate degree of perfection – and this is identified with God. In a Platonic world-view, this line of reasoning is completely logical, but it does not work in a non-hierarchical world-view in which all things are understood as having an equal share of perfection. So-called 'imperfect' people are just 'perfect' in their own way, as are 'imperfect' plants, cars and systems of governance. However, SAQ does not accept this non-hierarchical view: "As the degrees of existence are different and various, some beings are higher in the scale than others."<sup>153</sup>

## 25. The Argument from Design

`Abdu'l-Bahá also alludes to a variation of the watch-maker argument when He says, "the smallest created thing proves that there is a creator. For instance, this piece of bread proves that it has a maker."<sup>154</sup> A piece of bread does not bake itself – and, therefore, implies the presence of a baker, just as Paley's watch implies the existence of a watchmaker. `Abdu'l-Bahá applies this idea to 'the natural laws that operate in nature:

*It is certain that the whole contingent world is subjected to a law and rule which it can never disobey; even man is forced to submit to death, to sleep and to other conditions – that is to say, man in certain*

*particulars is governed, and necessarily this state of being governed implies the existence of a governor.*<sup>155</sup>

In short, there can be no law without a law-maker, i.e. someone or something who imposes limits on beings and their actions. To appreciate the force of this argument we need to do a thought-experiment: we must try to imagine a world where there are no limits on any being or its actions. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine any beings at all since every being is limited, and cannot do simply anything. For there to be beings and inter-action among beings there must be something which limits them – and this source of order is God.

## 26. The Argument from Change

Finally, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the argument from motion or change: “the least change produced in the form of the smallest thing proves the existence of a creator.”<sup>156</sup> According to this argument, every change requires an external cause and this line of causes cannot be infinite; if it were, no action or change would take place because nowhere do we find the necessary prerequisites for change, i.e. external causation. Each cause would still be waiting for its predecessor to come into action and this would go on *ad infinitum*. Therefore, a final first cause of all change must exist and this first cause is God. Because 'Abdu'l-Bahá rejects the view that even the slightest motion can be self-caused, He also rejects the suggestion that the universe could have brought itself into being:

*can this great universe, which is endless, be self-created and come into existence from the action of matter and the elements? How self-evidently wrong is such a supposition!*<sup>157</sup>

The question, of course, is rhetorical. What is noteworthy here is the categorical way in which He rejects any contradictory views by calling them “self-evidently wrong.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá ends the discussion of the proofs for God's existence by saying that “These obvious arguments are adduced for weak souls; but if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible.”<sup>158</sup> This, of course, has important implications for epistemology insofar as it recognises “inner perception” as a more powerful source of knowledge of God's existence than discursive arguments.

Insight can teach us more than discursive reasoning in some cases.

## 27. The Perfection of Creation

The argument from perfection inevitably raises the question about the perfection of creation. If the imperfection of creation is proof of God's existence, is creation flawed? Assuredly not, according to SAQ:

*For all existing beings, terrestrial and celestial, as well as this limitless space and all that is in it, have been created and organised, composed, arranged and perfected as they ought to be; the universe has no imperfection.*<sup>159</sup>

Elsewhere He emphasizes this point by saying, "All beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees."<sup>160</sup> In other words, all were created with their full or "complete" endowment of potentials that will be actualised over time. Although no being perfect in relationship to God – which is the basis of the argument from perfection – each thing is created perfect *in itself, in its own degree, in its essence*, but it does not necessarily give perfect expression or actualization to its perfect endowment of potentials. The vicissitudes of existence, and, in the case of humankind, misuse of free will may hinder the optimum actualisation of the originally perfect essence. Thus, both from an ontological and existential view, there is no contradiction between saying that the universe as originally created by God is perfect but that there are more or less imperfect actualisations of our perfect essential endowments.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also makes the following remark:

*the universe has no imperfection, so that if all beings became pure intelligence and reflected forever and ever, it is impossible that they could imagine anything better than that which exists.*<sup>161</sup>

This is a noteworthy statement because it seems to be another variation of what has become known as Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds" argument, according to which God optimizes and actualises all genuine possibilities in His creation, thereby creating a universe that contains the optimal diversity of beings. (This recalls the principle of plenitude discussed above.) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's formulation of this argument is especially

interesting because it answers the usual criticism of Leibniz' view, namely, the existence of evil and suffering negates the alleged inherent perfection of the world. Basically, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's answer is a challenge: let those who think they can, design a better world with the same diversity of beings and including human free will. He answers the challenge by saying that no one could do so. In other words, the fact that evil and ill exists is not in itself an argument against the essential perfection of the world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá illustrates this by saying,

*a scorpion is evil in relation to man; a serpent is evil in relation to man; but in relation to themselves they are not evil, for their poison is their weapon, and by their sting they defend themselves. But as the elements of their poison do not agree with our elements – that is to say, as there is antagonism between these different elements, therefore, this antagonism is evil; but in reality as regards themselves they are good.*<sup>162</sup>

## 28. A Process Ontology

One of the most common criticisms made of the Athenian tradition is that it is a philosophy of stasis that is based on a static vision of the universe. There is some debate about whether or not this is actually the case, but that need not detain us here. Rather, it is important to note that SAQ makes it patently obvious that its ontology is an active, evolutionary process ontology.

*Know that nothing which exists remains in a state of repose – that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence. So this flower, this hyacinth, during a certain period of time was coming from the world of nonexistence into being, and now it is going from being into nonexistence. This state of motion is said to be essential – that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement, as it is the essential requirement of fire to burn.*<sup>163</sup>

Motion or change, and existence are correlatives: change “cannot be separated from beings because it is their “essential requirement.” In other words, change is an essential attribute that is necessary for a thing to exist, a statement that in

passing re-affirms the essence and attribute analysis of reality in SAQ, and implies the difference between essential and accidental attributes. This statement also re-affirms the teleological nature of our existence insofar as we are always moving towards a goal of some kind, whether it be coming into existence or going out.

Change is universal – “nothing which exists remains in a state of repose” – and because it is a correlative of existence, there is no possibility of avoiding it for individuals or collectives. Here then, we discover the ontological foundation of the teaching of progressive revelation which is predicated on our subjection to endless change. That is why the revelation of the “eternal verities”<sup>164</sup> must be adapted to the ever-changing condition of humankind and material civilization. Change is also why the “contingent world is the source of imperfections.”<sup>165</sup> The reason is clear: change is only possible if things have unactualised potentials or capacities to shed and/or add unrealised attributes which means that by definition they are incomplete and not fully themselves. That by definition makes them imperfect.

The fact that change is ineradicably part of existence is also seen in the statement that “[i]n this material world time has cycles”<sup>166</sup> This applies to spiritual issues as well; as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “for souls there are progress, retrogression and education.”<sup>167</sup> This, of course, also includes the development of the human soul after death which once again draws attention to the process-nature of all existence. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “Both before and after putting off this material form, there is progress in perfection but not in state,”<sup>168</sup> as well as “as the spirit continues to exist after death, it necessarily progresses or declines.”<sup>169</sup> Thus He affirms that change is inevitable both in the material and the spiritual worlds.

Despite the ubiquity of change, we must not make the mistake of assuming that all kinds of change are applicable to all kinds of beings. “Intellectual realities”<sup>170</sup> and spiritual realities do not engage in physical motion:

*entrance and exit, descent and ascent, are characteristics of bodies and not of spirits – that is to say, sensible realities enter and come forth, but intellectual subtleties and mental realities, such as intelligence, love, knowledge, imagination and thought, do not enter, nor come forth, nor descend, but rather*

*they have direct connection ... the intellectual realities do not enter and descend, and it is absolutely impossible that the Holy Spirit should ascend and descend, enter, come out or penetrate, it can only be that the Holy Spirit appears in splendor, as the sun appears in the mirror.*<sup>171</sup>

Spirit and “intellectual realities” do not move through time and space as material things do, but ‘move’ in their own way by a “direct connection”<sup>172</sup> that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá compares to the reflection of the sun in a mirror. This has tremendous implications for His teaching about what happens at death because it means that the spirit or soul does not enter the body, or inhabit the body as is so often imagined, and therefore has no place ‘to go’ at the onset of death. It simply does not exist in the spatio-temporal realm and is not subject to spatio-temporal change.

*The spirit never entered this body, so in quitting it, it will not be in need of an abiding-place: no, the spirit is connected with the body, as this light is with this mirror. When the mirror is clear and perfect, the light of the lamp will be apparent in it, and when the mirror becomes covered with dust or breaks, the light will disappear.*<sup>173</sup>

The question remains, of course, about the exact meaning of the metaphor of the light in the mirror. Here is one possibility: the sun does not enter i.e. descend into the mirror ontologically but maintains a formal but not substantial presence in it by means of its power or light. Thus, we observe the form of the sun but not its substance in the mirror and we experience its power/light but neither the sun nor its power/light depend on the body/mirror for their actual existence. When the mirror breaks or is darkened there is nowhere for this power/light to manifest itself and therefore it ‘disappears’ not in itself but in relation to us. To continue the analogy, our soul after death is that ‘segment’ and amount of light we have reflected in our life-times which will differ just as each mirror reflects the sun in a slightly different manner.

## Part II: Onto-Theology

For our purposes, onto-theology is the study of ontological principles in relation to theological issues, or, if we wish, it



refers to the theology of being. In other words, it examines theological issues from an ontological perspective to explore the nature of reality.

## 29. The Ontological Attributes of God

Scattered throughout SAQ is a catalogue of God's attributes and these may be divided into two broad categories: God's ontological attributes and His ethical attributes, i.e. attributes related to the nature of God's being as we are informed of this subject by the Manifestation and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the attributes related to God's ethical relationship to His creation, as for example, the Merciful, the Educator and the Compassionate for example. In this portion of the paper, we shall focus on the ontological attributes because they form the foundation on which the ethical attributes are built. For example, if God were subject to time and had to wait for the future to unfold before He knew what it was, He could not be the all-knowing, omniscient educator Who could meet humankind's evolutionary needs.

According to SAQ, God possess certain attributes that make Him absolutely unique and distinguish Him from the rest of His creation. One of these is singleness which has several possible meanings. First, it means God is an absolute unity:

*That Lordly Reality admits of no division; for division and multiplicity are properties of creatures which are contingent existences, and not accidents which happen to the self-existent.*<sup>174</sup>

This complex and far-reaching statement makes two points. First, unlike all created beings, God is not a composite of actuality and potential, essence and attribute, essence and existence and substance and form. He is not a composite of actuality and potential because if God had any potentials, i.e. unactualised capacities, He would obviously be incomplete i.e. imperfect and subject to additional change. This would make God like all other contingent beings, it would be a demotion: "[t]he descent of that Lordly Reality into conditions and degrees would be equivalent to imperfection and contrary to perfection, and is, therefore, absolutely impossible."<sup>175</sup> God is not a composite of essence and attribute because "the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension."<sup>176</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá

provides a very precise ontological reason why God's essence and attributes must be one:

*If the attributes are not identical with the Essence, there must also be a multiplicity of preexistences, and differences between the attributes and the Essence must also exist; and as Preexistence is necessary, therefore, the sequence of preexistences would become infinite. This is an evident error.*<sup>177</sup>

In other words, if the essence and attributes are not one, then both must be "pre-existence[s]" like God because they co-exist with Him. However, this denies the singleness of God and makes Him one of a multiplicity of co-existing things. Moreover, if the attributes are preexistences, then there must be an infinite number of them since the ontological 'distance,' the degrees, between the essence of God and His attributes is infinite if God is not one with His attributes. This leads to an infinite sequence and the possibility of such a sequence is denied by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "This is an evident error." (His rejection of an infinite real sequence is another link to the philosophy of Aristotle.)

Because God has no potentials to actualise, i.e. is completely actualized, God undergoes no change. There is nothing further for God to change to; hence God is immutable:

*The Sun of Reality, as we have said, has always been in one condition; it has no change, no alteration, no transformation and no vicissitude. It is eternal and everlasting.*<sup>178</sup>

Change is imperfection because it means that a being is not yet 'all it can be.' Such a statement could only apply to contingent beings because contingent beings depend on new circumstances and conditions to initiate change. For them to change means they also exist in time as they await new circumstances and conditions. This is impossible in the case of God because He does not exist in time: "Time has sway over creatures but not over God."<sup>179</sup> Elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that "beginning and end in relation to God are one,"<sup>180</sup> which is to say that for God, the future does not exist as something distinct from the present and the past as they do for all created and contingent beings: they are the one.

God is also not a composite of substance and form because form must be imposed on a substance or material from

outside; no material can give itself form, as in the case of the chair in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example of four-fold causality. Furthermore, God cannot be a composite of essence and existence because He is the only necessary being, i.e. the only non-contingent being whose nature it is to exist. His essence and existence are one. He exists necessarily, He is not contingent or dependent<sup>181</sup> on anything else. That is why He can bestow existence on others but none can bestow existence on Him. In these four ways, God is different from all other beings, i.e. is ontologically unique and cannot, logically speaking, have any partner: "if we say that there is one Sun, and it is pure singleness, and has no partner and equal, we again speak truly."<sup>182</sup> This, it may be noted in passing, is the ontological reason why there can be no Satan, i.e. no actually existing being capable of challenging God's absolute position as Creator and ruler of creation. Such a being, would, in effect, be a 'partner' or co-ruler.

Of course, we must also keep in mind that "the Divine Reality is sanctified from singleness"<sup>183</sup> and not just from plurality. This statement reminds us that God is even beyond 'one-ness,' i.e. is beyond all conceivable categories of being ('number' is one of those categories) — a position which sets the ontological foundation for the necessity of knowing the Divine only through the Manifestation. If God were conceivable by the human mind, either by reason or by means of experience through 'mystic states,' there would be no absolute necessity for us to turn to the Manifestation to know about God.

It is important to remember that God does have names and attributes revealed to us by the Manifestation, and, with the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá we may reason about these as long as we recall our thoughts are only partial and reflect an innate human bias. ('Partial' of course does not mean 'incorrect.')

For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that "the names and attributes of the Divinity themselves *require* the existence of beings."<sup>184</sup> He proceeds to point out that there can be no creator without a creation or a monarch without subjects. His statement is challenging not because it implicitly names God as the Creator but because it says that God's names "*require*" a creation. Does this not effectively deny God's freedom to create because He is being required to do so by something? Moreover, does not this lack of freedom constitute an imperfection in God, a denial of the principle that "He doeth whatsoever He willeth"<sup>185</sup>? There is at least one solution to this apparent contradiction. As we saw earlier, God and His attributes are one, i.e. identical. Thus

God and the name of 'Creator' are one, and therefore, the necessity to create and the will to create are one and the same. Such distinctions do not exist in God for if they did, He would no longer be a unity. Only to us, whose attributes and essences are not always identical with our essence, is it possible for an attribute to compel us to do something. Moreover, there is no external entity imposing itself on God. What contingent and dependent being could have the capacity to do so?

God's absolute unity or "singleness" is only one of the ways in which He is unique. Neither spirits nor God engage in physical motion in any way and, therefore, really have no physical or material mode of existence.

*This state is neither abiding nor entering, neither commingling nor descending; for entering, abiding, descending, issuing forth and commingling are the necessities and characteristics of bodies, not of spirits; then how much less do they belong to the sanctified and pure Reality of God.*<sup>186</sup>

This has important implications for science because it means that any efforts to find the soul in the body is misguided insofar as souls, like God, are not subject to the conditions of place and time (nor of quantity) which are measurements crucial to scientific endeavour. Their existence can neither be proven nor disproven by these means, which means, in effect, we have encountered one of the limitations of science.

Of course, SAQ, draws attention to other attributes of God, such as the fact that He is omnipotent:

*it becomes evident that this Nature, which has neither perception nor intelligence, is in the grasp of Almighty God, Who is the Ruler of the world of Nature; whatever He wishes, He causes Nature to manifest.*<sup>187</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá also maintains that God is omniscient or all-knowing: "He is the Omniscient, the Knower."<sup>188</sup>

### 30. Emanationism

One of the signature doctrines of Bahá'í onto-theology is the doctrine of emanation, which, historically gets its first thorough explication in the *Enneads* of Plotinus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD. The *Enneads* were a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle and has great influence both in the Christian and

Muslim traditions of philosophy. Plotinus' main metaphor for the emanative process was the sun and its light. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also uses this metaphor.

*the light of the sun emanates from the sun; it does not manifest it. The appearance through emanation is like the appearance of the rays from the luminary of the horizons of the world – that is to say, the holy essence of the Sun of Truth is not divided and does not descend to the condition of the creatures. In the same way, the globe of the sun does not become divided and does not descend to the earth. No, the rays of the sun, which are its bounty, emanate from it and illumine the dark bodies.*<sup>189</sup>

Several observations are in order. First, the sun, i.e. God, retains His unity or “singleness” and does not divide or distribute itself in its light or among His creations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls such division and distribution “proceeding through manifestation”<sup>190</sup> in which the “reality of a thing [appears] in other forms.”<sup>191</sup> His example of such manifestation is the emergence of a tree or flower from a seed. Under no circumstances does manifestation apply to God Who never becomes part of creation and Who “has no change, no alteration, no transformation, and no vicissitude”<sup>192</sup> – a position that effectively precludes even the slightest suggestions of pantheism and monism since the teaching of emanation supports ontological pluralism. It also effectively precludes incarnationism, i.e. the Christian doctrine that in the person of Christ, God Himself became part of creation. The rejection of this doctrine defines a major difference between virtually all branches of Christianity and the Bahá'í understanding of the nature of the Manifestations.

To clarify the nature of emanationism, 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds the following statement:

*The spirits of men, with reference to God, have dependence through emanation, just as the discourse proceeds from the speaker and the writing from the writer – that is to say, the speaker himself does not become the discourse, nor does the writer himself become the writing.*<sup>193</sup>

The distinction between speaker and speech, and writer and words clearly demonstrates the ontological difference between God and creation: the difference between them is not one of

degree but rather, a difference of kind – hence the ontological pluralism of SAQ. One is not a 'lesser version' of the other. Reality is not the appearance of God "in other forms."<sup>194</sup>

Emanationism requires that reality be strictly divided into successive planes or levels of the emanative process with God as the only absolutely independent non-contingent being as the source or fountainhead of all other beings. This, of course, is exactly what we observe in SAQ as we have already shown with the hierarchy of mineral, vegetable, animal and human, and as shall be demonstrated below in the hierarchy of the world of God, the Kingdom and the material world. Moreover, in emanationism each successive level of being has less and less power or capacity and in that sense is proportionally less than its predecessor which has its powers in addition to new ones. For that reason, matter is described as "imperfection," "darkness" and "night,"<sup>195</sup> and humankind is described as "the end of imperfection ["materiality"]and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light."<sup>196</sup>

Emanationism stands in sharp contrast to creationism, i.e. the doctrine that God created only once and that was out of nothing. This is the commonly accepted doctrine in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Emanationism holds that creation is eternal and on-going although there may be phases in this process in which particular universes come into or go out of existence. Emanationism is distinct from monism insofar as emanationism does not see all of reality as one without any ontologically fundamental differences between the Creator and the created. The existence of the strict hierarchy we have observed in SAQ negates any such undifferentiated unity. Similarly, emanationism, though sometimes confused with pantheism, is really quite different insofar as emanationism does not identify God with creation or nature since such an identification would involve God in change and have Him descend into ordinary, material beings.

The emanationist ontology of SAQ (and the Writings in general) creates bridges between Bahá'í teachings and teachings found in other spiritual traditions such as Sufism, Kabbalah, Advaita Vedanta and the Vijñānavāda school of Buddhism. Moreover, it establishes connections with such philosophers as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd in the Muslim tradition, with Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, John Scotus Erigena and

Nicholas of Cusa in the Christian tradition and with Maimonides in the Jewish tradition.

### 31. The Manifestations

Because God and creation are so ontologically different, an intermediary level of reality is needed to connect them without impugning God's ontological absolute inviolability and without raising the possibility of created beings ascending to the level of the Creator as some mystics claim to do. The need for an intermediary is the ontological basis for the three part structure of reality as variously expressed in SAQ: "Know that the conditions of existence are limited to the conditions of servitude, of prophethood and of Deity..."<sup>197</sup> The three conditions mentioned here correspond to the levels of the creation, the Manifestation and the Creator. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also expresses this three-part structure of existence by stating, "The Prophets, on the contrary, believe that there is the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of Creation: three things."<sup>198</sup> Again we observe the three part structure with an intermediary between God and His creation. The Kingdom, as we have already seen, is the ideal world of which this world is an image or shadow. The three-part structure is also implicit in the following statement:

*Therefore, all creatures emanate from God – that is to say, it is by God that all things are realized, and by Him that all beings have attained to existence. The first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the "First Mind," and which the people of Bahá call the "First Will."<sup>199</sup>*

In this case, there is God, the first emanation called the "First Mind" or "First Will" and then the subsequent levels of emanation. The "First Mind" or "First Will" stands between them. The tripartite division is referred to implicitly when 'Abdu'l-Bahá, speaking of the impossibility of man devising adequate concepts of God, says,

*But for this Essence of the essences, this Truth of truths, this Mystery of mysteries, there are reflections, auroras, appearances and resplendencies in the world of existence. The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the*

*Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God.*<sup>200</sup>

Again we observe the tripartite structure of God, the “reflections, auras, appearances” and the “world of existence.” We also observe how this ‘middle point’ or “dawning place,” of “Universal Realit[y]” mediates or transmits the light of God into the rest of creation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the Manifestation as the “mediator of the Divine Bounty”<sup>201</sup> to the created world:

*The splendors of the perfections, bounties and attributes of God shine forth and radiate from the reality of the Perfect Man – that is to say, the Unique One, the supreme Manifestation of God. Other beings receive only one ray, but the supreme Manifestation is the mirror for this Sun, which appears and becomes manifest in it, with all its perfections, attributes, signs and wonders.*<sup>202</sup>

In the perfect Mirror, “the Sun of Reality becomes visible and manifest with all its qualities and perfections.”<sup>203</sup> This ontological function comes into sharper focus when we consider the third of the three stations of the Manifestations. “The third station is that of the divine appearance and heavenly splendour: it is the Word of God, the Eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit.”<sup>204</sup> This connection between the Manifestation in His third station with the Holy Spirit is significant because the Holy Spirit is also described as “the mediator between God and His creatures,”<sup>205</sup> which re-emphasises the Manifestation’s role as intermediary between the highest and lowest ontological levels.

### 32. The Manifestation as World-Soul

However, in His third station, the role of the Manifestation goes even further: it is

*the divine appearance, which is the divine perfections, the cause of the life of existence, of the education of souls, of the guidance of people, and of the enlightenment of the contingent world.*<sup>206</sup>

The teaching that the Manifestation is “the cause of the life of existence” means that He functions like the traditional concept of the ‘world-soul,’ the immediate source of existence and life throughout the created universe. (This is another link between



SAQ and the Athenian, particularly neo-Platonic tradition.) Thus the Manifestation has a ‘cosmic’ function in the evolution of the universe itself; His ‘work’ is not simply limited to the human sphere. This third station “has neither beginning nor end. When beginning is spoken of, it signifies the state of manifesting.”<sup>207</sup> In other words, this third station has always existed as a part of the three-fold structure of existence.

This ‘world-soul’ function is emphasised vis-à-vis humanity by the statement that

*One Holy Soul gives life to the world of humanity, changes the aspect of the terrestrial globe, causes intelligence to progress, vivifies souls, lays the basis of a new life, establishes new foundations, organizes the world, brings nations and religions under the shadow of one standard, delivers man from the world of imperfections and vices, and inspires him with the desire and need of natural and acquired perfections.*<sup>208</sup>

Without the Manifestation in His three conditions – the physical, the human or rational soul and the “divine appearance”<sup>209</sup> i.e. the “the Word of God, the eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit”<sup>210</sup> – humankind could not exist. He is literally the source of life to humanity (and by implication all the beings humanity physically depends on) as well as the mover of political, socio-economic and cultural progress. In other words, the Manifestation beyond His specifically human aspect, also has a cosmic and world-historical function. Thus, according to SAQ, the Manifestation is more than a teacher of moral and theological truths which is how Manifestations tend to be viewed in other religions. Rather, The Manifestation’s role is wider and more far-reaching than that of the conventional theological understandings.

In the ontological schema we have examined, it is apparent that God is ontological prior to all the other levels, i.e. the existence of God is the condition that allows the other two levels to exist. The same is true of the Manifestation Whose existence is the necessary condition that allows creation to exist. That is why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “the Reality of Christ, Who is the Word of God, with regard to essence, attributes and glory, certainly precedes the creatures.”<sup>211</sup> Without this “Reality,” the rest of creation could not exist, a fact which indicates the ontological function of the Manifestation.

### 33. Three Comments

At this point two general comments are in order. First, SAQ suggest correspondences from the onto-theological perspective. The Manifestations of God occupy the station of prophethood, which corresponds to the Kingdom and to the “First Mind” or “First Will”: all of them occupy a middle position between God and creation. This leads to the possibility that there may be a deeper order or structure at work in SAQ (and the other Writings) than what is explicitly apparent. This suggestion, however, will require more research. From this possibility, a question arises: ‘Why then, the different terms for the ‘middle level?’ At this point a definitive answer is difficult to establish but one possibility is that the different terms arise due to different perspectives or contexts and purposes. For example, the term ‘Manifestation’ is used when the focus of discussion is the human and historical presence of this first creation, i.e. when the focus of discussion is onto-theological. The other terms are used when the focus is more ontological and theoretical.

The second comment is that the conditions or levels of reality are absolutely fixed insofar as “for every being there is a point which it cannot overpass.”<sup>212</sup> In other words, no being can escape the condition of “servitude” in which it exists. For example, “a mineral, however far it may progress in the mineral kingdom, cannot gain the vegetable power,”<sup>213</sup> and a human being “however far he may progress in gaining limitless perfections, will never reach the condition of Deity.”<sup>214</sup> Obviously SAQ’s ontology inherently subscribes to a law of limits vis-à-vis progress which effectively rejects any mystic claims of being ontologically one with God, and any notion that the creation and God can in any way be one. Moreover, we might describe this ontological structure as ‘hard’ insofar as there is no crossing over from one level or condition to another. This provides additional support to the idea that the universe has an underlying order and structure which in turn supports the idea of a Creator. Finally, the ‘hard’ distinctions between levels of reality provides ontological foundations for the teaching that human beings cannot attain direct knowledge of God.

In the foregoing discussion we have observed in passing that the Manifestations exist on “three planes”<sup>215</sup> or “conditions”<sup>216</sup> or “stations”<sup>217</sup>; the physical condition as with all material beings; the “individual reality”<sup>218</sup> of the rational human soul

and the condition of the “divine appearance and heavenly splendour.”<sup>219</sup> A similar idea is found in the following: “but Their *heavenly condition* embraces all things, knows all mysteries, discovers all signs, and rules over all things.”<sup>220</sup> However, even in rational condition of the human soul, the Manifestation is not merely a man ‘like the others:’

*But the individual reality of the Manifestations of God is a holy reality, and for that reason it is sanctified and, in that which concerns its nature and quality, is distinguished from all other things.*<sup>221</sup>

In other words, the Manifestation possesses an individual rational soul, as do all human beings, but it is different from ours in regards to its nature and quality. This establishes a difference in kind between the Manifestation and the rest of creation; He is not merely ‘one of us,’ at least not in His second and third stations. One of the key differences concerns Their knowledge of the world:

*Since the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God, surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore, Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired – that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is a divine revelation.*<sup>222</sup>

Here we see how ontology impacts epistemology insofar as a higher ontological station enables greater access to knowledge of beings on a lower station. In this case, just as the human soul surrounds the body and has intuitive knowledge of its parts and their condition, the Manifestation ontologically surrounds all created entities insofar as His powers and capacities exceed theirs. (See the earlier section on nested hierarchies.) Unlike us, His immediate knowledge is not limited to His own body but extends to all creation. Therefore, He can comprehend all things and know them intuitively just as we are aware of our own bodies.

#### 34. The Manifestations’ Superior Knowledge

Precisely because He has such superior knowledge of all beings, He is capable of guiding humankind.

*The Manifestation – that is, the Holy Lawgiver – unless He is aware of the realities of beings, will not*

*comprehend the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things, and He will certainly not be able to establish a religion conformable to the facts and suited to the conditions.*<sup>223</sup>

Without His special insight into the conditions of “the realities of things,” the Manifestation would not be able to be the meet the needs of human spiritual and socio-economic evolution. The ontological basis for this special insight is found in the Manifestation’s role as a ‘world-soul Who is “the cause of the life of existence.”<sup>224</sup> This position allows Him privileged insight into the nature of all beings. In this connection, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

*the universal divine mind, which is beyond nature, is the bounty of the Preexistent Power. This universal mind is divine; it embraces existing realities, and it receives the light of the mysteries of God. It is a conscious power, not a power investigation and of research ... This divine intellectual power is the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and the Dawning-places of prophethood.*<sup>225</sup>

In other words, the special and privileged insight into the conditions of creation are a result of possessing the “universal divine mind” which is supra-natural, i.e. “beyond nature.” This means that the “universal divine mind” and its powers are beyond natural explanation, i.e. cannot be explained in purely natural or scientific terms. The fact that it is a “conscious power” and not an investigative power means that the universal mind does not engage in step-by-step discursive reasoning but rather works by immediate insight.

### Part III: Epistemology

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerning itself with questions about what we know, what is possible for us to know, how we can know, and the reliability of our knowledge and methods of acquiring it. Although SAQ has a considerable amount to say on this subject, it does not contain an epistemological theory worked out in minute detail. Instead, SAQ sets out general guidelines which all proposed Bahá’í-based epistemological theories must satisfy to be in harmony with the Writings. It is, therefore, possible that there may be a

variety of Bahá'í-based epistemologies which are consistent with the Writings, though not necessarily with each other.

As already discussed above, epistemology is intimately related with ontology because ontological station or condition determines what and how we can acquire knowledge. One of the principles which underlies SAQ's epistemology is that "everything which is lower is powerless to comprehend the reality of that which is higher."<sup>226</sup> This is why humankind cannot comprehend the "Reality of the Divinity"<sup>227</sup> and why the plant or animal cannot comprehend the human essence; 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "the difference of conditions in the world of beings is an obstacle to comprehension"<sup>228</sup> and adds, "[d]ifference of condition is an obstacle to knowledge; the inferior degree cannot comprehend the superior degree."<sup>229</sup> Consequently, humankind needs the Manifestation to attain knowledge of God: "if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God."<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, this principle shapes SAQ's view of what philosophy is and can do: "Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things *as they exist*, according to the capacity and the power of man."<sup>231</sup>

Here we observe not only the realist orientation of SAQ's epistemology in knowing "the reality of things *as they exist*," but also a re-affirmation of the principle that the capacity to know is linked to one's ontological condition.

### 35. Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth

As indicated in our discussion of ontology, SAQ falls clearly into the realist camp. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that each thing has its degree of existence provides a realist foundation for Bahá'í ontology and epistemology. If "each being" has its own "principle, foundation or reality"<sup>232</sup> and reflects one of the names of God in its own way, it is, therefore, not only genuinely distinct from all other things but also independent from them, i.e. has its own principle or foundation of existence "in itself."<sup>233</sup> Having this principle or foundation "in itself" establishes a basis for the ontological independence of "each being" (except, of course, from God) including independence from human observers, which is to say, the ontological status of "each being" is does not depend on being observed by humans or on human beliefs or linguistic practices.

SAQ builds on this realist ontological foundation by asserting that

*All sciences, knowledge, arts, wonders, institutions, discoveries and enterprises come from the exercised intelligence of the rational soul. There was a time when they were unknown, preserved mysteries and hidden secrets; the rational soul gradually discovered them and brought them out from the plane of the invisible and the hidden into the realm of the visible. This is the greatest power of perception in the world of nature, which in its highest flight and soaring comprehends the realities, the properties and the effects of the contingent beings.*<sup>234</sup>

The realist approach is clearly present in the assertion that the rational soul *discovers* the unknown, and “comprehends the realities, the properties and the effects of contingent beings.” In other words, the rational soul does not construct them, which is to say that these “realities” exist independently of the human perceiver. They once existed in a hidden form and are now revealed. Elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

*The mind and the thought of man sometimes discover truths, and from this thought and discovery signs and results are produced. This thought has a foundation. But many things come to the mind of man which are like the waves of the sea of imaginations; they have no fruit, and no result comes from them.*<sup>235</sup>

Here 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes into more detail. Discoveries lead to “thought [that] has a foundation,” i.e. a foundation in reality. This, in effect, asserts a correspondence theory of truth in which correct thought has a “foundation” or basis in reality, which is to say, corresponds to reality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also differentiates such thought from imaginations which He says lead to no real results. This idea is reinforced by His statement that “Man is able to resist and to oppose Nature because he discovers the constitution of things, and through this he commands the forces of Nature.”<sup>236</sup> The result of human discoveries that have a “foundation” in or correspond to reality is the ability to control nature. This, too, implies that discovers the pre-existing “constitution of things” and does not invent or construct them, i.e. they are independent of human perception. Here is another example:

*the rational soul as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings.*<sup>237</sup>

The rational soul becomes “cognizant” of “*their* peculiarities and effects,” i.e. perceives them in their nature and ways of being, not in our constructions. We observe the “properties of beings,” not the humanly constructed properties that we ascribe to them.

Of course, humankind is not God or a Manifestation. Its ability to acquire knowledge has limits; we know “as far as human ability permits.” We are not omniscient. However, we must not draw false conclusions from this. The fact that our knowledge is limited by our human ontological station and to our human capacities does not mean it is mistaken or a human construct. A child’s knowledge of arithmetic is limited, but it is not, thereby, in error, nor is it a construction dependent on the human perceiver. Our knowledge that the Giants won the Super Bowl 2008 is a limited knowledge of the actual game, but nonetheless it is correct and not dependent on an observer. Indeed, through the course of this study, we could not locate a single direct or indirect epistemological reference in SAQ which deviated from the realist position and the consequent correspondence theory of knowledge.

SAQ reinforces the correspondence theory of knowledge in a variety of statements. As already noted, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things *as they exist*, according to the capacity and the power of man.”<sup>238</sup> To comprehend “the reality of things *as they exist*” is nothing other than to have one’s knowledge correspond to reality. Naturally, this comprehension is limited by our station and capacities but this does not mean that what we do in fact comprehend does not correspond to reality. Imagine a very dirty window with only one clear patch: what we see through the clear patch is limited but that does not mean what we see is not really there. Furthermore, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that we can gain real knowledge by the power of inference: “From known realities – that is to say, from the things which are known and visible – he discovers unknown things.”<sup>239</sup> His example is Columbus who “through the power of his reason he discovers another hemisphere,”<sup>240</sup> whose inferred knowledge corresponded to reality. Another example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s to a correspondence theory of knowledge is the following:

*Reflect that man's power of thought consists of two kinds. One kind is true, when it agrees with a determined truth. Such conceptions find realization in the exterior world; such are accurate opinions, correct theories, scientific discoveries and inventions.*<sup>241</sup>

Here He speaks specifically of a knowledge that “agrees with a determined truth,” i.e. knowledge that corresponds to reality. He also provides a test for this knowledge: it leads to “accurate opinions” and “correct theories” which conform to reality as well as to discoveries and inventions. In other words, such knowledge has real results testable with the reality in question.

### 36. Rejection of Nominalism and Conceptualism

The inherent realism of SAQ places it squarely in opposition to nominalism and its variant, conceptualism. Nominalism holds that general or abstract terms i.e. ‘universals’ only exist as names (hence ‘nominalism’) and do not correspond to any reality. It is the

*view that things denominated by the same term share nothing in common except that fact: what all chairs have in common is that they are called ‘chair.’*<sup>242</sup>

According to nominalism, only individuals are real; kinds, species and classes are not – something which, as we have seen, SAQ emphatically denies in its assertion of the plant, animal and human levels of spirit, each with its own particular set of class, kind or ‘species’ attributes. The same is clear from SAQ’s references to “degrees, stations, species and classes.”<sup>243</sup> Furthermore, for nominalism, even the common qualities of things such as colours, structure, function and materials are human constructions and do not actually correspond to any real qualities in the things perceived. This, too, conflicts with SAQ which considers the attributes of plants, animals and humans to be objectively real. Humankind, for example, has the powers of growth attributable to plants, the powers of sense and motion of animals as well as the “rational soul” which distinguishes our species. These are objectively real qualities inhering in things.

Moreover, as the following statement shows, humankind “discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the *qualities and properties of beings.*”<sup>244</sup> It is noteworthy that we discover the



realities, “peculiarities and effects,” and “the qualities and properties of beings” — we do not invent or construct them. Furthermore, the qualities which clearly belong to the things in which they inhere are a source of knowledge about things: “our knowledge of things, even of created and limited things, is knowledge of their qualities.”<sup>245</sup> Indeed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá identifies knowledge of qualities or attributes as one of two kinds of knowledge:

*Know that there are two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of the essence of a thing and the knowledge of its qualities. The essence of a thing is known through its qualities; otherwise, it is unknown and hidden.*<sup>246</sup>

Obviously, in His view, qualities provide knowledge about things. Hence SAQ does not agree with the nominalist view that qualities do not correspond to anything real in objects.

It is important to emphasise this in order to locate the philosophy of SAQ on the spectrum of available philosophies and especially those of our time when nominalism in its various forms is popular, especially in its postmodern guise.<sup>247</sup> Locating the Bahá’í philosophy on the spectrum of available philosophies helps us determine its nature, not to mention its closest relatives and its opponents. As explained at the beginning of this paper, this has tremendous implications for teaching and explicating the Faith as well as for inter-faith dialogue, especially with religions that have strongly developed philosophical traditions.

### 37. Sources of Knowledge

According to SAQ, there are four generally accepted sources of knowledge. The first of these is knowledge based on the evidence based on sensory observation or, as it is called today, empirical knowledge. This kind of knowledge has its stronghold in science. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rejects this kind of knowledge as final and authoritative because the senses can mislead us and consequently mislead our thinking. Reason is the second method of gaining knowledge, but He rejects it as final and authoritative because it does not necessarily lead to agreement and certainty: “the method of reason is not perfect.”<sup>248</sup> The third method is tradition, and this method is “not perfect, because the traditions are understood by the reason ... [and] the reason itself is liable to err.”<sup>249</sup> However, there is a fourth

method of acquiring knowledge which is able to provide certainty.

*But the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained.*<sup>250</sup>

Let us examine this carefully, for in the contemporary philosophical climate, much depends on it. The “bounty of the Holy Spirit” provides the conditions in which we can attain “certainty,” “infallible” and “indubitable,” knowledge. Hence it is possible, at least in principle, for humankind to attain certain knowledge. The location of this passage as the conclusion of a talk on epistemology is also of interest because it demonstrates that in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s view, the spiritual condition of humankind has consequences on what and how much we are capable of knowing even in other areas. Our natural abilities, i.e. our abilities unassisted by the Holy Spirit, have inherent limitations that can only be overcome with divine support. Our spiritual condition and our capacity for knowledge are connected, as illustrated in the following statement:

*Now consider, in this great century which is the cycle of Bahá’u’lláh, what progress science and knowledge have made, how many secrets of existence have been discovered, how many great inventions have been brought to light and are day by day multiplying in number. Before long, material science and learning, as well as the knowledge of God, will make such progress and will show forth such wonders that the beholders will be amazed.*<sup>251</sup>

The spiritual and the scientific are not opposed to one another and can work together in harmony. There is a further association of the Holy Spirit with knowledge and understanding when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that the appearance of the Holy Spirit “dispels the darkness of ignorance.”<sup>252</sup> Here, too, spiritual condition and knowledge, i.e. epistemology, are linked.

Even the possibility of attaining certain knowledge distinguishes the epistemology of SAQ from that of contemporary postmodern philosophies which cannot admit that sure knowledge is possible even in principle. This is a

‘continental divide’ among modern philosophies with some philosophies, like those in the Athenian tradition, going one way and others, such as postmodernism, going another.

Naturally it is necessary to ask ourselves what is meant by the “bounty of the Holy Spirit.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá offers one clue when discussing the proofs for God’s existence:

*if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible. Thus, when man feels the indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the bounty of the spirit, it is necessary to establish external arguments.*<sup>253</sup>

In other words, when the mind is clear and open, we can perceive directly that which we otherwise must laboriously prove by discursive reasoning. We acquire knowledge by immediate insight because we are enlightened by the “the luminous rays which emanate from the Manifestations.”<sup>254</sup> This is analogous to but not the same as Descartes’ “clear and distinct ideas,”<sup>255</sup> the difference being that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá includes our spiritual and not merely our intellectual condition in His statement about “the bounty of the Holy Spirit.” However, in both cases, the insight attained, the comprehension attained by the “bounty of the Holy Spirit” is foundational, i.e. it cannot be doubted and is “infallible and indubitable.” On these certain foundations we can build a variety of inferences and deductions. Therefore, we may conclude that the epistemological position of SAQ is foundational insofar as “infallible and indubitable” knowledge is at least possible for those who attain the “bounty of the Holy Spirit.” SAQ is also foundational because the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are the certain foundations on which all other certain knowledge claims must be based.

### 38. A Reflection on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Statements

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements about the four methods of knowledge do not assert that the senses, reason or tradition cannot be used at all in the quest for certain knowledge but rather that by themselves they are not sufficient. They are “liable to error,”<sup>256</sup> i.e. “not perfect”<sup>257</sup> which does not mean ‘always wrong’ but rather, being possibly “exposed or subject to some usually adverse contingency or action.”<sup>258</sup> They may be wrong in various degrees of probability, but this is not to say

that they are useless in the quest for knowledge; rather, it indicates that they must be used with care and in the correct conditions. They are necessary but are not sufficient.

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá the senses, reason and traditions must be augmented and assisted by the inspiration or "bounty" of the Holy Spirit; when this occurs, we meet the necessary and sufficient condition for attaining certainty in our knowledge. This assistance provides us with a touchstone, a perspective or 'Archimedean point' from which we can judge whether our views agree with the revelation, are neutral towards it or disagree. Consequently, we must reject views that patently disagree with the revelation, assign various degrees of probability to those that are neutral and accept those which are endorsed or in harmony with the tenor of the Writings.

In considering the epistemology of SAQ, we must beware of going to two extremes common in our time. On one hand, we must not accept the senses, reason and traditions as absolute sources of truth, the way science accepts empiricism or religions often accept unexamined tradition. Such knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for certainty. On the other hand, we must not fall – as is common in postmodern philosophy – into the trap of corrosive relativism and scepticism about all knowledge claims and judge them all as equal because we 'can't really know for sure.' All truth-claims are judged to have the same degree of probability or improbability, which is a viewpoint that brings with it a host of philosophical difficulties.<sup>259</sup> As we have seen, however, throughout SAQ, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has no hesitations in describing various views – such as pantheism, maya-ism, re-incarnationism or a real infinite regress – as erroneous.

If 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not think that error and truth are real and that progress involves moving from the former to the latter, He would not be able to argue that humankind needs an educator

*so that knowledge and science may increase, and the reality of things, the mysteries of beings and the properties of existence maybe discovered; that, day by day, instructions, inventions and institutions may be improved; and from things perceptible to the senses conclusions as to intellectual things may be deduced.<sup>260</sup>*

If there were no real knowledge, i.e. no difference between truth and error, and no progress in knowledge, i.e. no

displacement of error by truth, or if all truth-claims had the some degree of probability or improbability, 'Abdu'l-Bahá could not speak meaningfully of the "progress science and knowledge have made"<sup>261</sup> since the inauguration of "the cycle of Bahá'u'lláh."<sup>262</sup> Elsewhere He says, "at the time of the appearance of each Manifestation of God extraordinary progress has occurred in the world of minds, thoughts and spirits."<sup>263</sup> Without improvements in knowledge there would only be change and not progress; indeed, the whole idea of progressive revelation is predicated on the progress i.e. advancement of human kind. It is, therefore, clear that any variant of scepticism would effectively negate two of the key principles of progressive revelation, namely, that new Manifestations appear because humankind has progressed to the point of needing not just a renewal of the "eternal verities"<sup>264</sup> but also a new, more advanced teachings than previous generations, and that the advent of the Manifestation inaugurates a new era of progress and improvement.

SAQ encourages the conclusion that the senses, reason and tradition may give us accurate knowledge, but that we must be open to the possibility of error. This, of course, does not mean we have to be sceptical as a matter of principle even when there is no reason to be. SAQ does not to foster an all-corrosive scepticism which would undermine even its own claims and teachings on the importance of discovering the truth about things. Furthermore, any wholesale rejection of reason would undermine the teaching that the distinctively human attribute is the "rational soul."<sup>265</sup> It would also contradict the praise bestowed upon science, everything said about discovering truths as well as the dictum that "in this age the peoples of the world need the arguments of reason."<sup>266</sup>

### 39. The Question of Certainty: Between Scylla and Charybdis

All this leads to an awkward and delicate question: 'Can human beings have certain knowledge?' According to SAQ, the answer is that in principle we can have "indubitable" knowledge if we are open to the "bounty of the Holy Spirit."

However, aside from this, the issue depends on what definition we assign to 'certainty.' Were we to say that a fact is certain if there is no reasonable evidence to doubt it – such as 'The Giants won Super Bowl 2008,' '1 + 1 = 2' and 'People will starve if they do not eat' – then we can indeed have certain knowledge. In other words, truth-claims can be accepted as

certainly true if they meet four conditions: (a) there is evidence supporting them; (b) there is no bona-fide evidence against them; (c) they are not self-contradictory or self-refuting and do not necessarily lead us to demonstrably false conclusions and (d) they are not in conflict with the teachings of the Manifestation. No one would seriously doubt that the Giants won Super Bowl 2008 or that people who do not eat will starve to death. The evidence for these truth-claims is overwhelming and there simply is no evidence against them whatever. The statements 'The Giants won Super Bowl 2008' or 'People who do not eat starve to death' contain no self-contradictions' neither do they undermine themselves or necessarily lead us to other palpably false conclusions. Finally, they are not in conflict with the Writings. In other words, we can have provisional certainty, i.e. certainty until bona-fide evidence to the contrary appears. The arrival of such evidence and the replacement of one truth-claim by a better, more adequate one is precisely what happens in scientific, social or spiritual progress.

The idea of provisional certainty of knowledge suggest that because of the short-comings of the senses, reason and tradition as 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out, any truth-claim is open *in principle* to correction although *in practice* there is no reason to doubt to await such correction. Who would seriously assert that people can live indefinitely without food? The world is brim full of countless such 'humble facts' – fire is hotter than rice, people cannot eat rocks, alligators are not ducks, the sun appears to rise at dawn – that may be doubted only in principle, but not in actual practice. They are provisionally or practically certain – and even SAQ makes use of them, as in the following example:

*Afterward comes the summer, when the heat increases, and growth and development attain their greatest power. The energy of life in the vegetable kingdom reaches to the degree of perfection, the fruit appears, and the time of harvest ripens; a seed has become a sheaf, and the food is stored for winter.*<sup>267</sup>

Here is an example of sense observation that may be doubtable in principle but is not doubtable in practice. However, rather than state that this truth is absolute i.e. indubitable, we should say that there are no reasons to doubt this – a formulation that reminds us that all truth-claims, like all claims based on the

senses, reason or tradition, are open to correction, at least in principle.

In our understanding, SAQ essentially steers the middle course of provisional certainty when the “bounty of the Holy Spirit” is not involved. On one extreme is the Charybdis of a rigid and dogmatic belief in our natural abilities to discover absolute truth, a position that as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out, is not warranted. On the other extreme is the Scylla of scepticism and relativism which abandon all attempts to adjudicate among truth-claims and, thereby, undermine the very concept of progress – one of the foundation stones of this revelation – as well as its epistemology of discovering truth and the importance of education:

*Human education signifies civilization and progress – that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.<sup>268</sup>*

The middle course between dogmatic certainty and an equally dogmatic scepticism and relativism is one of the key strategies for the unity of science and religion, at least on the methodological level. Science employs this policy, i.e. a properly established truth-claim is accepted as true until bona fide contrary evidence appears and then appropriate changes are made. Some truth-claims, such as the spherical form of the earth, are so well established and unchallenged by contrary evidence that for all practical purposes they are certain. They meet all of the four criteria noted above. However, others, such as higher level interpretations of complex data in cosmology or quantum physics are far from certain and still subject to debate. With some of these, we may never attain even practical certainty – and it is important not to lump these in with the ‘humble facts’ about which practical certainty is possible.

#### 40. Moderate Rationalism

As we have observed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not regard reason as a sufficient criterion of truth – and yet SAQ itself defines the human soul as the “rational soul,”<sup>269</sup> praises reason’s powers of discovery and invention,<sup>270</sup> and tells us that “in this age the peoples of the world need the arguments of reason.”<sup>271</sup> How are we to reconcile the apparent contradiction in the praise of

reason's importance on one hand and the recognition of its limits on the other?

The clearest solution is that SAQ exemplifies a position known as moderate rationalism. If we ask the question, 'How much can reason know?' there are basically three answers. Extreme rationalism, as represented Spinoza, Leibniz and modern positivists of various stripes, asserts that reason can tell us everything that is genuine knowledge. Whatever is not reasonable is not authentic knowledge; furthermore, there is nothing that reason cannot tell us. This view represents an absolute trust in the reliability of reason. Scepticism (and its cousins relativism and nihilism) take the polar opposite view: reason cannot give us any authentic knowledge since reason itself is subject to challenge or is merely a prejudiced cultural product that gives us nothing but viewpoints – but these are not really knowledge per se. This view has its strongest proponents in the ancient Sophists, Nietzsche and contemporary postmodernism.<sup>272</sup> Moderate rationalism, however, maintains that reason can tell us some things but not others, that reason is necessary but is not all-sufficient, that other ways of knowing are possible. It can, for example, accommodate belief in divine inspiration and revelation as part of a rationally based hierarchy of knowing in which rational knowledge leads us to a point where other forms of knowing are necessary. Moderate rationalism recognises that reason must be augmented by other powers – such as by the “bounties of the Holy Spirit” mentioned in SAQ.

#### 41. Knowledge of Essences

One of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's most significant statements on epistemology concerns our knowledge of the essences of things. He says,

*Know that there are two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of the essence of a thing and the knowledge of its qualities. The essence of a thing is known through its qualities; otherwise, it is unknown and hidden.*<sup>273</sup>

Aside from the fact that this statement confirms the existence of essences – thereby clearly making Bahá'í philosophy a type of essentialism – 'Abdu'l-Bahá informs us that essences can be known. However, He clearly specifies that essences can only be known by means of their qualities or attributes and cannot be known immediately through direct insight. Indeed, “our



knowledge of things, even of created and limited things, is knowledge of their qualities and not of their essence”<sup>274</sup> He announces, and repeats this theme when He says,

*For example, the inner essence of the sun is unknown, but is understood by its qualities, which are heat and light. The inner essence of man is unknown and not evident, but by its qualities it is characterized and known. Thus everything is known by its qualities and not by its essence. Although the mind encompasses all things, and the outward beings are comprehended by it, nevertheless these beings with regard to their essence are unknown; they are only known with regard to their qualities.*<sup>275</sup>

In passing, let us note again how this passage confirms the possibility of genuine knowledge about things, although it limits the means by which we may attain this knowledge. We can only know through the outer qualities or attributes, which can tell us some things about an object, but cannot tell us about its essence, its *en-soi* or ‘in-itself,’ from ‘within.’ In other words, we can only know things from the externalized signs of their interaction with us, which establishes specific limits on human knowledge. In the case of humans, we would say that our subjectivity is unknowable by others; all we can know are externalized attributes such as EEG graphs and verbal reports. Here is a limitation of human knowledge, including science: to paraphrase Schopenhauer, our scientific knowledge is phenomenal (of external attributes) and not noumenal (of essences).

It is important to avoid assuming that any and all knowledge of essences is forbidden by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. If this is what He meant, we would be trapped in a terrible conundrum because if qualities are not associated with an essence and cannot give us knowledge about the essence, what are they giving us knowledge about? Unattached qualities can’t give us knowledge about anything – which opens the door to radical scepticism and the impossibility of knowledge which in turn denies the teachings about progress in science, society and spirituality. How can we say we know about the sun if its qualities are not somehow connected with it? Thus, it would seem clear that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not setting the stage for such virulent scepticism. Rather, what He says is that our knowledge about the essence must come from its attributes i.e. by means of the attributes and not from direct insight or intuition.

Furthermore, this knowledge is limited and cannot tell us everything about an object for the good ontological reason that every object always has a vast store of unactualised potentials. (See the section on the composition of beings.)

Consequently, we conclude that SAQ does not absolutely disallow knowledge of essences but disallows any direct access to essences and requires use to gain our knowledge via the attributes and to recognise that such knowledge has inherent limits.

## 42. Objective and Subjective Knowledge

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in SAQ, knowledge can be divided into two major categories, both of which differ essentially in kind and not merely in degree: subjective knowledge and objective knowledge i.e. “an intuitive knowledge and a knowledge derived from perception.”<sup>276</sup> In objective knowledge, which is “derived from perception” and belongs “universally”<sup>277</sup> (a essential species attribute) to all human beings,

*by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart. The circle of this knowledge is very limited because it depends upon effort and attainment.*<sup>278</sup>

The reference to the impression of the form of a perceived object “in the mirror of the heart” agrees with the Athenian tradition (especially Aristotle and Plotinus) that perception concerns the form of things impressing themselves on the mind or heart. However, this knowledge is limited “because it depends on effort and attainment;” after all, our efforts suffer not only the perceptive limitations of our species but also our personal limitations. Such knowledge is external because it does not originate within the object of perception.

By way of contrast, the Manifestation knows subjectively or intuitively; this is “the knowledge of being, is intuitive; it is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself.”<sup>279</sup> We, too, have subjective intuitive knowledge because “the spirit surrounds the body”<sup>280</sup> and is aware of the body's conditions as well as of all the body parts. However, in human beings this capacity is limited to our own bodies; we cannot actually feel another's pain, despite our best efforts at

empathy. The spirit knows the body from within because it is in the higher ontological station of surrounding the body. The Manifestations attain knowledge of the world in the same way because He is on a higher ontological plane and spiritually surrounds all lower beings.

Since the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God, surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore, Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired – that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is a divine revelation.<sup>281</sup>

Such immediate and intuitive knowledge of created beings is necessary because

*unless He is aware of the realities of beings, will not comprehend the essential connection which proceeds from the realities of things, and He will certainly not be able to establish a religion conformable to the facts and suited to the conditions.*<sup>282</sup>

Only immediate and intuitive knowledge of the Manifestation can understand things from within, can understand the essences or “realities of beings,” which means that unlike scientists or any other human beings, the Manifestation has access to the subjectivity of other beings. For this reason He is able to understand “the essential connections” which emanate from the essences or “realities of things.”

*Religion, then, is the necessary connection which emanates from the reality of things; and as the supreme Manifestations of God are aware of the mysteries of beings, therefore, They understand this essential connection, and by this knowledge establish the Law of God.*<sup>283</sup>

This means that the religion established by the Manifestation is based on His immediate and intuitive knowledge of the essences or realities of beings and their “necessary connections.” Because humankind does not and cannot possess subjective or intuitive knowledge of those realities and the connections between them, we must accept what the Manifestation establishes as “the Law of God.”

From this situation it logically follows that humankind could not reasonably challenge the “Laws of God”: we lack the knowledge and insight to do so, nor will we ever be able to acquire such knowledge. Since we cannot possibly ever possess the necessary knowledge to base a challenge on the foundations of knowledge, it makes no sense to do so. The necessary and sufficient basis for any such challenge is missing. Indeed, it would make more sense for a five year old to challenge the judgment of an experienced physician (even a blind pig finds the occasional acorn) than for humankind to challenge the “Laws of God” established by the Manifestation. Thus, any prohibition of challenging what the Manifestation establishes is not evidence of domination, suppression or latent totalitarianism but simply a rational outcome of the differing ontological and subsequent epistemological situations of the Manifestation and humankind.

### 43. Knowledge of God

One of the foundational principles of Bahá’í epistemology is that the essence and attributes of God are unknowable to humankind.

For the essence and the attributes of the Lord of Unity are in the heights of sanctity, and for the minds and understandings there is no way to approach that position. *‘The way is closed, and seeking is forbidden.’*<sup>284</sup>

Previously in this paper, we have already seen the ontological reason why this is so: “everything which is lower is powerless to comprehend the reality of that which is higher.”<sup>285</sup> Although humankind is obviously on a lower ontological level than God and, therefore, barred from directly acquiring knowledge of Him, this does not mean that such knowledge is impossible to attain:

*But for this Essence of the essences, this Truth of truths, this Mystery of mysteries, there are reflections, auroras, appearances and resplendencies in the world of existence. The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God. All the perfections, the bounties, the splendors which come*

*from God are visible and evident in the Reality of the Holy Manifestations.*<sup>286</sup>

For this reason, “all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names, the attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations.”<sup>287</sup> Thus, “if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God.”<sup>288</sup>

In light of these statements, it becomes clear that SAQ steers a middle course between an apophatic theology according to which all descriptions and conceptualizations of God and subsequent discussions are false and should be avoided because God’s essence is unknowable, and, on the other hand, an extreme natural theology which tries to deduce knowledge of God’s essence and attributes by humankind’s natural powers without divine revelation through the Manifestation. SAQ’s position seems to be that correct reasoning about God and His attributes is possible – but it must be based on and checked against what the Manifestation reveals. Furthermore, we must remember that what the Manifestation reveals is a limited and adapted not only to our human capacities but also to what is comprehensible and practical in our particular cultural-spiritual milieu. We may know about God but only indirectly, in a mediated manner, and in a manner consistent with our human, personal and cultural capacity.

Of course, such limitations do not mean that the knowledge of God we obtain is incorrect. How could it be if it comes from the Manifestation? Moreover, as shown before, ‘incomplete’ does not mean ‘incorrect.’ Therefore, it is apparent that we do indeed have knowledge of God, but it is knowledge that comes to us via a particular route – the Manifestation – and not by means of direct personal insight or by mystical experience of God or His attributes.

The fact that we do, in fact, receive correct knowledge about God from the Manifestation has an important consequence: it means that on the basis of what has been revealed about God’s attributes by the Manifestations, we can legitimately reason about the implications and meaning of these attributes for us. In other words, the denial of any direct knowledge of God’s essence or attributes does not foreclose reasonable dialogue on this subject though it does undercut dogmatic claims in any dialogue based on what the Manifestation reveals. It does not,

of course, prohibit categorical rejection of claims that contradict what the Manifestation says not to mention any dismissal of God's existence.

A final note in regard to the limitation of our knowledge by our specifically human capacity and our personal and cultural condition: this accords with one of the key principles of the Athenian tradition in philosophy, namely, that all knowledge is known according to the nature/essence and condition of the knower. Animals, for example, can only know through the senses whereas humans know through the senses as well as their rational capacities. This principle is implicitly present in the statement that "the differences of conditions in the world of beings is an obstacle to comprehension."<sup>289</sup> Our place on the ontological scale of being determines what we can and cannot know. Agreement on this principle is another major connection between SAQ and the Athenian tradition.

#### 44. God's Knowledge

In SAQ's epistemology, God is "omniscient"<sup>290</sup> because, as we have seen, He surrounds all creation and, for that reason, has immediate access to all that can be known. The ontologically higher comprehends the lower, and the highest comprehends all. There can be no obstacles to God's comprehension since anything that could be an obstacle would be something with the power to limit God and this is impossible: "God is powerful, omnipotent."<sup>291</sup> At this point, the differences between God's knowledge and that of other beings can still be rationally explained in terms of the ontological schema established in SAQ.

However, SAQ also points to one fundamental difference between God's knowledge and the knowledge of His creatures. For human beings to have knowledge requires that there be an object of knowledge, a tree, a person, an idea, a feeling – something which is present to a subject. According to SAQ, this is not the case with God Who, unlike other beings, does not need an object of knowledge:

*The Prophets say, The Knowledge of God has no need of the existence of beings, but the knowledge of the creature needs the existence of things known; if the Knowledge of God had need of any other thing, then it would be the knowledge of the creature, and not that of God ... The phenomenal knowledge [the knowledge of*

*created beings] has need of things known; the Preexistent Knowledge is independent of their existence.*<sup>292</sup>

To need objects of knowledge would be a sign of imperfection in God since that would put God in the position of needing something other than Himself. This would be an imperfection and would, in effect, make God's knowledge contingent or dependent on something else — which is an impossibility because “sanctification from imperfections [] is one of His necessary properties.”<sup>293</sup> From divine perfection it follows logically that God's knowledge cannot be dependent on anything else. However, if we attempt to understand this from a purely natural point of view we may appreciate *why* things must be this way but not *how* such knowledge can exist: “these divine and perfect attributes are not so understood by the intelligence that we can decide if the Divine Knowledge has need of things known or not.”<sup>294</sup> We are simply incapable of knowing how knowledge can exist independently of an object of knowledge present to a subject and, consequently, must accept what the Manifestation and His authorized and divinely guided interpreters tell us. Although the details of the belief itself cannot be explained to us, the foundation of the belief, namely, that God is necessarily independent of all things, is rational.

#### 45. Mind

According to SAQ, mind is an essential attribute of the human spirit, i.e. a quality without which the human spirit could not be itself. In short, it is an aspect of the essence of the human spirit.

*the mind is the power of the human spirit. Spirit is the lamp; mind is the light which shines from the lamp. Spirit is the tree, and the mind is the fruit. Mind is the perfection of the spirit and is its essential quality, as the sun's rays are the essential necessity of the sun.*<sup>295</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also describes the mind as a “power,” or capacity to interact with the world in a certain way, i.e. to acquire knowledge and form judgments. In the metaphor of the mind as the fruit of the tree of the human spirit, as “the perfection of the spirit,” He indicates that mind is the ultimate purpose of spirit, its entelechy, that for which spirit exists. The same idea is conveyed by the metaphor of the mind as light

from the lamp of the spirit; a lamp has no other reason to exist than the production of light. Moreover, light enables us to distinguish between things, and thereby establishes the basis of all knowledge.

As we have had occasion to observe, the human mind because of its high ontological position, “encompasses all things”<sup>296</sup> at least outwardly or phenomenally. However, it cannot know their essences directly but only learn about them by way of their qualities. SAQ makes it clear that the mind can acquire truth and make something of these findings, though, of course, the mind also can deceive itself.

*The mind and the thought of man sometimes discover truths, and from this thought and discovery signs and results are produced. This thought has a foundation. But many things come to the mind of man which are like the waves of the sea of imaginations; they have no fruit, and no result comes from them.*<sup>297</sup>

We can distinguish between mere imaginings and realities by the lack of results. SAQ therefore seems to adopt a pragmatic test to determine which discoveries are genuine knowledge and which are fantasies.

#### 46. Mind is Not Brain

Another attribute of the mind is that it is not subject to time and space: “Place and time surround the body, not the mind and spirit.”<sup>298</sup> Simply put, locality in space and time to do not apply to the mind; it is, to use a word from physics, ‘non-local.’ This allows “the spirit and mind of man [to] travel to all countries and regions – even through the limitless space of the heaven.”<sup>299</sup> Such freedom from material conditions is significant because it means that according to SAQ, mind cannot be identified with or reduced to brain since the latter is a purely material entity and mind is not. Unlike material beings, “mind itself is an intellectual thing which has no outward existence.”<sup>300</sup> The distinction between mind and brain is reinforced by the following statement:

*Thus consider what thousands of vicissitudes can happen to the body of man, but the spirit is not affected by them; it may even be that some members of the body are entirely crippled, but the essence of the mind remains and is everlasting.*<sup>301</sup>



Like spirit, mind is independent of the body, though not, as we shall see, unconnected. The body cannot hinder the spirit in itself but it can hinder the expression of that spirit in the material world. The fact that the brain and spirit/mind are distinct and separable (at death) but not unconnected entities in this life suggests that the brain is only the material organ through which mind manifests temporarily in the material world.

Emphasising the difference between the mind and material objects, 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out that the mind is not involved in physical motion of any kind:

*Moreover, entrance and exit, descent and ascent, are characteristics of bodies and not of spirits – that is to say, sensible realities enter and come forth, but intellectual subtleties and mental realities, such as intelligence, love, knowledge, imagination and thought, do not enter, nor come forth, nor descend, but rather they have direct connection.*<sup>302</sup>

In reading this, we must recall that the mind is a power of the human spirit and shares its essential attributes and, therefore, does not conform to the laws of material behavior. For this reason it would be fallacious to attempt to study the mind by scientific methods which have been specifically developed to study material entities and their behaviors for to do so would be confuse and conflate two different kinds of beings. Brain research cannot tell us about the mind per se; what it can do is tell us about how the mind acts through the material medium of the brain i.e. about the material signs of the mind's action. If we wish to study the mind itself, other methods of study not based on material objects must be developed.

If mind and body/brain are not identical, and are essentially independent, then it is necessary to question how they are connected. SAQ does not provide a technically detailed answer to this question but instead supplies a metaphorical model from which we can develop one or more solutions. Let us begin by examining the relationship between the body and the human spirit of which the body is a particular material instantiation. According to SAQ, "the connection of the spirit with the body is like that of the sun with the mirror."<sup>303</sup> Elsewhere it says,

*This perfected body can be compared to a mirror, and the human spirit to the sun. Nevertheless, if the mirror breaks, the bounty of the sun continues; and if the*

*mirror is destroyed or ceases to exist, no harm will happen to the bounty of the sun which is everlasting.*<sup>304</sup>

We should keep in mind that if the body functions like a mirror, then obviously the brain – also a part of the body – does too. The image of the sun in the mirror is used elsewhere in SAQ to explain the connection between spirit and body: “the spirit is connected with the body, as this light is with this mirror.”<sup>305</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also says, “The sun is not within the mirror, but it has a connection with the mirror.”<sup>306</sup> The import of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement is that the mind – which is an essential attribute of the human spirit – acts through the brain the same way the image of the sun acts in the mirror.

#### 47. Brain and Mind – A Formal Connection

Examining the nature of this connection, we find that the sun is in the mirror not substantially but formally. The actual sun is not in actually (ontologically) present in the mirror. Instead, the form of the sun is present in the mirror and it is there because the emanations of the sun, the light, condition the mirror in a specific way to reflect the sun’s image. In other words, the sun is formally but not substantially present and through this formal presence conditions or determines what the mirror reflects. (How, i.e. to what degree of brightness or accuracy the mirror reflects depends on the qualities of the mirror but that is another issue.) In the same way, the “the mind is connected with the acquisition of knowledge, like images reflected in a mirror.”<sup>307</sup> The mind is conditioned by the formal presence of the images that it receives inasmuch as every perception and idea or conception has its own specific form to distinguish it from others. This form is what conditions the mind so that it acquires information and knowledge:

*the knowledge of things which men universally have is gained by reflection or by evidence – that is to say, either by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart.*<sup>308</sup>

Whether it be the form of a perceived object or the particular form of an idea or conception, the mind seems to work by means of conditioning by formal causality. Formal causality – which we have already encountered in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explication of four-fold causality acts as a cause because it shapes or conditions something, which has an effect

on how the conditioned object inter-acts with other things. A piece of bronze in the form of a statue and the same bronze recast as a suit of armour will inter-act differently with their surroundings. Substantially they are the same but formally they are not and this formal difference is decisive. This is an example of formal causality in action.

The conclusion seems clear: mind and brain/body are distinct and separate entities but are connected nevertheless: “the mind has no place, but it is connected with the brain.”<sup>309</sup> Thus, SAQ suggests a mind-brain dualism, the two being different kinds of entities. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “spirit is different from the body.”<sup>310</sup> Indeed, He elaborates further, adding, “the spirit of man is not in the body because it is freed and sanctified from entrance and exit.”<sup>311</sup> Mind, we must recall is a power or attribute of the spirit. However, because mind/spirit and body are connected, SAQ’s teachings about the mind and body/brain cannot be taken as encouragement to adopt occasionalism, the belief that mind and brain are so different that they cannot interact and therefore require God to coordinate their activities. Leibniz’ variation of this – the doctrine of pre-established harmony – states that God had arranged the universe so that all apparent cases of cause-and-effect arose in a divinely pre-established sequences without any interaction.<sup>312</sup> This, too, violates the formal causality that is implicit in the image of the sun and the mirror.

This is, in our view, as far as we can go in understanding how the mind works if we limit ourselves to SAQ. Of course, SAQ does not go into the technical details of formal causality, but in the image of the sun and the mirror, it provides us with a direction in which to seek more detailed answer and to exclude certain viewpoints such as the identity of brain and mind. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “This explanation, though short, is complete; therefore, reflect upon it, and if God wills, you may become acquainted with the details.”<sup>313</sup>

According to SAQ, the human mind is not the only mind in existence. There is also the “First Mind”:

*the first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the ‘First Mind,’ and which the people of Bahá call the ‘First Will.’ This emanation, in that which concerns its action in the world of God, is not limited by time or*

*place; it is without beginning or end – beginning and end in relation to God are one.*<sup>314</sup>

Like the human mind, it is not limited by time and space, though as the first emanation, it is on a higher ontological plane than humankind or nature and can, therefore, surround or comprehend more of reality. Elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*But the universal divine mind, which is beyond nature, is the bounty of the Preexistent Power. This universal mind is divine; it embraces existing realities, and it receives the light of the mysteries of God. It is a conscious power, not a power of investigation and of research.*<sup>315</sup>

Because this mind, which is a “bounty” or emanation of God, is not subject to the laws of time and space, it is “beyond nature” and surrounds all other things. For that reason, too, it is a “conscious power,” i.e. a power that knows subjectively, immediately and intuitively and is not dependent on investigation, research and discursive reasoning. Furthermore,

*This divine intellectual power [the “universal divine mind”] is the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and the Dawning-places of prophethood; a ray of this light falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous, and a portion and a share of this power comes to them through the Holy Manifestations.*<sup>316</sup>

This divine mind, which is an essential attribute of the Manifestations, helps establish a rational foundation for the belief that the Manifestation possesses universal knowledge of all creation and must, therefore be obeyed even though we, who lack such knowledge, do not always understand.

#### 48. Infallibility

Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of SAQ's epistemology is the concept of infallibility. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there are two kinds of infallibility, “essential infallibility and acquired infallibility”<sup>317</sup> which He compares to “essential knowledge and acquired knowledge.”<sup>318</sup> As we recall from our examination of ontology and onto-theology, the Manifestation is on a higher ontological plane than creation and, therefore, comprehends or surrounds, which is to say, He can know its conditions subjectively within Himself. His

“knowledge of being, is intuitive; it is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself.”<sup>319</sup> The Manifestation knows creation the way He knows Himself and, therefore, is able to reveal perfect laws that meet all of the hidden and overt needs of creation. Our insight, of course, is only partial which is why it is inappropriate for us to critique His commandments. This explanation shows why the “Most Great Infallibility”<sup>320</sup> of the Manifestation is a necessary consequence of His ontological position.

The second kind of infallibility is “acquired infallibility”<sup>321</sup> which is bestowed by God upon some special souls: “Although these souls have not essential infallibility, still they are under the protection of God – that is to say, God preserves them from error.”<sup>322</sup> These souls cannot be essentially infallible because, unlike the Manifestations, they do not surround or comprehend creation. However, the “protection of God ... preserves them from error” because if it did not, “their error would cause believing souls to fall into error, and thus the foundation of the Religion of God would be overturned, which would not be fitting nor worthy of God.”<sup>323</sup> This protection from error extends to the Universal House of Justice as an institution (not to its individual members) and in this case is called “conferred infallibility.”<sup>324</sup>

The doctrine of infallibility has generated considerable discussion about what it actually means. The ontological foundations of the concept of the Manifestation show that the “essential infallibility” of the Manifestation potentially covers all areas of knowledge; He surrounds all creation not just parts of it. There is no indication of a limitation to ‘faith and morals’ or to anything else: “*whatever* emanates from Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality.”<sup>325</sup> The Manifestation, after all, is not simply another human being like the rest of us, occupying a higher plane of being.

The case of “acquired” and “conferred” infallibility is somewhat different because human beings lack the Manifestation’s superior ontological station. Consequently, it may be possible to limit the range of infallibility to matters of faith and morals, i.e. to that which affects our conduct as Bahá’ís and to what the Writings declare to be true. This practical limitation is evident in the concern that if holy souls were not safe-guarded from error, they would mislead others.<sup>326</sup> Here we have a more practical concern about why “acquired” or “conferred” infallibility is necessary. However, in SAQ we find

no evidence that “infallibility” is limited to a condition of ‘sinlessness’ as has been suggested. It very clearly refers to knowledge of various kinds and not to personal states of being.

#### IV. Philosophical Anthropology

Philosophical anthropology, which originates with Kant’s *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Viewpoint*, is a branch of philosophy that explores the individual and collective nature of humankind. It may also be called ‘theory of man.’ It examines such subjects as individual and collective human nature, humankind’s position and role in the universe and the purpose of human existence. Philosophical anthropology has enormous relevance to human existence. For example, all religions, all systems of ethics are explicitly or implicitly based on a theory of man. The same is true for all legal systems as well as all systems of psychology and education. Each of these endeavours makes assumptions about what people ‘are like,’ their needs and desires, reasonable obligations as well as innate capacities. A theory of man is also embedded in all cultures.

##### 49. Human Nature

We shall begin this survey of the philosophical anthropology in SAQ with an examination of its theory of human nature. The very possession of such a theory is controversial in today’s intellectual climate since such influential philosophies as Sartrean existentialism and postmodernism completely reject the idea of there being a given, universal human nature. Sartre first sounded this note in 1943 in *Being and Nothingness* which is based on the premise the “existence precedes essence,” that we are not ‘oppressed’ by a pre-given, ready-made human nature applicable to all persons but that we must make ourselves through our own choices and actions. Without exception, all major postmodernist philosophers follow Sartre on this point, a position described most succinctly by Lyotard as a rejection of “metanarratives.”<sup>327</sup> A “metanarrative” is a universal explanatory paradigm which purports to provide true explanations of phenomena of a certain kind.

Sartrean existentialism and postmodernism notwithstanding, SAQ promulgates the concept of a human nature explicitly and implicitly in various ways and contexts. For example, in His discussion of human evolution, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “For the proof of the originality of the human species,

and of the *permanency of the nature of man, is clear and evident.*"<sup>328</sup> The nature of humankind exists, is stable and "permanent" and, above all, "is clear and evident." By describing its existence and permanency as "clear and evident," 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in effect, suggesting that those who disagree are not seeing the evidence or not evaluating the evidence properly. In short, He is dismissing their views as fundamentally ignorant. Vis-à-vis ethics, He says that those who follow the Manifestation are "delivered from the animal characteristics and qualities which are *the characteristics of human nature.*"<sup>329</sup> On a similar note, He points out that "brutal qualities exist in *the nature of man.*"<sup>330</sup> These remarks simply affirm the existence of human nature as part of a discussing human morality or lack of it. The same occurs in His discussion of human evolution in which He refers to the human embryo developing "until it reaches the degree of reason and perfection."<sup>331</sup> The concept of human nature is also implicit in the ontological hierarchy in which humankind is at the summit because it possesses all the powers of the lower vegetable and animal levels. Human nature also lifts humankind above the rest of nature: neither sun nor sea "can never comprehend the conditions, the state, the qualities, the movements and the nature of man."<sup>332</sup>

However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not just refer to human nature in passing; rather He provides a detailed picture of some of its foundational attributes. These are common to all human beings at all times and in all cultures – which is, of course, what we would expect from a religious world-view that teaches the essential oneness of humankind. Without such a universal human nature, there would be no basis for the unification of humankind because there would be no basis on which to develop global teachings.

In SAQ, the most obvious attribute of human nature is that we are essentially spiritual beings. This fact is reflected in our ontological structure: "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."<sup>333</sup> Briefly, in the Athenian tradition which this statement exemplifies, the substance (not to be confused with matter) is independent in its existence and possess certain qualities called 'accidents.' These accidents are not necessary to the existence of the substance and can be altered without affecting the identity or existence of the substance. For example, a cat is a substance, but its color is an accident; if the color is changed,

the same cat continues to exist. Stating that the rational soul is the substance, means that soul is what we essentially are and that our bodily existence is a temporary 'accident.' From this it follows that the soul and the body are not the same kinds of 'things' – which, in effect, is a form of soul/body dualism – and that the soul is immortal because it is capable of existing without the accidental body. All of these assertions are universally true of all human beings at all times, in all places and under all circumstances. In other words, here we find the basis of anthropological essentialism in SAQ, which does not agree with Sartre's claim that "existence precedes essence."

Not only are we essentially spiritual beings, but share the same essential attributes:

*This spiritual nature, which came into existence through the bounty of the Divine Reality, is the union of all perfections and appears through the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is the divine perfections; it is light, spirituality, guidance, exaltation, high aspiration, justice, love, grace, kindness to all, philanthropy, the essence of life.*<sup>334</sup>

Spirit is the source of our "perfections" with which to overcome the imperfections of our physical nature which is subject to "anger, jealousy, dispute, covetousness, avarice, ignorance, prejudice, hatred, pride and tyranny."<sup>335</sup> According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, our task and destiny is to perfect our human existence by strengthening and developing the spiritual aspects of our nature. This means that human beings share a universal duty and destiny – a struggle to control our unruly animal nature and make it work for the good of the soul and our spiritual development. Both as individuals and collectives we succeed in varying degrees in this process and sometimes slip into complete failure.

As shown throughout SAQ, all of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings about philosophical anthropology is premised on our essential identity as spiritual beings and the primacy of the soul over the material body. This brings in its train a host of profound consequences for the conduct of individual lives and the management of society. For example, it enlarges our perspective on what is meant by 'doing good' or 'reducing harm' because we must not only consider the good of the body but also the good of the soul. It will deeply affect education policy in such areas as curriculum because questions of



spiritual education cannot be circumvented or ignored outright. Recognising the primacy of the spirit in our constitution will also have effects on our personal and collective scale of values which in turn affects decisions at every level and at every turn. Most obviously this would affect the operations of a consumer-driven economy or, at least, the kind of products in demand, especially if large numbers of people were to believe “[t]he rewards of this life are the virtues and perfections which adorn the reality of man”<sup>336</sup> and not the acquisition of ‘things’ or material wealth. These rewards are attainable both in the earthly life and in the next.

## 50. The Soul and Immortality

As already noted, the fact that the soul is a substance and the body an accident is the basis for an ontological proof for the immortality of the soul, which according to SAQ is “the fundamental basis of the divine religions.”<sup>337</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers not only to traditional religious traditions to establish the immortality of the spirit – the Gospels and the Qur’án – but also to logical proofs which we shall briefly examine. One of these proofs is that, as just demonstrated, that the spirit or substance is independent of the body or accident. The spirit, He says, can see and hear without sense organs and even travel as it does during sleep without any material means<sup>338</sup>; furthermore, the spirit is unaffected by the illnesses and debilities of the body.<sup>339</sup> Because “the spirit is different from the body”<sup>340</sup> it continues to exist even when the body disintegrates.

At this point it is apropos to note that not just the soul but also the personality is independent of the body as well.

*The personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body, but the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God.*<sup>341</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wording here shows His awareness of a long-standing subject of debate in the Athenian tradition, namely, the origin of the individual personality. Since there exists an essence shared by all humans, what is it that individualises us? One answer is that individualization occurs through the

particular body we possess, i.e. matter is what individualises. Another is that form, not matter, individualises, i.e. each thing possesses a “*haecceitas*” or ‘this-ness’ that makes it the specific thing it is.<sup>342</sup> As the foregoing quotation from SAQ shows, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá plainly takes the latter view that the “personality of the rational soul” exists from the start and does not depend on the body to be. Experience in the world may strengthen the personality but it can only actualise what is already potential in it. This original personality is part of the innate character that we all possess. The innate character willed discussed in greater detail below.

Another proof of immortality is based on the premise

*that no sign can come from a nonexistent thing – that is to say, it is impossible that from absolute nonexistence signs should appear – for the signs are the consequence of an existence, and the consequence depends upon the existence of the principle.*<sup>343</sup>

In other words, non-existent entities cannot produce results i.e. cannot actualise potentials either in themselves or in something else for the obvious reason that as non-existent they have no potentials and they certainly cannot act as efficient causes actualising potentials elsewhere because they do not exist! However, after the death of the body, the human spirit “persists and continues to act and to have power.”<sup>344</sup> The evidence offered is the “Kingdom of Christ”<sup>345</sup> which continues to exist and influence the world long after the death of Christ’s body. For this to occur, the ‘Christ-spirit’ must continue to exist in some form.

Along with the “logical proofs” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also offers what might be called a direct proof of immediate insight, such as we have already discussed in the epistemology section of this paper. If we open our “inner sight,” we shall need no discursive proofs of immortality because we shall be able to apprehend this fact immediately for ourselves.

*But if the human spirit will rejoice and be attracted to the Kingdom of God, if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual hearing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun...*<sup>346</sup>

If we attain the right spiritual condition, we see truths such as the immortality of the soul by immediate insight rather than by discursive argument.

## 51. The Rational Soul

Another far-reaching attribute of human nature is the possession of a rational soul:

*The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings...*<sup>347</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes it clear that the rational soul differentiates humanity from animals, and is, therefore, an essential, i.e. defining characteristic of all human beings. Individuals and cultures may not always make use of this rational power to the same extent but it is universal, i.e. always there whenever and wherever humans exist.

*The first condition of perception in the world of nature is the perception of the rational soul. In this perception and in this power all men are sharers, whether they be neglectful or vigilant, believers or deniers.*<sup>348</sup>

This statement has far-reaching consequences because it means that at least in principle, we possess a universal standard, an ‘Archimedean standpoint’ by which to evaluate individual and collective action and beliefs. He himself does not hesitate to apply it. For example, He dismisses the traditional Christian account of original sin as “unreasonable and evidently wrong”<sup>349</sup> for various reasons. Similarly, in rejecting the traditional Christian interpretation of the Trinity He states,

*If it were otherwise [than his explanation], the foundations of the Religion of God would rest upon an illogical proposition which the mind could never conceive, and how can the mind be forced to believe a thing which it cannot conceive? A thing cannot be grasped by the intelligence except when it is clothed in an intelligible form; otherwise, it is but an effort of the imagination.*<sup>350</sup>

Even religion must have rational foundations because, given our nature as a “rational soul,” we cannot even “conceive” of teachings which rest on “an illogical proposition.” If we cannot “conceive” of an idea, how can we as rational beings, believe? In other words, a belief must have a sufficient reason that explains why it (or any other phenomenon) is what it is. Otherwise the belief becomes problematical. Because of our “rational souls” neither individuals nor cultures can accept insufficient explanations which is why they all persons and cultures develop various explanations for phenomena. The form and details of these explanations may differ, but all are attempts to satisfy the principle of sufficient reason.

## 52. Humankind’s Dual Nature

Unlike the lower level of being, humanity has a dual nature, i.e. it is a composite of two natures:

*Know that there are two natures in man: the physical nature and the spiritual nature. The physical nature is inherited from Adam, and the spiritual nature is inherited from the Reality of the Word of God, which is the spirituality of Christ. The physical nature is born of Adam, but the spiritual nature is born from the bounty of the Holy Spirit. The first is the source of all imperfection; the second is the source of all perfection.*<sup>351</sup>

The first noteworthy issue here is that this statement is about humankind in general, i.e. it is a universal statement about human nature. The two-part structure constitutes a fundamental feature of what it means to be human at all times and places, and in all cultures or stages of collective development. There is no suggestion in SAQ (or anywhere else in the Writings) that any exceptions exist or that our two-part constitutional nature will change during the course of human evolution on earth. Second, this duality is hierarchical, with the spiritual part taking precedence over the physical or animal nature which is associated with “imperfection.” The Manifestations appear so that “men might be freed from the imperfections of the physical nature and might become possessed of the virtues of the spiritual nature.”<sup>352</sup> Of course, this is not to say that our physical aspect is of no value but only that for it to function for our complete well-being it must be properly subordinated by our spiritual higher nature. Here

we see yet another confirmation of the hierarchical ontology at work in SAQ.

### 53. Inherent Struggle Between Higher and Lower Natures

Third, it follows from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that humans are divided between a higher and lower nature and that we are inherently conflicted beings always engaged in a struggle within ourselves. Hence, we are often forced to choose between following these two natures, between "imperfection" and "perfection," and since this make dualism constitutes our nature, there is no way this struggle can be overcome completely; it constitutes who and what we are. However, the struggle between these two principles must not be seen as an imperfection in itself; rather it is a necessary pre-condition for our ethical existence, i.e. for us to attain increasing perfection by means of free choice among real alternatives. To help us make that choice is precisely the reason for the existence of Manifestations if we choose to accept it. In other words, this division between our two natures is the condition for humankind's ability to rise to greater heights of spiritual development. Without it, any moral ascent is impossible.

Finally, this dual constitution reflects humankind's two-fold ontological position in creation.

*Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality – that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light; that is why it has been said that the condition of man is the end of the night and the beginning of day, meaning that he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and that he possesses the degrees of perfection. He has the animal side as well as the angelic side and the aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side.*<sup>353</sup>

Ontologically speaking, humanity occupies a dual station as the apex of "materiality" but also as the "beginning of spirituality" and this dual station reflects itself in our two natures. We are the transition point from "materiality" to spirituality and have attributes of both. This helps explain our ethical ambiguity; because we are the "last degree of darkness" we are capable of tremendous evil and because we are

“beginning of light” we are also capable of great good. No individual, no collective and no culture have ever been able to escape this fundamental ambiguity which is, therefore, also a universal attribute of humankind.

#### 54. The Purpose of Earthly Existence

The existence of this perpetual moral struggle within humankind inevitably raises the question of what is the purpose in requiring the human soul to go through the difficult phase of bodily being. Here is one part of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's answer:

*The wisdom of the appearance of the spirit in the body is this: the human spirit is a Divine Trust, and it must traverse all conditions, for its passage and movement through the conditions of existence will be the means of its acquiring perfections ...*<sup>354</sup>

In other words, the purpose of physical existence is to help the soul acquire “perfections,” i.e. to develop its inherent capacities, accumulate experience and knowledge and, through free choice, attain spiritual virtues. Without this passage through physical being, there could be no real qualitative growth, learning and maturation; we would remain unactualised potentials and, therefore, not fully ourselves. However, there is another, ontological and cosmic reason for our bodily existence:

*Besides this, it is necessary that the signs of the perfection of the spirit should be apparent in this world, so that the world of creation may bring forth endless results, and this body may receive life and manifest the divine bounties ... If the rays and heat of the sun did not shine upon the earth, the earth would be uninhabited, without meaning; and its development would be retarded. In the same way, if the perfections of the spirit did not appear in this world, this world would be unenlightened and absolutely brutal. By the appearance of the spirit in the physical form, this world is enlightened.*<sup>355</sup>

In other words, humanity is the means by which the “perfections of the spirit” appear in the material world and, thereby, render it “enlightened.” Without this spiritual enlightenment the world would be “absolutely brutal” (“nasty, brutish and short” to borrow Hobbes' phrase.) i.e. bereft of

the virtues of knowledge and understanding, as well as completely subject to the lowest animal impulses such as greed, violence, lust, sloth or laziness and self-centeredness. Humankind, therefore, is the agency through which a new, transcendent spiritual dimension begins to play a role in the material world by adding a new feature to the one-dimensional material existence. At this point it is tempting to think of Teilhard de Chardin's theory of the noosphere as the specifically human contribution to the evolution of the material world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements certainly are in harmony with this line of thought. He says that without humanity, the material universe would have no purpose for its existence (recall our earlier discussion of teleology): "This world is also in the condition of a fruit tree, and man is like the fruit; without fruit the tree would be useless."<sup>356</sup> Like the fruit of a tree, humankind is the noblest product of the material world, and, for that reason, its *raison d'être*. In other words, the existence of humankind has a cosmological and evolutionary function. From this perspective, humankind is not simply an accidental development on the planet but rather a necessary occurrence.

Humankind is able to be the spiritual enlightener of the material world only because it exists both in materiality and spirituality. We possess the necessary and sufficient material conditions to attract the influence of the spirit in the same way that a clear mirror is able to receive and reflect the sun.

*these members, these elements, this composition, which are found in the organism of man, are an attraction and magnet for the spirit; it is certain that the spirit will appear in it. So a mirror which is clear will certainly attract the rays of the sun ... when these existing elements are gathered together according to the natural order, and with perfect strength, they become a magnet for the spirit, and the spirit will become manifest in them with all its perfections.*<sup>357</sup>

In other words, the physical constitution of human beings is sufficiently complex and sensitive enough to "become a magnet for the spirit" and allow the spirit to become manifest in the material world. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá this course of events is necessary because

*the connection which exists between the reality of things, whether they be spiritual or material, requires*

*that when the mirror is clear and faces the sun, the light of the sun must become apparent in it. In the same way, when the elements are arranged and combined in the most glorious system, organization and manner, the human spirit will appear and be manifest in them. This is the decree of the Powerful, the Wise.*<sup>358</sup>

In this passage, 'Abdu'l-Bahá draws our attention to a fundamental cosmic law established by God in His design of the universe. It is as much a law as the law of gravity or the Boyle gas laws. This law forms a "connection" which joins all aspects of reality into a single whole and is, thereby, a universal connective principle that joins different ontological levels of reality, in this case, the material and the spiritual.

We also observe a correspondence between the Manifestation enlightening us spiritually, and we, in turn, bringing signs of the spirit into the material realm. This is confirmed when 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*As the spirit of man is the cause of the life of the body, so the world is in the condition of the body, and man is in the condition of the spirit. If there were no man, the perfections of the spirit would not appear, and the light of the mind would not be resplendent in this world. This world would be like a body without a soul.*<sup>359</sup>

By means of its analogy of the "spirit of man" and the human body, this passage suggests that humankind provides a soul for the world of matter and, thereby, provides it with "life." One assumes that this means spiritual life inasmuch as it is humankind which brings the "perfections of the spirit" and the "light of the mind" into the world of matter.

All of the various attributes mentioned in the previous discussion are universally applicable to human beings and are not dependent on culture, ethnicity or any other external factors. Different cultures may reflect the light of the spirit differently, some more adequately than others and some, such as Nazi Germany or Stalin's Russia hardly at all. (Unless we are willing to accept these examples, we cannot assent to the unqualified proposition that all cultures reflect the spiritual light equally.)



## 55. Innate, Inherited and Acquired Character

Within our specifically human nature, there are three further divisions: “the innate character, the inherited character and the acquired character which is gained by education.”<sup>360</sup> Of the innate character, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says

*With regard to the innate character, although the divine creation is purely good, yet the varieties of natural qualities in man come from the difference of degree; all are excellent, but they are more or less so, according to the degree. So all mankind possess intelligence and capacities, but the intelligence, the capacity and the worthiness of men differ.*<sup>361</sup>

The innate character, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also calls the “original nature”<sup>362</sup> is that foundational essence that identifies us as human and is made up of such “natural qualities” as “intelligence” and other capacities. These are good in themselves but not all people have them in the same degree. It is worthwhile pointing out this innate character is universal, possessed by “all mankind” i.e. identifies the human species and, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, distinguishes it from the animal. In other words, this is a general species quality that does not yet identify us as individuals.

*The “inherited character” is the individual constitution we inherit from our parents: “The variety of inherited qualities comes from strength and weakness of constitution – that is to say, when the two parents are weak, the children will be weak.”*<sup>363</sup>

(Of course, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is speaking in ‘bell-curve’ generalities here, since exceptions always exist; however, as Toynbee points out, exceptions prove the rule.) This “inherited character” helps to differentiate us as individuals since we all have one; with the innate human character it forms “the capital of life”<sup>364</sup> which He also calls the “natural capacity”<sup>365</sup> and which “God has given equally to all mankind.”<sup>366</sup> This “natural capacity” is inherently good. Again we observe the universal nature of the structure of human nature as presented by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The “acquired character,” associated with “acquired capacity,”<sup>367</sup> is the third aspect of our specifically human character. It is the result of education, and the choices we learn to make as a result of our education. This is where we shape our characters through the exercise of free will, above all guided by

the education provided by the Manifestations. Here is where we acquire praiseworthy or blameworthy attributes: "One does not criticize vicious people because of their innate capacities and nature, but rather for their acquired capacities and nature."<sup>368</sup>

## 56. Free Will

The issue of "acquired character" brings us to one of the most important topics in philosophical anthropology, namely free will. This, too, is one of the constitutive aspects of our human nature. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

*Some things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions ... in the choice of good and bad actions he is free, and he commits them according to his own will.*<sup>369</sup>

In other words, human beings are free in regards to our ethical choices be they words, actions or attitudes; regardless of what our circumstances are, we are always free to choose our response. Ethically speaking, we all possess radical or complete freedom by virtue of the inescapable fact that we are human. As Sartre put it in *Being and Nothingness*, we are "condemned to be free"<sup>370</sup> whether we want to be or not. We can only 'escape' our freedom by living in "bad faith," i.e. by self-deceptively and/or hypocritically lying to ourselves that 'we have no choice.' Ontologically, this freedom is based on the fact that the spirit in itself is not subject to any of the vicissitudes of material existence and thereby cannot use these hardships.

This theme of radical ethical freedom brings with it the consequence of radical responsibility for ourselves, for our decision, words and actions. 'Radical responsibility' means that we embrace our complete ethical freedom and, therefore, abstain from seeking any excuses or justifications for our bad actions in the circumstances of the external world nor do we blame God for making us the kind of person we are, i.e. for our innate and inherited character. That is the point of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Bible-based discussion about the mineral not having any right to complain to God that it was not giving vegetable perfections. Each state of being is perfect in its own degree and "must strive after the perfections of [its] own degree."<sup>371</sup> That is all it can be responsible for because perfecting one's

own degree of being is all that one has the power to do. However, within that purview human beings are completely responsible. Obviously, this aspect of Bahá'í philosophical anthropology has enormous implications for law and the justice system, education and social policies.

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts our radical ethical freedom, He also frankly and realistically recognises that

*there are certain things to which man is forced and compelled, such as sleep, death, sickness, decline of power, injuries and misfortunes; these are not subject to the will of man, and he is not responsible for them, for he is compelled to endure them.*<sup>372</sup>

There are certain things we must do simply by virtue of being alive, and there are other things we must do to deal with various misfortunes and difficulties, over which we have no control. Free will is not absolute, nor can we always shape reality as we would like it to be by force of will. SAQ gives no comfort to the belief that we can literally 'make our own reality' as we choose. However, we incur no culpability for these uncontrollable events themselves, but rather, we can incur praise or blame by our response to them; we are, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, always free to take "good and bad action."<sup>373</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that nothing in SAQ suggests that free will is limited to one group, ethnicity, class or culture; rather it is possessed universally by all human beings at all times because it is a constitutional part of human nature. Nor is there any insinuation that socio-economic conditions excuse or justify destructive choices although reflection on these conditions may help us understand how people came to take destructive or self-destructive turns. Moreover, SAQ does not seem to answer the question of whether or not poor material conditions diminish ethical responsibility and the ability to make free moral choices. These considerations, which clearly affect law and justice, education and social policies will require further study of the Writings.

## 57. Ethics

Although the ethical teachings of SAQ incorporate some elements of other approaches to ethics, the foundations of the ethical teachings promulgated in SAQ have deep affinities with what is known as 'virtue ethics.' In general terms, virtue ethics

emphasise the acquisition of certain virtues and the subsequent development of good character as the best foundation for making ethical choices. This close relationship to virtue ethics, is yet another sign of SAQ (and the Writings) belonging to the Athenian tradition in philosophy especially with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. The virtue ethics tradition, was, of course developed among the Jews, Christians and Muslims who inherited Greek philosophical thought.

Before examining SAQ's relationship to virtue ethics more closely, it is helpful to examine its position in regards to other approaches to ethics. One of the most famous and influential is Kant's deontological ethics according to which acts are right or wrong independently of their consequences.<sup>374</sup> In other words, consequences are not the only criteria by which to judge an action; Deontological ethics emphasise knowing what our duty is and carrying it out. Our personal motivation for doing the act is essentially irrelevant as long as the right act is properly carried out. For SAQ, deontological ethics are not so much wrong as incomplete. We certainly have obligations to God, for example – “to know [Him] and to worship [Him]” – but 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that mere outward action, merely going through the motions, even if correct, is not sufficient for humans to attain their highest possible moral development. Speaking of those who do much good in the world but have no knowledge of the divine teachings, He says,

*Know that such actions, such efforts and such words are praiseworthy and approved, and are the glory of humanity. But these actions alone are not sufficient; they are a body of the greatest loveliness, but without spirit.*<sup>375</sup>

In other words, the motivations driving even right actions are as important as the actions themselves. It is, after all, possible to do outwardly good actions with bad intent or from bad motives; we may tell a truth about someone – with the intention of causing them harm. The character of the doer and his spiritual condition are also relevant in judging an action. Another problem with deontological ethics is that we have is the question of how we know which acts are wrong or right. Hence, deontological ethics are not wrong but rather incomplete; what they tell is necessary but not sufficient for complete human ethical development.

SAQ also shows points of contact with consequentialism, another major class of moral theories, which maintains that the consequences of an action are the only basis for moral judgment. Moral acts are those which have good consequences. Sometimes consequentialism is described as ‘utilitarian’ ethics because it judges actions strictly by outcomes. The obvious problem with this approach is that it cannot define what we mean by a ‘good consequence,’ which can vary widely not only among individuals but also among societies and thus offers little real guidance as to what constitutes ‘good consequences.’ What should be considered a good consequence? What should not be – and how do arbitrate among conflicting ‘good’ consequences such as the public’s right to fly safely and the privacy rights of the individual? Unlike consequentialism, SAQ cannot agree that the value of an action depends solely on its good or desirable outcomes. For example, a rigorous programme of euthanizing the terminally ill and incurable mentally handicapped may have numerous positive results but such results alone would be a weak recommendation for action on this score. There are obviously other factors to consider such as the effect of an act on the character of those who perform it. This shows that from SAQ’s point of view, consequentialism is not wrong – good actions involve good consequences in some way – but rather, it is incomplete.

SAQ can agree with consequentialism insofar as divinely given virtues and teachings lead to positive outcomes for humankind. Bad consequences are, after all, important reasons to replace beliefs that encourage disunity and conflict with beliefs that draw human beings together. The Manifestations appear to give teachings that will lead to good consequences for humanity. In SAQ, there is one apparent example of consequentialism to consider. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes lying as the “foundation of all evil,”<sup>376</sup> but He says that a doctor may lie to a patient to help the patient’s recovery,<sup>377</sup> adding cryptically, “This is not blameworthy.”<sup>378</sup> Does He mean the action is good – or merely that in this special situation, it should not be condemned, i.e. is permissible? From a consequentialist viewpoint, He seems to be approving the action or at least finding it acceptable and justifiable because of its positive consequences for the patient. But is He giving us permission to lie for other reasons we judge to be good? That, of course, would open the door to all kinds of self-justifying rationalisations and erode the value of the virtue of truthfulness. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá words “Notwithstanding all this [the

evil of lying]”<sup>379</sup> shows that He means this case to be seen as an exception and not as a general guide to action.

(Despite first impressions, this is not an example of moral relativism in SAQ. The action of lying is justified by reference to a moral absolute, i.e. saving a life, which in itself is beyond any relativist questioning at all.)

## 58. Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics are based on the belief that good action requires the development of good character and that in turn requires the acquisition of certain personal virtues. Only then can we be prepared to make good ethical decisions and to live well. Virtue ethics places great emphasis on motivation, holding that truly good deeds can only come when we have good motives. The basis of Bahá'í ethics as laid out in SAQ is that our ethical task is to overcome the impulses of our lower, animal nature and to acquire virtues by struggling to actualise our higher, spiritual nature.

*He [man] has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side. Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among the creatures; but if the satanic power overcomes the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures.*<sup>380</sup>

The “satanic power” is the uncontrolled demands of our physical or animal nature and these can lead us into evil. The purpose of overcoming our animal aspects is that we might acquire the eternal virtues that have been taught by the Manifestations. These

*foundations of the Religion of God, which are spiritual and which are the virtues of humanity, cannot be abrogated; they are irremovable and eternal, and are renewed in the cycle of every Prophet.*<sup>381</sup>

The reason why these virtues are eternal is because, as we shall see in the section on philosophical anthropology, our human nature is so formed by God as to need the fulfillment of certain needs to achieve optimum growth. In other words, the virtues reflect the needs of our divinely created, objectively real and

universal human nature and develop our characters in a positive way. For us to achieve optimum development, we need

*faith, knowledge, certitude, justice, piety, righteousness, trustworthiness, love of God, benevolence, purity, detachment, humility, meekness, patience and constancy. It shows mercy to the poor, defends the oppressed, gives to the wretched and uplifts the fallen ... These divine qualities, these eternal commandments, will never be abolished; nay, they will last and remain established for ever and ever. These virtues of humanity will be renewed in each of the different cycles; for at the end of every cycle the spiritual Law of God – that is to say, the human virtues – disappears, and only the form subsists.*<sup>382</sup>

If the soul acquires these virtues, “it is the most noble of the existing beings; and if it acquires vices, it becomes the most degraded existence.”<sup>383</sup> Virtue ethics do not just focus on the action alone nor on its consequences, but rather place great emphasis on the motive for which an action is done. To act virtuously is not only to act properly from but to act properly for good motives or “purity of heart.”

*But the heavenly water and spirit, which are knowledge and life, make the human heart good and pure; the heart which receives a portion of the bounty of the Spirit becomes sanctified, good and pure – that is to say, the reality of man becomes purified and sanctified from the impurities of the world of nature. These natural impurities are evil qualities: anger, lust, worldliness, pride, lying, hypocrisy, fraud, self-love, etc.*<sup>384</sup>

Purity of heart is necessary to do genuinely good deeds. As we have seen, this purity of heart or good will is necessary so that acts have more than mere good appearance:

*The third virtue of humanity is the goodwill which is the basis of good actions ... for the goodwill is absolute light; it is purified and sanctified from the impurities of selfishness, of enmity, of deception. Now it may be that a man performs an action which in appearance is righteous, but which is dictated by covetousness.*<sup>385</sup>

However, to acquire purity of heart we must have “knowledge of God”<sup>386</sup> which is “the cause of spiritual progress and attraction, and through it the perception of truth, the

*exaltation of humanity, divine civilization, rightness of morals and illumination are obtained.*"<sup>387</sup> This is the foundation of the virtues we are to acquire. "If man has not this knowledge, He will be separated from God, and when this separation exists, *good actions have not complete effect.*"<sup>388</sup>

We also need the love of God:

*The light of which shines in the lamp of the hearts of those who know God; its brilliant rays illuminate the horizon and give to man the life of the Kingdom. In truth, the fruit of human existence is the love of God, for this love is the spirit of life, and the eternal bounty. If the love of God did not exist, the contingent world would be in darkness ... the hearts of men would be dead, and deprived of the sensations of existence ... spiritual union would be lost ... the light of unity would not illuminate humanity ...*<sup>389</sup>

Once we have attained knowledge and love of God, then we are ready to acquire the other virtues that distinguish us from animals. Because the virtues taught by the Manifestations, they are in themselves the rewards we attain in this world: "The rewards of this life are the virtues and perfections which adorn the reality of man."<sup>390</sup> In other words, we need not wait for the next life to reap the rewards of virtue, but may have these rewards immediately in this life:

*When they are delivered through the light of faith from the darkness of these vices, and become illuminated with the radiance of the sun of reality, and ennobled with all the virtues, they esteem this the greatest reward, and they know it to be the true paradise.*<sup>391</sup>

It should be noted that the virtue ethics promulgated in SAQ are completely incompatible with any version of relativism or ethical subjectivism. In SAQ, we are not being invited to a debate on whether or know faith, knowledge, purity and detachment are virtues worth attaining – the fact that they are is established implicitly by our universal human nature and explicitly by the Manifestation Who is not seeking our in-pu-t on these issues. On the contrary, the Manifestation proclaims these and other virtues He lists, as the virtues necessary for each and every member of humankind whether we know it or not. These values are objective, and a contrary opinion on the importance of purity, for example is simply a sign of error. Nor does SAQ accept ethical subjectivism, i.e.



the belief that we make our own individual ethical codes in our statements and actions and that a person is moral if his actions match his words. This, of course, allows some very evil actions to qualify as ‘moral’ if for no other reason than that they are consistent with a statement of plans. Consistency and sincerity are not sufficient to make an action moral. The ethics of SAQ are, on the contrary, objective, not subjective ethics – an individual’s personal views about these virtues are basically irrelevant as to their necessity.

## 59. Progress

The concept of progress is foundational to SAQ’s philosophical anthropology, ontology and onto-theology. In fact, without the concept of progress, the very rationale for the appearance of successive Manifestations, and with it, the rationale for the Bahá’í revelation would vanish: “at the time of the appearance of each Manifestation of God extraordinary progress has occurred in the world of minds, thoughts and spirits.”<sup>392</sup> The whole purpose of consecutive Manifestations is to ensure that humankind makes progress in “material, human and spiritual”<sup>393</sup> education and to help us achieve this goal, “we need an educator who will be at the same time a material, human and spiritual educator.”<sup>394</sup> At this point the onto-theological dimensions of SAQ’s teachings on progress become clear in respect to the need for an “educator [who] must be *unquestionably and indubitably perfect in all respects and distinguished above all men.*”<sup>395</sup> Without these supra-human perfections He would be subject to all the same weaknesses as other humans and would lack the ability to carry out His mission.

According to SAQ, material education:

*is concerned with the progress and development of the body, through gaining its sustenance, its material comfort and ease. This education is common to animals and man.*<sup>396</sup>

Human education:

*signifies civilization and progress – that is to say, government, administration, charitable works, trades, arts and handicrafts, sciences, great inventions and discoveries and elaborate institutions, which are the*

*activities essential to man as distinguished from the animal.*<sup>397</sup>

Human education includes progress in:

*intelligence and thought in such a way that they may attain complete development, so that knowledge and science may increase, and the reality of things, the mysteries of beings and the properties of existence may be discovered; that, day by day, instructions, inventions and institutions may be improved; and from things perceptible to the senses conclusions as to intellectual things may be deduced.*<sup>398</sup>

Spiritual education “is that of the Kingdom of God: it consists in acquiring divine perfections, and this is true education; for in this state man becomes the focus of divine blessings.”<sup>399</sup> Spiritual education also exists “so that intelligence and comprehension may penetrate the metaphysical world, and may receive benefit from the sanctifying breeze of the Holy Spirit”<sup>400</sup> and so that human beings may become mirrors reflecting the “attributes and names of God.”<sup>401</sup>

These passages make clear that 'Abdu'l-Bahá sees humankind making progress in its material, intellectual, social and governmental aspects, as well as in spiritual existence. With the arrival of the Manifestation, “universal progress appears in the world of humanity.”<sup>402</sup>

Specifically, He praises the progress made with the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh:

*In this great century which is the cycle of Bahá'u'lláh, what progress science and knowledge have made, how many secrets of existence have been discovered, how many great inventions have been brought to light and are day by day multiplying in number. Before long, material science and learning, as well as the knowledge beholders will be amazed.*<sup>403</sup>

In this passage we not only see the role of Bahá'u'lláh in human progress, but we also have specific indications that ‘progress’ means more and better knowledge vis-à-vis the secrets that have been “discovered,” more and better “great inventions,” and new and amazing developments in “material science and learning.” In other words, progress means improvement i.e. the replacement of something that is inadequate by something that

is more adequate, be it a procedure, a theory, belief or understanding, a device and so on. A similar idea is evident in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remark that if we educate populations,

*day by day knowledge and sciences would increase, the understanding would be broadened, the sensibilities developed, customs would become good, and morals normal; in one word, in all these classes of perfections there would be progress, and there would be fewer crimes.*<sup>404</sup>

It is evident here that 'progress' does not merely mean 'change' or 'difference' but rather 'improvement,' 'greater efficiency,' 'greater adequacy' of understanding and knowledge, and enhanced "sensibilities." This, of course, implies the currently controversial proposition that if there is genuine progress then the level of material, human and spiritual civilization attained by previous civilizations and cultures were not as advanced as that which will be achieved by civilization and culture in the era inaugurated by Bahá'u'lláh. In other words, 'progress' as used in SAQ involves the idea of advancement and improvement beyond a previous stage of development that is incomplete or less perfect than its successor.

An inescapable consequence of belief in progress is that some civilizations and cultures are more advanced than others, i.e. that not all are equal in their development of humankind's material, human and intellectual, and spiritual capacities. 'Abdu'l-Bahá certainly accepts this result, as is evident in His references to "barbarian[]" cultures: "These Arab tribes were in the lowest depths of savagery and barbarism, and in comparison with them the savages of Africa and wild Indians of America were as advanced as a Plato."<sup>405</sup> During the twentieth century the Nazis, Fascists and Communists showed how even materially and intellectually advanced individuals and societies could retrogress into barbarism when spiritual education is ignored or suppressed. Civilizations and cultures can remain in or retrogress into lower states.

The doctrine of progress also shapes SAQ's vision of the after-life: "man can also make progress in perfections after leaving this world."<sup>406</sup> This means that we may increase our specifically human perfections in the next life but that we cannot advance beyond our essential human nature to become God or a Manifestation.<sup>407</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá illustrates this in the following statement:

*Look at this mineral. However far it may evolve, it only evolves in its own condition; you cannot bring the crystal to a state where it can attain to sight. This is impossible. So the moon which is in the heavens, however far it might evolve, could never become a luminous sun, but in its own condition it has apogee and perigee ... It is true that coal could become a diamond, but both are in the mineral condition, and their component elements are the same.*<sup>408</sup>

Thus, progress is limited or bounded by the essential nature of things, but is not bounded within the limits established by the essential nature of a being. Here we observe a convergence between SAQ's ontological teachings regarding essence and its teachings regarding spiritual progress after death.

## 60. Human Evolution

'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings on human progress include the concept of human evolution over the last few million years. However, there is an important caveat attached to His assent. 'Abdu'l-Bahá unequivocally rejects the notion that the human species has evolved from an animal although He does not reject that throughout our long history the human species has changed accidental i.e. physical attributes and appeared in a variety of forms. Of the suggestion that humankind was initially an animal and that through progressive modifications it became human, He says, "How puerile and unfounded is this idea and this thought!"<sup>409</sup> We may have changed our actualised outward attributes but we have not changed our substance or essence.

*For man, from the beginning of the embryonic period till he reaches the degree of maturity, goes through different forms and appearances. His aspect, his form, his appearance and color change; he passes from one form to another, and from one appearance to another. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the embryonic period he is of the species of man – that is to say, an embryo of a man and not of an animal; but this is not at first apparent, but later it becomes visible and evident.*<sup>410</sup>

In other words, 'Abdu'l-Bahá accepts the notion of humankind having progressed through a long line of accidental changes in different forms just like a human embryo in the womb.

However, He disagrees with the interpretation of these accidental changes as showing that there has been essential or substantial alteration in the development of the human race. In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's view, "his [man's] species and essence undergo no change"<sup>411</sup> which is simply a particular application of His general dictum that "the essence of things does not change."<sup>412</sup> Things may appear to change their essences over time as they actualize their previously hidden potentials, but deeper philosophical reflection shows that the essence and its potentials remain stable. After all, a thing cannot change into something for which it has no potential: a gumboot will not become a live alligator. No matter what we do to and with the gumboot, and no matter how different it looks and acts, none of its transformations will involve anything for which it doesn't have potential in the first place. All its transformations are potentially present, i.e. essentially present from the first. Similarly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says

*the embryo possesses from the first all perfections, such as the spirit, the mind, the sight, the smell, the taste – in one word, all the powers – but they are not visible and become so only by degrees.*<sup>413</sup>

This is also what transpired in human history on the earth: there were beings which outwardly resembled animals but they carried within them the potentials of attaining spirit and mind, although it took a long time to actualise these potentials. "In the beginning of his formation the mind and spirit also existed, but they were hidden; later they were manifested."<sup>414</sup> Because mind and spirit were not manifested and left no outward signs of their existence does not mean that these potentials did not exist; indeed, the fact that they are now actualized proves they must have existed as unactualised potentials. After all, as explained above, a thing cannot actualise potentials it does not have. Thus, two seemingly identical species may in fact be radically different if one possesses the potentials for spirit and mind, and the other does not, even though skeletal remains alone may not allow us to distinguish them. Any attempt to draw conclusions solely on the basis of outward form alone would obviously be going beyond the available evidence. Consequently, there are good ontologically based reasons for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to say, "he [man] is the embryo of the superior species, and not of the animal; his species and essence undergo no change"<sup>415</sup> and "Man was always a distinct species, a man, not an animal."<sup>416</sup> Only our actualised attributes and appearance have changed.

As we have seen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá frames His interpretation of evolution on the philosophical analysis of reality in terms of essence, attribute, accident, potential and actuality. Such analysis, integral to the Athenian tradition, even applies to the history of the earth itself.

*the terrestrial globe from the beginning was created with all its elements, substances, minerals, atoms and organisms; but these only appeared by degrees: first the mineral, then the plant, afterward the animal, and finally man. But from the first these kinds and species existed, but were undeveloped in the terrestrial globe, and then appeared only gradually.*<sup>417</sup>

In other words, “from the beginning” the earth possessed in potential “all its elements, substances, minerals, atoms and organisms.” They were all potentially present and gradually became actualised. However, each of these kinds of things and species existed “from the first” and, therefore, did not require that one kind or essence be transformed into another. Indeed, that is impossible. Anything that exists on earth can exist only because the potential for its development was there in the first place. If there were no potential, how could it develop? How could a gumboot become a live alligator?

'Abdu'l-Bahá's argument is an inevitable consequence of the explanatory framework of the Athenian tradition in philosophy according to which “the essence of things does not change.”<sup>418</sup> Each species – a word He uses to refer to different specific kinds of plants or animals as well as humans – has its own unique essence and the inherent hidden potentials which will be actualized or externalised under different conditions. Hence differences may arise as several instantiations of an essence actualise different attributes under different circumstances; outwardly, some of these differences may be dramatic. Nonetheless, they are variant actualisations of the same essence. If, for example, species A gives rise to species B, then the potential for creating species B was already in species A. Therefore, from the point of view of essences and potentials, they are still one kind or essence or species, although they actualise or manifest vastly different potentials. There has been no change in the essence per se but there have been changes insofar as different potentials have been actualized and externalised.

## 61. SAQ and Science

There is no question that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's views on human evolution are in conflict with current scientific thought in regards to the origins and history of humankind. However, this does not necessarily undermine Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that science and religion should be in harmony unless one adopts the view that religion must uncritically agree with science on all its pronouncements at all times. Logically this is untenable for the simple reason that science itself changes its views – sometime profoundly – and no text, revealed or not, can adopt all the successive scientific beliefs on a given subject without falling into self-contradiction and, thereby, ceasing to be useful as a guide.<sup>419</sup>

Nor does SAQ lend itself to the suggestion that religion and science are non-overlapping magisterial (NOMA) in which each has its own specific area of competency which cannot conflict because they deal with different topics.<sup>420</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá's critique of scientists' interpretation of the data of evolution – he does not challenge the data itself – shows that in His view, science and religion are not separate compartments hermetically sealed off from each other. Nor is there a firewall between science and His ontological statements which are, after all, statements about the nature of all reality, including that which is studied by science. This applies particularly to His proofs for the existence of God which most certainly have implications for cosmology if for no other reason than that such proofs suggest that all purely material explanations are inherently incomplete. Thus, it seems clear that SAQ exemplifies the dialogical approach to the harmony of religion and science. In the dialogical approach, both sides are aware of their own and the other's inherent strengths and limitations and engage in careful dialogue in the quest for truth; they feel free to engage in mutual critique and recognise their commonalities vis-à-vis methods (the use of reason, models, paradigms, independent investigation), and presuppositions about the nature of reality. They also concern themselves with the "limit-questions"<sup>421</sup> that science raises about the origins of the universe, its intelligibility and order, the origin and nature of natural law and appearance versus reality. These "limit questions" are of mutual interest to science and religion. From the dialogical perspective the harmony of religion and science does not mean uncritical agreement of one with the other, but of a mutual quest for a more adequate understanding of the

truth about reality. They work as partners in a process – which is what both science and religion are – rather than make score-sheets of agreements and disagreements.

## Conclusion

This survey of SAQ has covered major subjects in ontology, onto-theology, epistemology and philosophical anthropology. From this survey, we have drawn three general conclusions.

First, SAQ's ideas on these four foundational subject areas are founded on and shaped by a consistent set of philosophical ideas. In other words, SAQ is more than a random collection of thoughts on various topics; instead it exemplifies a consistent underlying philosophy vis-à-vis ontology, onto-theology, epistemology and philosophical anthropology. In these areas, SAQ lays down basic principles from which a considerable portions of SAQ (and the other Writings) may be deduced or to which they can be rationally related. Close analysis shows the seemingly unconnected parts are joined at an often implicit level by a coherent underlying philosophy.

Second, this underlying philosophy has significant connections with the philosophy of the Athenian tradition, in terms of language and terminology, concepts and use of concepts, and the development of arguments. Of the available philosophical traditions, SAQ is most consistent with the Athenian tradition, both in its early and contemporary forms. Like SAQ, this tradition analyses reality in terms of essences, substances, accidents, potentials, actualities and four-fold causality; accepts the existence of God, and emphasises humankind's special place in creation, as well as virtue ethics.

To say that the philosophy embedded in SAQ is most consistent with the Athenian tradition is not to say that SAQ (or the Writings) are limited by past versions of this tradition. As shown most decisively in the work of Whitehead and his followers, but also in the work of Marcel, de Chardin, MacIntyre and Wild, as well as the developments in neo-Thomism, the Athenian tradition is not only flexible but capable of enormous, sometimes even radical, growth in new directions. Being part of this tradition does not imprison philosophy in the past but rather provides a philosophically sound vessel with which to embark on voyages of exploration.



Third, SAQ shows that the philosophy based on the Bahá'í Writings in general and SAQ in particular, can be a coherent and systematic basis for a dialogical (including critical) relationship with other philosophical approaches, with science, as well as with various intellectual disciplines. In other words, the philosophy embedded throughout SAQ and the other Writings represents a solid foundation from which Bahá'ís may engage other systems of thought both appreciatively and critically. It is, therefore, a valuable tool for inter-faith dialogue, for teaching and for apologetics.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.

<sup>2</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVI, p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVI, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed study of this view, see Ian Kluge, "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings," *Lights of Irfán*, Vol. IV, 2003. Alastair McIntyre is a well-known example of a contemporary neo-Aristotelian. It must be emphasised that it is not necessary to be a Catholic to be a neo-Thomist, as illustrated by Mortimer Adler. We should also recall that many Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd and Suhrawardi worked in the tradition begun by Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus.

<sup>7</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*.

<sup>10</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.

<sup>11</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.

<sup>12</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.

<sup>13</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.

<sup>14</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.

<sup>15</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278. Note, too, how `Abdu'l-Bahá provides another guideline within which a Bahá'í philosophy must work when he says it is "futile to deny" that the existence of creation is an illusion compared to God's absolute, non-contingent existence.

<sup>16</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280; emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.

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- <sup>18</sup> See Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings," *Lights of Irfán*
- <sup>19</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.
- <sup>21</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 3.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.
- <sup>23</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 212-213.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 281.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>26</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>27</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 189-190.
- <sup>30</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 247; emphasis added.
- <sup>32</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 178.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 178-179; emphasis added.
- <sup>34</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130.
- <sup>35</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130.
- <sup>37</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130-131.
- <sup>38</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 131.
- <sup>39</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 131.
- <sup>40</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 131.
- <sup>41</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 249; emphasis added.
- <sup>42</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 212.
- <sup>43</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 123.
- <sup>44</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 245-246; emphasis added.
- <sup>45</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 225.
- <sup>46</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 225.
- <sup>47</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 243.
- <sup>48</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.
- <sup>49</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 178.
- <sup>50</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 129; emphasis added.
- <sup>51</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 78.
- <sup>52</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 79.
- <sup>53</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 178.
- <sup>54</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 233.
- <sup>55</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 179.

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- <sup>56</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146.
- <sup>57</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.
- <sup>58</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157-158.
- <sup>59</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 158; see also SAQ 252.
- <sup>60</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- <sup>61</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>62</sup> "Pantheism and Panentheism" by Charles Hartshorne in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, Vol. 11, p. 165-171. Both Whitehead and his follower Hartshorne are panentheists.
- <sup>63</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.
- <sup>64</sup> "Pantheism and Panentheism" by Charles Hartshorne in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, Vol. 11, p. 166.
- <sup>65</sup> See "No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it." in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 178, for further evidence on this issue.
- <sup>66</sup> *New Scientist*
- <sup>67</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 179; emphasis added. See also 100, 143, 163, 202, 208,
- <sup>68</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 178; emphasis added.
- <sup>69</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- <sup>70</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 7, 198 a, b.
- <sup>71</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V, 1, 1013 a, b.
- <sup>72</sup> John Wild, *Introduction to Realistic Philosophy*, p. 300.
- <sup>73</sup> John Wild, *Introduction to Realistic Philosophy*, p. 300.
- <sup>74</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- <sup>75</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 7, 200b.
- <sup>76</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 7, 198a.
- <sup>77</sup> John Wild, *Introduction to Realistic Philosophy*, p. 302.
- <sup>78</sup> Abraham Edel, *Aristotle and His Philosophy*, p. 62. See also W.D. Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 77 which supports Norris, Edel and Wild.
- <sup>79</sup> Henry B. Veatch, *Aristotle: A Contemporary Appreciation*, p. p. 48.
- <sup>80</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The One and the Many*, p. 200.
- <sup>81</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The One and the Many*, p. 201.
- <sup>82</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J., *The One and the Many*, p. 201.
- <sup>83</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 181; emphasis added.
- <sup>84</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 3; emphasis added.
- <sup>85</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 181.
- <sup>86</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 181.
- <sup>87</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 3.

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- <sup>88</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6; emphasis added.
- <sup>89</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6.
- <sup>90</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 89.
- <sup>91</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 89.
- <sup>92</sup> Ted Honderich, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 384.
- <sup>93</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- <sup>94</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 283.
- <sup>95</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 283.
- <sup>96</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 241.
- <sup>97</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 39.
- <sup>98</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 48.
- <sup>99</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 76.
- <sup>100</sup> Ted Honderich, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 887.
- <sup>101</sup> Ted Honderich, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 887.
- <sup>102</sup> Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 264.
- <sup>103</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 518-519.
- <sup>104</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208-209; emphasis added.
- <sup>105</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208-209.
- <sup>106</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 129.
- <sup>107</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 184.
- <sup>108</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235; emphasis added.
- <sup>109</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 283.
- <sup>110</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 295.
- <sup>111</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- <sup>112</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199; emphasis added.
- <sup>113</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196.
- <sup>114</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 195-196.
- <sup>115</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222.
- <sup>116</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 113.
- <sup>117</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 5.
- <sup>118</sup> W. Norris Clarke, S.J. *The Philosophical Approach to God*, p. 59.
- <sup>119</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196.
- <sup>120</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 197.
- <sup>121</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196.
- <sup>122</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196.
- <sup>123</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 281.
- <sup>124</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 281.
- <sup>125</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 180.

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- <sup>126</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 225.
- <sup>127</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 180.
- <sup>128</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 281.
- <sup>129</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199.
- <sup>130</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 217-218.
- <sup>131</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 151.
- <sup>132</sup> [20.15] “Surely the hour is coming— I am about to make it manifest— so that every soul may be rewarded as it strives:”
- <sup>133</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199.
- <sup>134</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199.
- <sup>135</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199.
- <sup>136</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199.
- <sup>137</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- <sup>138</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.
- <sup>139</sup> In Aristotle substance and essence are convertible terms. See Edell, *Aristotle and His Philosophy*, p. 122. See also Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 162.
- <sup>140</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- <sup>141</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146, 147, 148,
- <sup>142</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146.
- <sup>143</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- <sup>144</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- <sup>145</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146-147; emphasis added.
- <sup>146</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148; see also 147.
- <sup>147</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148; emphasis added.
- <sup>148</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 5.
- <sup>149</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 181.
- <sup>150</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 5.
- <sup>151</sup> The argument from perfection is the fourth of Aquinas’ five proofs for God in the *Summa Theologica*.
- <sup>152</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6.
- <sup>153</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130.
- <sup>154</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6.
- <sup>155</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6.
- <sup>156</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6.
- <sup>157</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6.
- <sup>158</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6.
- <sup>159</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 177.
- <sup>160</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199.

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- <sup>161</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 177.
- <sup>162</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 263-264; emphasis added.
- <sup>163</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 233.
- <sup>164</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 108.
- <sup>165</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 2.
- <sup>166</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 14.
- <sup>167</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 14.
- <sup>168</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 237.
- <sup>169</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 233.
- <sup>170</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 108.
- <sup>171</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 108.
- <sup>172</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 108.
- <sup>173</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239-240.
- <sup>174</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 113.
- <sup>175</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 113.
- <sup>176</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- <sup>177</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148-149.
- <sup>178</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 207; emphasis added.
- <sup>179</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 156.
- <sup>180</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- <sup>181</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 202.
- <sup>182</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 114.
- <sup>183</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 113.
- <sup>184</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 180; emphasis added. See also SAQ p. 282.
- <sup>185</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 173.
- <sup>186</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 207.
- <sup>187</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 4.
- <sup>188</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- <sup>189</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 202-203.
- <sup>190</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 205.
- <sup>191</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 205.
- <sup>192</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 207.
- <sup>193</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 205.
- <sup>194</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 205.
- <sup>195</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
- <sup>196</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
- <sup>197</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 230.

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- <sup>198</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 295.
- <sup>199</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- <sup>200</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- <sup>201</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 168.
- <sup>202</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222.
- <sup>203</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 114.
- <sup>204</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 152.
- <sup>205</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 145.
- <sup>206</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 154; emphasis added.
- <sup>207</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 153.
- <sup>208</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 9-10.
- <sup>209</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 154.
- <sup>210</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 152.
- <sup>211</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 116.
- <sup>212</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 230.
- <sup>213</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 230.
- <sup>214</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 230.
- <sup>215</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 154.
- <sup>216</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 153.
- <sup>217</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 151.
- <sup>218</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 154.
- <sup>219</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 152.
- <sup>220</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 218-219; emphasis added.
- <sup>221</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 154.
- <sup>222</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157-158.
- <sup>223</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 158.
- <sup>224</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 154.
- <sup>225</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 218.
- <sup>226</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- <sup>227</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- <sup>228</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.
- <sup>229</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.
- <sup>230</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222.
- <sup>231</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221; emphasis added.
- <sup>232</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.
- <sup>233</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 278.
- <sup>234</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 217-218.
- <sup>235</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 253.

- <sup>236</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 3.
- <sup>237</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>238</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221; emphasis added.
- <sup>239</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 144.
- <sup>240</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 144.
- <sup>241</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 251; see also 3, 9,
- <sup>242</sup> Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 264.
- <sup>243</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 129.
- <sup>244</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208; emphasis added.
- <sup>245</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- <sup>246</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- <sup>247</sup> See Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings," *Lights of Irfán*, Vol. Nine, 2008.
- <sup>248</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 298.
- <sup>249</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 298.
- <sup>250</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 299; emphasis added.
- <sup>251</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 64.
- <sup>252</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 145; emphasis added.
- <sup>253</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6; emphasis added.
- <sup>254</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 108.
- <sup>255</sup> Descartes, *Regulae*, Rule III.  
[www.mtsu.edu/rbombard/RB/Spinoza/cnd.html](http://www.mtsu.edu/rbombard/RB/Spinoza/cnd.html). See also *Philosophical Meditations*.
- <sup>256</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 298.
- <sup>257</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 298.
- <sup>258</sup> Meriam-Webster Dictionary, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liable](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liable)
- <sup>259</sup> See Ian Kluge, "Relativism and the Bahá'í Writings."
- <sup>260</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 9; emphasis added.
- <sup>261</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 64.
- <sup>262</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 64.
- <sup>263</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 163.
- <sup>264</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 108.
- <sup>265</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>266</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 7.
- <sup>267</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 73.
- <sup>268</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.8; italics added.
- <sup>269</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>270</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 217.



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- 271 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 7.
- 272 See Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings" (Lights of Irfán Vol. 9, 2008) and "Relativism and the Bahá'í Writings."
- 273 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- 274 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- 275 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220; emphasis added.
- 276 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- 277 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- 278 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- 279 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- 280 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- 281 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 158.
- 282 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 158.
- 283 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 158.
- 284 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146.
- 285 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- 286 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- 287 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- 288 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222.
- 289 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.
- 290 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- 291 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 250.
- 292 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 293-294; emphasis added.
- 293 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 293.
- 294 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 294.
- 295 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 209; emphasis added.
- 296 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- 297 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 253.
- 298 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 241.
- 299 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 241.
- 300 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 263.
- 301 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 156; emphasis added.
- 302 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 108.
- 303 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 229; see also 287.
- 304 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 144.
- 305 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.
- 306 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 242.
- 307 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 108.

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- <sup>308</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- <sup>309</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 242.
- <sup>310</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 228.
- <sup>311</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 229.
- <sup>312</sup> Malebranche and Leibniz are the major western philosophers associated with this doctrine; among early Muslim proponents were al-Ashari and al-Ghazali.
- <sup>313</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 209.
- <sup>314</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- <sup>315</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 218.
- <sup>316</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 218.
- <sup>317</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 171.
- <sup>318</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 171.
- <sup>319</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- <sup>320</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 172.
- <sup>321</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 172.
- <sup>322</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 172.
- <sup>323</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 172.
- <sup>324</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 173.
- <sup>325</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 173; emphasis added.
- <sup>326</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 172.
- <sup>327</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p. xxiv.
- <sup>328</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 184.
- <sup>329</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 224; emphasis added.
- <sup>330</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 119; emphasis added.
- <sup>331</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 193.
- <sup>332</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 189.
- <sup>333</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.
- <sup>334</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 118.
- <sup>335</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 119.
- <sup>336</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 223.
- <sup>337</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 223.
- <sup>338</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 229.
- <sup>339</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 229.
- <sup>340</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 229.
- <sup>341</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 240; emphasis added.
- <sup>342</sup> In the Western tradition, the second view is most closely identified with Duns Scotus, and the first with Thomas Aquinas.

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- 343 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 225.
- 344 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 225.
- 345 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 225.
- 346 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 225.
- 347 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208; emphasis added.
- 348 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 217; emphasis added.
- 349 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 120.
- 350 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 115; emphasis added.
- 351 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 118.
- 352 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 118.
- 353 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
- 354 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 200.
- 355 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 200.
- 356 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 201.
- 357 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 201.
- 358 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 201; emphasis added.
- 359 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 201.
- 360 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 212.
- 361 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 212.
- 362 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 212.
- 363 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 213.
- 364 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215.
- 365 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 214.
- 366 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 214.
- 367 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 214.
- 368 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 214-215.
- 369 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 248.
- 370 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 156.
- 371 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 249.
- 372 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 248.
- 373 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 248.
- 374 Ted Honderich, editor, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 187.
- 375 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300; emphasis added.
- 376 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215.
- 377 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215-216.
- 378 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 216.
- 379 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215-216.
- 380 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235-236; emphasis added.

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- <sup>381</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 48; emphasis added.
- <sup>382</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 47.
- <sup>383</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 144.
- <sup>384</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 92.
- <sup>385</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 302.
- <sup>386</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300.
- <sup>387</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300; emphasis added.
- <sup>388</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 238. emphasis added.
- <sup>389</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 300-301; emphasis added.
- <sup>390</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 223.
- <sup>391</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 224.
- <sup>392</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 163.
- <sup>393</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 8.
- <sup>394</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 8.
- <sup>395</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 8; emphasis added.
- <sup>396</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 8.
- <sup>397</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 8.
- <sup>398</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 9; emphasis added.
- <sup>399</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 8.
- <sup>400</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 9.
- <sup>401</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 9.
- <sup>402</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 74-75.
- <sup>403</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 64.
- <sup>404</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 272.
- <sup>405</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 19. It would be curious to know how Edward Said would respond to this and similar statements.
- <sup>406</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 237.
- <sup>407</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 230.
- <sup>408</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 233-234.
- <sup>409</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 184.
- <sup>410</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 193; see also 194.
- <sup>411</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 184.
- <sup>412</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 100.
- <sup>413</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199.
- <sup>414</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 198.
- <sup>415</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 184.
- <sup>416</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 184.
- <sup>417</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 199; emphasis added.

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<sup>418</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 100.

<sup>419</sup> For example, in the 1970’s scientific consensus was that the earth was cooling not warming. Another example would be the reversal of the view that neutrinos have no mass.

<sup>420</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, “*Nonoverlapping Magisteria*,” *Natural History*, March 1997.

<sup>421</sup> Ian G Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion*, p.24.

# Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

## Chapter 31 of Some Answered Questions

Moojan Momen

*Some Answered Questions* is a book of the answers that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave to questions put to Him by Laura Clifford Barney in the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akka in the early 1900s. The Persian and English texts of these replies were published in 1908. The Persian text was seen, corrected by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His own hand and approved by Him with the affixing of His seal. The English text has a number of problems and is currently being retranslated.

One of the questions put to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked Him for an explanation of the verse in the Bible (in the ensuing quotations from the Bible, the Authorised King James Version is given first with the Revised Standard Version in parentheses afterwards):

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. (Matt. 12:31-32: Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.)

Since this is a quotation from Christian scripture it is first necessary to put it into its Christian context and to see what Christian theologians and commentators on the Bible have said about it. The verse comes in the context of a story about a man ‘possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb’ (22: a blind and dumb

demoniac) who was brought to Jesus and healed. The people were amazed, saying 'Is this not the son of David' (23: 'Can this be the Son of David?') — in other words: can this be the Messiah who was to spring from the loins of David? But the Pharisees, no doubt fearing for their station and their following, said: 'This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils' (24: It is only by Be-el'zebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons) — and therefore he is not the son of David. Beelzebub was the ringleader of the apostasy from God and rebellion against him. But Jesus refuted the Pharisees through logic, saying 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand' (25: Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand) so why would Satan or Beelzebub cast out devils — why would he act against himself? (26: 'and if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?'). And if he is to be accused of casting out demons through Beelzebub, then what about those from among the Jews who also cast out demons (and about whom it was said that they did this through the Spirit of God)? He thus condemns them for making their judgments not out of justice but out of prejudice. He then goes on to point out that this is in fact a proof of His mission:

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man and then he will spoil his house? He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. (28-30: But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.)

Then there comes the verses that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked to comment upon and, following these, there are verses that expand upon this point:

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how

can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (33-37: 'Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! how can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the Day of Judgment men will render account for every careless word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.')

The following is an abbreviated version of the commentary of Matthew Henry (1662-1714), an English non-conformist clergyman in his *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (1708-1710) on this verse.<sup>1</sup> He states that this verse gives the 'gracious assurance of the pardon of all sin upon gospel terms', that 'the greatness of sin shall be no bar to our acceptance with God, if we truly repent and believe the gospel.' The only exception to this is '*the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, which is here declared to be the only unpardonable sin.' In explaining this, he harks back to a few verses earlier: '*But Jesus knew their thoughts*, (v. 25). It is not all speaking against the person or essence of the Holy Ghost, or some of his more private operations, or merely the resisting of his internal working in the sinner himself, that is here meant; for *who then should be saved?*' Further on he says: 'this blasphemy is excepted, not for any defect of mercy in God or merit in Christ, but because it inevitably leaves the sinner in infidelity and impenitency.' He goes on to say that 'those who blasphemed Christ when he was here upon earth, and called him a Winebibber, a Deceiver, a Blasphemer, and the like, they had some colour of excuse, because of the meanness of his appearance, and the prejudices of the nation against him; and the proof of his divine mission was not perfected till after his ascension; and therefore, upon their repentance, they shall be pardoned'.



Matthew Henry then goes on to tie in the 'blasphemy against the Holy Ghost' with the Pentecostal appearance of the Holy Spirit saying that although during the ministry of Jesus some may have been confused about His station, all reasonable doubt was removed with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:

But if, when the Holy Ghost is given, in his inward gifts of revelation, speaking with tongues, and the like, such as were the distributions of the Spirit among the apostles, if they continue to blaspheme the Spirit likewise, as an evil spirit, there is no hope of them that they will ever be brought to believe in Christ.

John Wesley gives a much shorter and more direct explanation:

*The blasphemy against the Spirit:* How much stir has been made about this? How many sermons, yea, volumes, have been written concerning it? And yet there is nothing plainer in all of the Bible. It is neither more nor less than the ascribing those miracles to the power of the devil, which Christ wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Whosoever speaketh against the Son of man: In any other respects: It shall be forgiven him – Upon his true repentance: But whosoever speaketh thus against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world nor in the world to come – This was a proverbial expression among the Jews, for a thing that would never be done. It here means farther, He shall not escape the punishment of it, either in this world, or in the world to come. The judgment of God shall overtake him, both here and hereafter.<sup>2</sup>

The equivalent to Beelzebub (Beelzebul) and Lucifer in the Apocrypha of the Bible,<sup>3</sup> the personification of rebellion against God, is, in the Qur'an, Iblis, the angel who is ordered to bow down before Adam and refuses and is therefore cast out of heaven and becomes Satan. It is thus pride and disobedience that cause his fall:

It is We who created you and gave you shape; then We bade the angels bow down to Adam, and they bowed down; not so Iblis; he refused to be of those who bow down. (God) said: 'what prevented thee from bowing down when I commanded thee?' He said: 'I am better

than he: thou didst create me from fire and him from clay.’ (God) said: ‘Get thee down from this: it is not for thee to be arrogant here: get out, for thou art of the meanest (of creatures).’<sup>4</sup>

In Shi’i Islam, a parallel with ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ can be seen in the concept of those such as Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and Mu’awiya who opposed the Imams as successors to the Prophet Muhammad and prevented them from gaining their rightful place. In one of his orations which have been compiled in the *Nahj al-Balaghah*, ‘Ali refers to the fact that Abu Bakr knowingly and deliberately went against the expressed wish of Muhammad when he took over the leadership of Islam (the caliphate) instead of giving this to ‘Ali whom Muhammad had named: ‘By God the son of Abu Quhafah [Abu Bakr] dressed himself with it [the caliphate] and he certainly knew that my position in relation to it was the same as the position of the axis in relation to the hand-mill. The flood water flows down from me and the bird cannot fly up to me.’<sup>5</sup>

Also related to this theme are ‘Ali’s words in another oration, when he reminds his followers of events at the Battle of Siffin and of how his enemy Mu’awiyah, at the battle of Siffin, had used the outward appearance of piety to advance his inner designs of enmity and his desire to grasp the leadership:

When they had raised the Qur’an by way of deceit, craft, artifice and cheat, did you not say: ‘They are our brothers and our comrades in accepting Islam. They want us to cease fighting, and ask for protection through the Book of Allah, the Glorified. Our opinion is to agree with them and to end their troubles.’ Then I said to you, ‘In this affair the outward appearance of it is faith but the inner reality is enmity. Its beginning is pity and the end is repentance. Consequently you should stick to your position, and remain steadfast on your path. You should press your teeth (to put all your might) in jihad and should not pay heed to the shouts of the shouter. If he is answered he would mislead, but if he is left (unanswered) he will be disgraced.’<sup>6</sup>

Let us now proceed to consider what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says about this verse from St Matthew’s Gospel. He states that the Manifestations of God have two aspects – one is the place of manifestation (i.e. the physical body of the Manifestation) which can be compared to the globe of the sun, and the other

the 'resplendency' of the Manifestation (the divine qualities of the Manifestations), which are like the heat and light coming from the sun. It is the latter which is the defining characteristic of the Manifestation; if it were not present then that individual would not be the Manifestation. This appearance of divine qualities in the person of the Manifestation is the appearance of the Holy Spirit in them.<sup>7</sup>

If a person, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, remains remote from the Manifestation, this can be corrected. The person did not recognize the appearance of divine attributes in the Manifestation but may be awakened from this state. If however, a person hates the divine attributes themselves, in other words hates the Holy Spirit, then this is a state that has no remedy and cannot be forgiven; this person cannot be awakened from this state because they are already fully aware that the Manifestation is the possessor of divine attributes but they hate those attributes and thus must remain far from the Manifestation. The Manifestations dispense the bounties of God through the Holy Spirit that appear in them, not through their personality, therefore if a person hates the Holy Spirit, that person cannot receive the bounties of God, remains deprived and thus remains beyond the reach of the grace and forgiveness of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out that many who were enemies of the Manifestations of God later recognized their error and were forgiven; they had been enemies of the light-holder and remained distant but once they realised that their enemy was in fact the place of the manifestation of light, they came close, their enmity was transformed into love and they were forgiven. However, those whose enmity is towards the light itself must ever remain remote and for this condition there is no remedy, no reunion and no forgiveness.<sup>8</sup>

This passage speaks of people who are utterly lost and have put themselves beyond the reach of God's grace and forgiveness, and the Bahá'í scriptures also condemn in the strongest possible terms those who are named covenant-breakers. Indeed some of the expressions used in this passage about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit are very similar to language used regarding covenant-breakers; for example, in this Bible passage about blasphemy and the commentary upon it, it is made clear that some are ignorant of the fact that they are attacking the Holy Spirit and these are not to be considered as those who 'blaspheme against the Holy Spirit'. It is only those who are aware and knowingly do this that are considered

condemned. The same is stated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about covenant-breakers:

*Thus it is seen that no means for dissension hath been left, but carnal desires are the cause of difference as it is the case with the violators. These do not doubt the validity of the Covenant but selfish motives have dragged them to this condition. It is not that they do not know what they do – they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition.<sup>9</sup>*

Thus it is tempting to equate this passage about ‘Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ with these condemnations of the covenant-breakers. There exist however a number of points that show that there may some distinction to be made.

1. In this passage it is stated that those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. The Kitáb-i Aqdas states however that the greatest covenant-breaker of the time of Bahá’u’lláh, Mírzá Yahyá, can be forgiven (v. 184). This difference can be explained however by pointing out that this verse of the Kitáb-i Aqdas makes forgiveness conditional upon the repentance of Mírzá Yahyá: ‘Return unto God, humble, submissive and lowly.’ Thus it could be said that if Mírzá Yahyá repented and returned to God, he was no longer in a state of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and thus no longer in that state where God’s grace and forgiveness could not reach him.

2. The passages about covenant-breaking in the Bahá’í scriptures assign a number of motives to those who have broken the Covenant: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that they ‘have an evil intention and are thinking of leadership and of forming a party’<sup>10</sup> or are ‘deprived of the Spirit of God and are lost in passion and are seeking leadership.’<sup>11</sup> The passage regarding ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ does not ascribe any motives to those who are in this position but rather posits a metaphysical state – an evil tree bringing forth evil fruit is the description given in the following verse (v. 33). It could however be argued that the verses preceding those mentioning ‘blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’ state that the crowd were wondering whether Jesus could be the Messiah as a result of the miracle they had observed and it was in order to counter this and to preserve their own leadership that the Pharisees made the accusation that Jesus had worked the miracle through Beelzebub and not by Divine power. Thus the Gospel passage

can be stated to ascribe motives of 'seeking leadership' to this phenomenon in the same way as the above statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá do.

3. In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's last Tablet to America in which there is a long discourse on covenant-breaking and 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes a number of verses from the Gospels as referring to this phenomenon, this passage is not mentioned.<sup>12</sup>

4. There are certain individuals who are described in apocalyptic terms as the 'Anti-Christ'. Since it is used in the Bahá'í authoritative texts as a generic term applying even to individuals in relation to the Bábí and Bahá'í religions, its meaning must be opposition to Holy Spirit which is equally in Christ, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. It would thus appear to be synonymous with those who commit 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit'. However, among those given this designation is Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, the Prime Minister of Muhammad Shah who is described as the Anti-Christ of the Bábí dispensation.<sup>13</sup> He is not however regarded as a covenant-breaker. Similarly the passage in St Matthew's Gospel that refers to 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit' is written in relation certain Pharisees and their opposition to Jesus and these would not be considered covenant-breakers in the Bahá'í usage of that word.

Thus it would seem that the two categories of those who 'blaspheme against the Holy Spirit' and covenant-breakers may not be wholly congruous. Certainly it would appear that there are some who fit in the first category who do not fit into the second category – but it does seem likely that all who fit into the second category are included in the first category – that is to say, all covenant-breakers fit into the category of those who 'blaspheme against the Holy Spirit'. It is of some interest to note that in discussions of covenant-breaking, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to Judas Iscariot<sup>14</sup> and to 'Umar.<sup>15</sup>

## Definition and Classification of Covenant-breakers

The Universal House of Justice has described covenant-breaker thus:

When a person declares his acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God he becomes a party to the Covenant and accepts the totality of His Revelation. If he then turns round and attacks Bahá'u'lláh or the Central Institution of the Faith he violates the

Covenant. If this happens every effort is made to help that person to see the illogicality and error of his actions, but if he persists he must, in accordance with the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, be shunned as a Covenant-breaker.<sup>16</sup>

This is not however a comprehensive definition since some who have been declared covenant-breakers do not fall within this definition. This point may be further developed by considering who are and are not in this category. Those who are not Bahá'ís and oppose the Bahá'í Faith or its head (such as many Muslim and Christian religious leaders) are not usually considered Covenant-breakers; those who leave the Bahá'í Faith because they have lost faith are similarly not considered Covenant-breakers; and those who commit infractions of Bahá'í law may lose their administrative rights, but are not considered Covenant-breakers.

In considering those who are considered covenant-breakers, it is useful to create a classification of these:

1. Leadership claimants: Those who raised a claim to leadership of the Bahá'í community against the duly appointed and authorised head of the Faith. These include Mírzá Yahyá who is considered to have violated the clear instructions in the writings of the Báb not to oppose anyone who claimed to be the next Manifestation of God;<sup>17</sup> Mírzá Muhammad 'Alí who opposed the authority of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and even plotted to have 'Abdu'l-Bahá imprisoned or killed;<sup>18</sup> and Charles Mason Remey who claimed the Guardianship of the Bahá'í Faith after the death of Shoghi Effendi.<sup>19</sup>

2. Dissidence: This group consists of those who accept the legitimacy of the head of the Bahá'í Faith religion, but oppose his policies and actions. This group consists mostly of opponents of the Bahá'í administration such as Ruth White, who was opposed to the concept of the Bahá'í administration and tried to prove that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament was a forgery as a way of discrediting it; and Ahmad Sohrab, who opposed the concept and setting up of the Bahá'í administration in the United States. He and his associate Julie Chanler set up the New History Society as a way of spreading the Bahá'í teachings but refused to allow it to be under the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States or the Local Spiritual Assembly of New York, where it was based.

3. Disobedience: Those who disobeyed the authorized head of the Bahá'í Faith in a direct instruction from him have sometimes been regarded as covenant-breakers and been expelled. Of course it could be argued that most Bahá'ís have at one time or another failed to obey one or other of the laws of the Bahá'í Faith, which are the instructions of the head of the religion. It has however been disobedience to the administrative injunctions directed by the head of the Bahá'í Faith towards particular individuals or groups of people that have caused people to be expelled. Thus for example, Amínú'lláh Faríd was expelled when he left Haifa for Europe and North America against the instructions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who wanted to protect the Western Bahá'ís from him. Similarly in the years after World War II, Shoghi Effendi felt that the arrival of large numbers of Iranian students in the United States was swamping the American Bahá'í community and damaging its organic growth.

4. Association: Individuals associating with covenant-breakers can, if they do not cease doing so after being warned, be declared covenant-breakers. This may be considered part of the previous category, in that successive heads of the Bahá'í Faith have always instructed Bahá'ís to avoid contact with covenant-breakers and thus association with known covenant-breakers could be considered an act of disobedience to the head of the Faith. The reasoning given by the head of the Faith in this instance is however different. 'Abdu'l-Bahá likens covenant-breaking to a contagious spiritual disease and states that this is why association with covenant-breakers is forbidden. In his last tablet to the Bahá'ís of America he wrote:

*In short, the point is this: 'Abdu'l-Bahá is extremely kind, but when the disease is leprosy, what am I to do? Just as in bodily diseases we must prevent intermingling and infection and put into effect sanitary laws – because the infectious physical diseases uproot the foundation of humanity; likewise one must protect and safeguard the blessed souls from the breaths and fatal spiritual diseases; otherwise violation, like the plague, will become a contagion and all will perish. In the early days, after the Ascension of the Blessed Beauty, the centre of violation was alone; little by little the infection spread; and this was due to companionship and association.<sup>20</sup>*

Similarly Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, warns that the Bahá'ís of the West do not sufficiently appreciate the dangers of contact with covenant-breakers:

... It is a pity that some of the Western friends, with remarkable naivete, do not grasp the fact that there is absolutely nothing keeping those who have broken the Covenant, whether Bahá'u'lláh's or the Master's, out of the Cause of God except their own inner spiritually sick condition. If they were sound, instead of diseased, and wanted to enter the service of our Faith, they would apply direct to the Guardian, and he would be able to adjudge of their sincerity and, if sincere, would welcome them into the ranks of the faithful as he did with Sydney Sprague. Unfortunately a man who is ill is not made well just by asserting there is nothing wrong with him! Facts, actual states, are what count. Probably no group of people in the world have softer tongues, or proclaim more loudly their innocence, than those who in their heart of hearts, and by their every act, are enemies of the Centre of the Covenant. The Master well knew this, and that is why He said we must shun their company, but pray for them. If you put a leper in a room with healthy people, he cannot catch their health; on the contrary they are very likely to catch his horrible ailment.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family were declared covenant-breakers because of their continued association with other members of the family who had previously been declared covenant-breakers, for example three of the daughters of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Rúhá, Túbá and Munavvar Khánum, as well as several of their children.

5. Children of Covenant-Breakers. This category may be considered a sub-section of the above category, but again, some different considerations apply, in that, although the same considerations of contagion apply, the association of children with their parents is not a voluntary one. Despite this, the children of covenant-breakers are regarded as covenant-breakers. The reason is given in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

The friends are sometimes surprisingly naive and superficial in their approach to the subject of Covenant-breakers. They do not seem to understand



that the descendants of Azal, with their mother's milk, drank hatred of Bahá'u'lláh, just as the descendants of Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí and his relatives have imbibed from babyhood a false concept of the Master. It takes practically a miracle to overcome this lifelong habit of wrong thought.<sup>22</sup>

Thus for example, Parvine Afnan Shahid, the daughter of the marriage between two grand-children of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was determined by the Universal House of Justice to be a covenant-breaker in 1996, since by virtue of her continued association with this lady, another Bahá'í was declared a covenant-breaker.<sup>23</sup>

## Classification of Those who Blaspheme against the Holy Spirit

It is then possible to create a classification of those who may be regarded as having blasphemed against the Holy Spirit:

1. Covenant-Breakers according to the above classification.

2. Apostasy. Although most individuals who leave the Bahá'í community because of loss of belief are not considered any differently from those who have never been Bahá'ís, there have been a small number of persons who left the community and then began to attack it maliciously and vehemently and who are referred to in terms identical to those he used of the Covenant-breakers. Indeed, this goes back to the time of the Báb, who characterised three of his followers (Mullá Javád Baraghání, Mullá 'Abdu'l-'Alí Hirátí, and Mírzá Ibráhím Shírízí), who out of jealousy towards the station of Mulla Husayn Bushru'i, left the Bábí community, joined with the Báb's enemy, the Shaykhí leader Mírzá Muhammad Karim Khan Kirmani. According to Nabíl, these three persons were compared in the Báb's writing with Sámirí who, according to Islamic tradition, produced the calf for the Israelites to worship, and with Jibt and Tághút, two idol worshipped by Quraysh<sup>24</sup> B language very similar to that later used by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with regard to the Covenant-breakers.<sup>25</sup>

An apostate from the time of Shoghi Effendi was Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Husayn Taftí, known as Áváríh (1290/1873-1953), who wrote a book called Kashfu'l-Hiyal (The Uncovering of

Trickery) in three volumes attacking the Bahá'í Faith and its central figures in vitriolic and intemperate language. Shoghi Effendi urged the Bahá'ís of Iran to avoid all contact with Ávárih<sup>26</sup> and, in one of his letters to the Bahá'ís of Iran, Shoghi Effendi referred to Ávárih as a dead body which the surging ocean of the Cause of God had cast upon its shores<sup>27</sup>, all very reminiscent of the actions taken and words used against covenant-breakers by both Shoghi Effendi and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Indeed, in one of his writings, Shoghi Effendi groups together 'the rejected Ávárih' with the 'the jealous covenant-breaker [Mírzá Muhammad 'Ali], the thankless Yahyá [Azal], and Karím the transgressor [Khan Kirmani]'.<sup>28</sup> Shoghi Effendi also describes Ávárih as Satan (Iblis), which is the same term used by Bahá'u'lláh ('Satan, in the garb of man') about covenant-breakers.<sup>29</sup>

3. Religious Leaders and others who knowingly oppose the Bahá'í Faith. It is clear from the Kitáb-i-Íqán that not all religious leaders who oppose the Bahá'í Faith are in this category since some are stated to have opposed out of ignorance:

Leaders of religion, in every age, have hindered their people from attaining the shores of eternal salvation, inasmuch as they held the reins of authority in their mighty grasp. Some for the lust of leadership, others through want of knowledge and understanding, have been the cause of the deprivation of the people. By their sanction and authority, every Prophet of God hath drunk from the chalice of sacrifice, and winged His flight unto the heights of glory.<sup>30</sup>

Those who recognize the truth of the new religion and still oppose because of 'lust of leadership', are however in this category. The clearest example of this is Hájí Mírzá Áqásí who is identified as the Anti-Christ of the Bábí religion. There are however other clerics who are stigmatized by Bahá'u'lláh with such labels as *Dhi'b* (the wolf, Shaykh Muhammad Báqir Najafí of Isfahan) and *Raqshá* (the she-serpent, Mír Muhammad Husayn Imám-Jum'ih of Isfahan), while others are condemned in his writings, such as Muhammad Karím Khán Kirmání. Interestingly, Ávárih, who was named in the previous category is also named *Raqshá* by Shoghi Effendi.<sup>31</sup>

## Causes of Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

We may also try to assess the causes of this phenomenon. Why would anyone knowingly attack what they know to be good? The following suggested causes are not intended to be exclusive. Most individual cases contain elements of more than one. The following are some preliminary ideas on this:

1. Desire for leadership of the Bahá'í community and a jealousy of the position of power and leadership of the head of the religion. Such motives are hinted at repeatedly in the authoritative Bahá'í texts; thus 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

*Thus it is seen that the ocean of the Covenant hath surged and surged until it hath thrown out the dead bodies – souls that are deprived of the Spirit of God and are lost in passion and self and are seeking leadership.*<sup>32</sup>

The importance of this matter is pointed out by the Universal House of Justice:

The seriousness of Covenant-breaking is that it strikes at the very centre and foundation of the unity of mankind. If God were to allow the instrument to be divided and impaired, how then would His purpose be achieved?<sup>33</sup>

This applies mainly of course to those in category 1 of the classification of Covenant-Breaking given above – those who contended directly for leadership, such Mírzá Muhammad 'Alí and Charles Mason Remey.

2. Rebelliousness and pride. Where there is no attempt to gain the leadership of the Bahá'í Faith, the actions of rebelling and opposing the head of the Bahá'í Faith appear to derive mainly from a refusal to submit to the leadership of the head of the religion out of pride or stubbornness. Thus for example, Ahmad Sohrab, although to some extent exhibiting a desire for leadership, was eventually expelled because of his refusal to submit to the Bahá'í administration that Shoghi Effendi was putting in place. Shoghi Effendi writes:

However, since the Master's Will was read, and the administrative order, under the Guardianship, began to be developed, he [Ahmad Sohrab] became cognizant of the fact that his personal ambition for leadership

would have to be subordinated to some degree of supervision; that he would have to obey the National and local assemblies – just like every other Bahá'í, and could not be free to teach wholly independent of any advice or supervision. This was the beginning of the defection which in the end took him outside the pale of the Faith: he refused not to be handled always as an exception, a privileged exception. In fact, if we keenly analyse it, it is almost invariably the soaring ambition and deep self-love of people that has led them to leave the Faith.<sup>34</sup>

3. Contempt born of closeness. In many of the members of the family of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá who were expelled, a certain degree of contempt for the head of the religion can be seen. Simply put, the family of Bahá'u'lláh (except Bahiyyih Khánum), were unable to transfer the respect that they had for Bahá'u'lláh to the new head of the religion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Similarly, the family of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was unwilling or unable to transfer the respect they had for 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the new head of the religion Shoghi Effendi. Thus in the case of Shoghi Effendi, they had known the head of the religion as a boy and considered that they knew his foibles and weaknesses; they did not see why they, who were also members of the "Holy Family" should be ordered around by this youngster. Indeed they considered it their duty to give Shoghi Effendi the benefit of their experience and advice. In the case of Mírzá Muhammad 'Alí's family, they thought of the leadership of the Bahá'í Faith as a family affair in which they had a share and they were annoyed with 'Abdu'l-Bahá for depriving them of what they considered their rightful claim to both the leadership and of income.

This can be most clearly seen in the case of the actions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's family. While 'Abdu'l-Bahá was alive, none of them would have ever considered any major life decision (marriage, a major journey, or the name of a child) without seeking 'Abdu'l-Bahá's advice, approval and blessing. They were unable to transfer this respect to Shoghi Effendi. Even if we leave aside the fact that Shoghi Effendi was the head of the Bahá'í faith, as eldest grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he was the head of the family and the customs of a traditional Middle Eastern family would demand that the head of the family be consulted about major life decisions and his blessing obtained. So when Shoghi Effendi's sister Ruhangiz married Nayyir Afnan while Shoghi Effendi was absent and without informing

him, and his other sister and cousin married two brothers of Nayyir Afnan (again without seeking his approval), and his brother Husayn Rabbani married a German girl without consulting him and Ruhi Afnan went off on a trip to America without his approval all of these omissions showed contempt for his headship and authority both in the family and in the Bahá'í Faith; they were deliberate and very open snubs to Shoghi Effendi which would have been evident to all of the members of the family and even to the people of Haifa and beyond. When Munib Shahid married the grand-daughter of an avowed enemy of the Bahá'í Faith, Al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem, in a Muslim ceremony, at a time when Shoghi Effendi was striving to establish the independence of the Bahá'í Faith from Islam, this was not only a personal snub to Shoghi Effendi who was not consulted but also to what he was striving to achieve for the Bahá'í Faith.

4. Desire to maintain leadership. Those clerics who opposed the Bahá'í Faith did so out of a fear for their position in society and their wealth. This includes Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, who as well as being Prime Minister, was the spiritual guide of Muhammad Shah. It also applies to the other clerics mentioned. It also brings us back to the quotation from the Gospel of St Matthew with which we started this paper, because of course the people to whom these words of Christ about 'blasphemy against the Holy Spirit were directed were the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders who feared for their position and wealth if the people thought that Jesus really was the Messiah, son of David.

## Conclusions

In summary, a number of conclusions can thus be drawn about this phenomenon of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit:

1. This phenomenon seen in all religions. In this paper, we have seen that it is present in both Christianity and the Bahá'í faith. However, from a Bahá'í perspective, the phenomenon of covenant-breaking has also occurred in Islam with the usurpation of 'Ali's succession to the prophet Muhammad and the opposition of the Umayyad dynasty to the Imams. And so it would appear to be a general phenomenon across all religions

2. Consists of knowing opposition to the truth. The phenomenon consists of knowingly opposing and attacking the source of divine guidance.

3. Can be external to the religion. Some of the religious leaders of the previous religious dispensations who, knowing the new religion to be the truth nevertheless oppose it, are considered to be in this category.

4. Can be internal to the religion. This is opposition to the head of the Bahá'í Faith or founder of the religion or disobedience of direct instructions of that leader.

5. The motives of those engaged in this activity, insofar as they can be ascertained are those of jealousy and pride

6. Since making a judgement as to who is to be classed as having blasphemed against the Holy Spirit involves an assessment of the inner spiritual state of a person, only divinely inspired leadership can make such a judgement.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, London: Cassell's, 1876. See [www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.i\\_1.xiii.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.i_1.xiii.html) (accessed 22 May 2008)
- <sup>2</sup> [www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?com=wes&b=40&c=12](http://www.christnotes.org/commentary.php?com=wes&b=40&c=12) (accessed 22 June 2008)
- <sup>3</sup> The Testament of Solomon (trans. F. C. Conybeare) verse 26; see [www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/testamen.htm](http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/testamen.htm) (accessed 4 September 2008)
- <sup>4</sup> Qur'an 7:11-13
- <sup>5</sup> Imam 'Ali, Khut@bah ash-Shiqshiqiyah, *Nahj al-Balaghah*. The allusion to flood water is said to denote knowledge, while it is stated that Abu Bakr had towards the end of his life likened himself to a bird.
- <sup>6</sup> Imam 'Ali, Sermon 121, *Nahj al-Balaghah*
- <sup>7</sup> *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 127
- <sup>8</sup> *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 127-8
- <sup>9</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 215-6
- <sup>10</sup> *The Covenant Of Bahá'u'lláh* (Manchester: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950), p. 154
- <sup>11</sup> *Star of the West*, vol. 10, no. 14 (23 Nov. 1919), p. 265

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- <sup>12</sup> *Bahá'í World Faith* (2nd edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), pp. 429-38 (see esp. pp. 431-2)
- <sup>13</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (rev. edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 164; Shoghi Effendi, *High Endeavors: Messages to Alaska* ([Anchorage]: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Alaska, 1976), p. 69
- <sup>14</sup> *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 432
- <sup>15</sup> In particular 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the words of 'Umar: 'the Book of God is enough for us' which blocked the desire of the Prophet Muhammad on his death-bed to write down the appointment of his successor. See Lawḥ-i Hizár Baytí, Muntakhabátí az Mak t b-i Hadrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bah , vol. 4 (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2000), pp. 263-5
- <sup>16</sup> Letter to an individual Bahá'í dated 23 March 1975, quoted in *The Power of the Covenant*, Part Two (Thornhill, Ontario: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 1987), pp. 7-8
- <sup>17</sup> This statement is in the Persian Bayan, Vahid 6, chap. 8
- <sup>18</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 249, 269-271
- <sup>19</sup> The most comprehensive and authoritative statement of the Bahá'í position on Mason Remey is contained in a memorandum 'Mason Remey and Those Who Followed Him' issued with a letter from the Universal House of Justice to all national assemblies, 31 January 1997. See also Adib Taherzadeh, *Child of the Covenant* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), pp. 369-71
- <sup>20</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 438. Shoghi Effendi later had to state that this analogy should not be taken too far: '... Covenant Breaking is truly a Spiritual disease, and the whole view-point and attitude of a Covenant Breaker is so poisonous that the Master likened it to leprosy, and warned the friends to breathe the same air was dangerous. This should not be taken literally; He meant when you are close enough to breathe the same air you are close enough to contact their corrupting influence. Your sister should never imagine she, loyal and devoted, has become a "carrier".' (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, 29 July 1946 in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 183)
- <sup>21</sup> From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, April 11, 1949; in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File* (compiled by Helen Hornby, 2nd edn., New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 187
- <sup>22</sup> From a letter dated 18 August 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly in the compilation from the Universal House of Justice: 'Non-Association with Covenant-breakers', see [bahai-library.com/unpubl.compilations/covenant-breakers.html](http://bahai-library.com/unpubl.compilations/covenant-breakers.html) (accessed 1 July 2008)

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- <sup>23</sup> Letter of Universal House of Justice to National Spiritual Assembly of New Zealand, 12 December 1996; Letter of National Spiritual Assembly of the New Zealand to Bahá'ís of New Zealand, 16 December, 1996.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 162
- <sup>25</sup> *Star of the West*, vol. 13 (1922), pp. 20-22; *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 429-38 (esp. p. 431); Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), p. 211
- <sup>26</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqí'at 1922-1948* (Tehran: Mu'assih Millí Matbú'át Amrí, 130 B.E./1973), p. 13
- <sup>27</sup> Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 295
- <sup>28</sup> *Ma'idih Asmani* (9 vols., Tehran: Mu'assih Millí Matbú'át Amrí. 121-129 B.E./1964-1972), vol. 6, p. 64; *Tawqí'at 1927-1939* (Tehran: Mu'assih Millí Matbú'át Amri. 129 B.E./1972), p. 186
- <sup>29</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Tawqí'at 1927-1939*, p. 188; cf. Bahá'u'lláh quoted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 430
- <sup>30</sup> Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Íqán, the Book of Certitude* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2nd edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 15
- <sup>31</sup> *Tawqí'at 1927-1939*, p. 188
- <sup>32</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 210
- <sup>33</sup> Letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated 23 March 1975, to an individual; in *Developing Distinctive Bahá'í Communities* (Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 1968), section 5.14; see [bahai-library.com/?file=nsa\\_developing\\_distinctive\\_communities.html&chapter=1#5.1](http://bahai-library.com/?file=nsa_developing_distinctive_communities.html&chapter=1#5.1) (accessed 4 September 2008).
- <sup>34</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria* (2 vols., Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982), vol. 1, p. 134



# Man Is Man

## 'Abdul-Bahá on Human Evolution

Ramin Neshati

### Overview

The essential harmony of science and religion is an underpinning belief of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, few are the established world religions whose sacred literature and teachings so vigorously promote unbiased and unfettered scientific inquiry as does the Bahá'í Faith. For Bahá'ís, the absence of this foundational principle reduces religion to a mere set of superstitions, bankrupt beliefs and ruinous rituals. Bahá'í teachings laud science and reason as indispensable complements to faith and spirituality, and Bahá'ís believe that religion must at all times conform to science and reason.<sup>2</sup> Intelligence and erudition gained through scientific pursuits cannot, therefore, be discordant with mystical proclivity and the pursuit of spirituality. 'Abdul-Bahá, the eldest son and appointed successor of Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í religion, elucidated the central importance of the principle of the harmony of science and religion in talks and speeches delivered to diverse Western audiences a century ago.<sup>3</sup>

The premise of the essential harmony of science and religion gives rise to a plethora of thought-provoking and troubling uncertainties for many scientists. The notion that science and religion can somehow be harmonized is not universally accepted by the scientific community, primarily since abstract notions such as spirituality do not lend themselves to the scientific method of inquiry.<sup>4</sup> For centuries scientists have investigated and debated vexing questions such as the manner and timing of the formation of the cosmos and the origin of mankind. The existence, or not, of an omniscient, transcendent entity called God has always been at the center of these debates. In fact, throughout history, many a renowned scientist, philosopher and soothsayer has given life and limb in these quests but today the same incommensurable questions

remain the subject of heated arguments among scientists and religionists of all persuasions, from the occident to the orient. Most modern scientists leave no room for a divinely-inspired creative force nor do they see a need for anything but chance or accident as sufficient rationalization for the universe and all living beings therein. While the scientific community has progressively converged around Evolution and the Big Bang theories to explain the origins of mankind and the formation of the cosmos, respectively, the Bahá'í teachings (as well as those of other religions) unequivocally affirm and attribute these events to divine will. Importantly, Bahá'í teachings accommodate intra-species evolution as a matter of growth and refinement, yet the notion that mankind somehow evolved from some other species, such as the ape life form, is spurned.

Bahá'ís deem humanity as having been inimitably created by God as “the most noble” of all species. Further, the human species has been uniquely endowed with spiritual susceptibilities and intellectual faculties. In the *Hidden Words*, Bahá'u'lláh affirms “... I have created thee rich,” or “... noble have I created thee,” or “... I knew my love for thee; therefore I created thee,” this notion is referred to throughout the Writings.<sup>5</sup> The Bahá'í viewpoint maintains that the divinely endowed gifts of spirituality and intellect elevate humankind above all other creation and equip him to solve complex and confounding conundrums. Through these gifts alone mankind is able to discern and discover the world of existence and to unlock its inscrutable wonders. Advocating creationism—the belief in a deity as the creator of the earth, imminently involved and ready to intervene when necessary—is not unique to the Bahá'í religion.<sup>6</sup> This belief has been upheld by many schools of philosophy, various secular and spiritual movements as well as the Semitic religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which hold in common the belief in monotheism, the reality of a hereafter and the interminable tension between good and evil in earthly existence. Nonetheless, it cannot escape our attention that belief in creationism has been seriously strained by the scientific community's reliance on the post-Darwinian concepts of natural selection and inter-species transmutation as the inexorable explanations for the origin of the human life form on earth. While Bahá'í teachings roundly reject the notion that mankind evolved from some other species, the scientific community assiduously supports and substantiates Darwinian evolutionary theories in its quest to unravel this ultimate conundrum.<sup>7</sup>

What can be made of this seeming dogmatic dichotomy between science and religion? Were we inimitably created through “intelligent design” in the image of God or did we randomly and through chance alone evolve from the ape life form? Are creatures and species purposeless in their existence or is there an immutable divine plan at work, lending function and purpose to life? Such inquiries are yet to be conclusively assuaged and reconciled despite momentous advances in scientific knowledge and philosophical wisdom since the mid-nineteenth century when the British scientist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) first published his theories and explanations on human origin and evolution.<sup>8</sup> Here, we will review some of the salient statements of ‘Abdul-Bahá on the necessity of the agreement between science and religion and examine their significance as they pertain to the disentanglement of the mystery surrounding the origin of mankind. Many of the explanations ‘Abdul-Bahá provided on this and related topics can be found in the collection of semi-private talks he gave to Laura Clifford Barney in Akka, Palestine during 1904-1906. The notes from these eclectic talks were authenticated by ‘Abdul-Bahá himself and subsequently translated and published by Barney circa 1908 in London under the title *Some Answered Questions*. In the foreword to the 1981 edition of this collection, the publisher comments on ‘Abdul-Bahá’s style of discourse as “treading the mystical path with practical feet” and affirms ‘Abdul-Bahá’s explanations of the origin, development and purpose for human existence as substantiation of the Bahá’í principle of the harmony of science and religion. (SAQ) This paper, whose aim is to induce more questions than conclusions, is dedicated to the centenary commemoration of this notable publication, and is offered as an enticement for further study by interested students and scholars of the Bahá’í Faith.

## Religion, Science and Darwinian Evolutionary Thought

Scientists subject conjectures, hypotheses and theories to observable, empirical, measurable and persistent proofs. This is the essence of the scientific method and it brooks no deviation from absolute objectivity in observation, measurement and analysis. But how are such proofs to be tendered for faith-based convictions? Can a religious code of beliefs lend itself to dispassionate scientific inquiry? One of the intractable realities that inevitably crops up in a discourse

on science and religion is the inherently distinct spheres, respectively, of human cognition and human emotion, to which they appeal. Religion has a close affinity with the realm of authority and power, while science is closely aligned with the realms of logic and reason.<sup>9</sup> Can these seemingly incongruent realms be reconciled or harmonized? Bahá'í teachings endeavor to bridge the gulf between scientific analysis and religious belief by underscoring the complementarity and the interdependence of these distinct realms. For a Bahá'í there is not a choice between science or religion; rather, they seek a blend of both. This is a crucial point to bear in mind as we explore the tension between science and religion over the hotly debated topic of the origin of mankind. This issue also lies at the heart of the as-yet unsettled difference of opinion between scientific and faith-based communities over the reality of an omniscient, transcendent creator.

For a fuller understanding of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which itself has evolved over time, it is instructive to examine the essence of his initial observations and inferences. In his seminal and ground-breaking work *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859 to great acclaim, he attempts to document the manner in which living organisms grow and adapt to their environments through a process called natural selection.<sup>10</sup> This is the process wherein genetic inheritances vary through successive generations to facilitate the survival and flourishing of the species in their natural habitats. The innate competition for survival is at the root of Darwin's theory of evolution. Food, climate, habitat and social forces such as alliances or wars are some of the key determinants of survival. Each generation survives the challenges imposed by these forces through adoption of or adaptation to its new-found ecosystem. Furthermore, environmental conditions can also engender the appearance or the disappearance of physical behaviors, bodily organs or other acclimatization necessary for the survival of the species. Darwin deemed the process of natural selection to be random and uncoordinated, yet the result appears to be anything but haphazard, remarkably efficient and in step with the exigencies of survival. Darwin went to great lengths to explain the origin and transformations of various living organisms such as plants, insects and birds. He deduced that continued self-fertilization was not conducive to survival since organisms could not retain sufficient genetic variability to survive sudden or harsh environmental alterations. He posited that the

current forms and conditions of many species had traversed through the process of natural selection via several stages of transmutations from only a few common ancestors. Through observation, meticulous record keeping and field work, Darwin concluded that beneficial gene variants survived randomly by means of, and perhaps because of, environmental exigencies. As a consequence, useful genetic information survived and was passed down through the generations resulting in inter-relatedness of various organisms and species, all of which was dictated by the notion of the survival of the fittest.<sup>11</sup> He concluded that adaptation to changing environmental conditions result in the variations seen in different species. One of Darwin's significant findings, and later confirmed by functionalist evolutionary biologists such as Dawkins, is that evolution is a slow and gradual process. It requires the passage of decades, if not centuries, for an evolved state to take hold, reach equilibrium with its environment and become noticeable.<sup>12</sup> This important concept will be explored more fully later in the paper.

While he was not the first scientist to put forward such claims, the scale and the consequences of Darwin's inferences, especially his hypotheses on the evolution of the human species, published in 1871 in *The Descent of Man*, reverberated through the sanctuaries of science and the hallowed halls of established religions.<sup>13</sup> Darwin's publications sent trembles through the world of science and his swelling coterie of supporters shattered age-old conviction in creationism and essentialist biology that had heretofore held sway over much of human civilization, philosophy and scientific inquiry. His intimation that homo sapiens transmuted from the pre-existing ape life form was particularly controversial in his lifetime and continues to be so to the present. Why is his theory on the origin of the human species pregnant with such controversy? Most people of faith find the acquiescence to Darwinian evolutionary thought to be untenable precisely because this theory obviates the need for a divine and transcendent creator. The role of God, if this abstract concept can be accommodated in Darwinian thought at all, is relegated to that of a remote, disinterested, disempowered entity. This is anathema to most religionists. Darwin left no room for divine intervention in the world of existence. Neither did he allow for any special purpose for creation. He famously was "... inclined to looking at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may

call chance.”<sup>14</sup> Being at first bound for the comfortable life of a priest, Darwin was marginally content with the idea of a creative God, his later agnosticism notwithstanding. It is the trust, however tenuous, in “designed laws” that will be explored further in this paper for potential congruence to Bahá’í beliefs. Over time, the influence exerted by Darwinian evolutionary thinking has progressively permeated nearly all branches of science.

## Evolution or Revolution?

A brief chronological review of a select sampling of scientific and philosophical excogitations and accomplishments in the decades leading up to Darwin may prove instructive in better appreciating the magnitude of his contributions to the world of science. For brevity, we will confine our cursory survey to influential Western thinkers.

The 16<sup>th</sup>-century physicist, philosopher and father of modern science, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), audaciously set forth scientific inquiry to explain the nature of the universe despite severe oppression and forced recantation imposed on him by the Catholic Church. His support of the Copernican notion of the heliocentricity of the universe was abhorrent to the Pope and the society of his time, which were deeply ingrained in the Aristotelian belief in geocentricism. Yet, Galileo’s contributions to astronomy, physics and mathematics paved the way for many important findings and discoveries both during and after his lifetime.<sup>15</sup> Galileo’s scientific findings were as ground-breaking and world-shattering as those proposed by Darwin. Following on Galileo’s heels, consider Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), philosopher, mathematician, inventor of calculus and the binary system, and perhaps one of the greatest rationalists and a superlative intellect of his time. It is said that Leibniz wrote a proof for the existence of God and shared it with Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), his contemporary philosopher and proponent of epistemology.<sup>16</sup> Leibniz’ philosophy comprehended a pre-established harmony which he attributed to a perfect being. Spinoza, widely acknowledged as having ushered in the dawn of the Enlightenment in Europe that set off a revolution resulting in many advancements in the arts and sciences, was largely in agreement with Leibniz. However, Spinoza was inclined to equate God with nature and believed that humans were emanations of that natural essence.<sup>17</sup> Although Spinoza was

derided as an atheist and a heretic for his views, yet the power of his influence survived and grew long after his death. As with Darwin, the thinking advanced by the likes of Leibniz and Spinoza were radical departures from conventional wisdom and stimulated a great deal of intellectual pursuits. Another contemporary of Leibniz, Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727), the physicist, mathematician and theologian, imparted to posterity many scientific contributions such as gravity, optics, the laws of motion and numerous other important findings.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, Newton can be considered as the most prolific scientist of all time. Being a deeply religious man, he was quick to point out that while gravity explained planetary motion it could not explain how the planets were set in motion in the first place. Newton believed in the existence of a supernatural being from whose will the universe had come into existence. Newton's revolutionary discoveries created the bedrock for future scientific pursuits and inventions in the same manner that Darwin's theories paved the way for modern-day advances in biology and genetics research.

Following Newton, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher and logician Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) eloquently argued for the existence of God, freedom and immortality as the necessities of human life. Kant proposed that scientific reasoning was limited, and thus one could not firmly prove or disprove the existence of God. Such an "intelligible unity" could only be proved with practical intent, as if there be a God.<sup>19</sup> Kant is considered to be one of the giants in the world of philosophy and is said to have greatly influenced later philosophers such as Hegel, Schopenhauer and others. Finally, Kant's contemporary astronomer and mathematician, Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749-1827), rose to become one of the greatest scientists of all time. Laplace is considered to be the father of probability theory, statistics and of Scientific Determinism – a set of precise laws that explain the evolution of the universe.<sup>20</sup> While Laplace could convincingly argue and establish the evolution of the universe, yet he found himself at a loss to explain its initial state; reminiscent of Newton, he could not explicate how the laws that governed the universe were chosen and instead attributed them to an unknowable God.<sup>21</sup> As with Darwin, Laplace introduced revolutionary thinking within the world of science but was unable to fully explain all of his findings and thinking.

The common thread through this survey is clear: most of the influential scientists and philosophers that pre-dated Darwin,

while not in full agreement over the details, still promoted or allowed the notion of a creative force to whose will or action they attributed earthly existence. It remains unclear to what extent they directly influenced Darwin's own beliefs and thinking. Yet, the upshot of Darwinian theories pertaining to evolution and the origin of the human species has been nothing short of a monumental scientific achievement, despite its radical denial of a creative force. Although largely accepted, Darwin's revolutionary contributions to the world of science remain controversial to the present.

## The Limits of Science

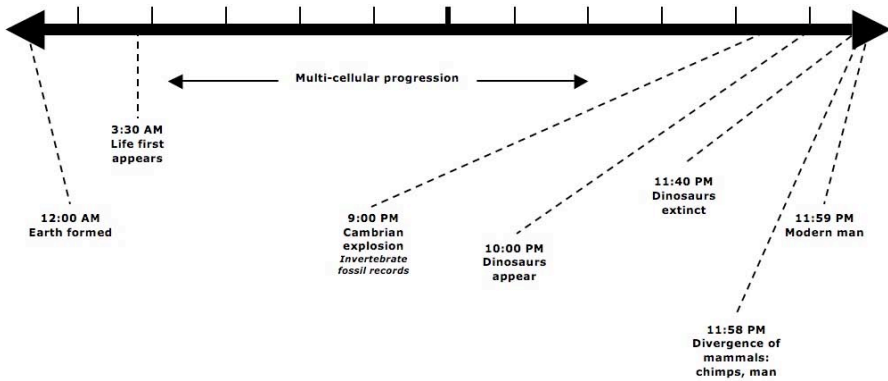
The modern practice of science has been reduced to the formulation of mathematical models and the administration of empirical experiments. The process of arriving at these models and experiments is iterative and prone to errors and false assumptions along the way. Future generations of scientists routinely prove their preceding peers wrong. Consider for instance Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher, mystic and mathematician. According to Russell, no other man "...has been as influential as he was in the sphere of thought," yet in recent times he is found wanting in the "... intimate blending of religion and reasoning, of moral aspiration with logical admiration of what is timeless..."<sup>22</sup> This is an ironic observation that we will contend with later in this paper.

Is scientific thinking limiting, as Kant and others have suggested? The scientific method is dependent on our ability to precisely measure phenomena in a predictable and repeatable manner. But we know from Heisenberg's uncertainty principle that no scientific experiment or measurement is accurate owing to the imprecision of measuring techniques and tools. In like manner, we know from Gödel's incompleteness theorem that a consistent set of axioms to prove all of mathematics is virtually impossible.<sup>23</sup> These examples of the limits of science militate for caution when either scientists or religionists advance triumphalist and absolutist claims in the effort to prove their point or to disprove those of their opponents. Moreover, one might legitimately ask: what animates scientific models and mathematical equations? Indeed, why should there be a universe for science to discover or for religion to describe in the first place? In the words of the pre-eminent contemporary physicist, Stephen Hawking, "... why does the universe bother to exist?"<sup>24</sup> The answers to these questions are



anything but clear or conclusive when viewed exclusively through the lens of science or of religion. Scientific methods and laws address material existence but do not admit the existence, or accommodate the analysis, of metaphysical abstractions. Religion can fulfill a complementary role by providing an explanation for phenomenon that have yet to be explained by any branch of science. Ultimately, the Bahá'í principle of the harmony of science and religion maintains that scientific truths must be complemented by belief in a transcendent creator, whose will is the impetus for the existence of the cosmos, of human life and of all other living forms in nature.

Earlier we mentioned that evolutionary scientists insist on randomness and chance as the inexorable explanation for human evolution. The existence of a creative force or a plan that could potentially regulate the cosmos and earthly life, if not rejected outright, is seen as doubtful by many scientists.<sup>25</sup> Human existence can be understood as the result of transmutation from an earlier life form, most likely the ape species. Further, Darwinism has been embraced as “liberation from the delusion that its [human] destiny is controlled by a power higher than itself.”<sup>26</sup> Judging by the rigorous requirements of the scientific method, are there incontrovertible proofs to these assertions? While science is on the march to uncover these claims, more recently some scientists have suggested that the extent of genetic change through natural selection is too narrow a concept to be scientifically useful since there has not been a sufficient passage of time to conclusively establish the evolution of complex species from single cells.<sup>27</sup> Even so, there is a growing body of evidence that seeks to substantiate the evolution of multi-cellular organisms by tracking changes in proteins and enzymes through time, and to map the formation of these organisms from the fusion of single cells.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, Collins has compressed 4.5 billion years of evolutionary life into a 24-hour span of time to drive home the need for temporal perspective in better understanding cellular evolution. From the diagram below, adapted from Collins, we can get an appreciation of our collective proximity to the proverbial trees (and in our inability to clearly see the forest):<sup>29</sup>



In this diagram, the earth was formed at midnight, the first emanations of life forms appeared sometime around 3:30 past midnight, and the Cambrian explosion occurred at 9:00 in the evening, suggesting a relatively long passage of time for the progression of multi-cellular organisms. Following the appearance and extinction of dinosaurs, mammals began to diverge into different life forms sometime around 11:58 at night. Modern man appeared a minute before midnight. Notice that in relative terms only a minute has transpired from the inception of human life to today. Recall also that most scientists are agreed that the Darwinian concept of natural selection is a gradual phenomenon and can be subject to many divergent outcomes through time. Given that in relative terms we have not yet witnessed a sufficient passage of time to draw definitive conclusions about the evolution of the species, especially the human life form, is it plausible to only rely on scientific explanation for the origin of mankind or the manner of the formation of the cosmos? Can theology provide complementary, not contradictory, clarifications? It is precisely in this context that the Bahá'í belief in the harmony of science and religion seeks to unify scientific truth with religious certainty to arrive at a more nuanced and sophisticated resolution to some of these as-yet unsolved mysteries. Let us consider 'Abdul-Bahá's elucidations.

## 'Abdul-Bahá on Human Evolution

'Abdul-Bahá endorsed the concept of human evolution. He, of course, spoke of intra-species refinement and growth, not inter-species transmutation. (SAQ)<sup>30</sup> Human evolution is not only accepted but seen as necessary. The earth presents a dynamic habitat, constantly prone to gradual or sudden

changes. To survive in frequently changing environments, species must adapt and evolve. Moreover, for any species to reach its full potential, it must go through various stages of development and growth. At each stage, organisms evolve by maturing physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and so on. To establish this point, 'Abdul-Bahá cited the example of the acorn. Its potential is to one day be an oak tree. It cannot take on any other form of life. To reach its destiny, it must sprout, be nourished and survive the hazards of growth to one day reach its full form: an oak tree. In like manner, a human zygote necessarily evolves to an embryo and later into a fetus until it is born as a human child. Even after birth, humans evolve as they pass through various phases of physical, mental and spiritual growth. Consider the following passage which speaks to the uniqueness of the human life form:

*But from the beginning of man's existence he is a distinct species. In the same way, the embryo of man in the womb of the mother was at first in a strange form; then this body passes from shape to shape, from state to state, from form to form, until it appears in utmost beauty and perfection. But even when in the womb of the mother and in this strange form, entirely different from his present form and figure, he is the embryo of the superior species, and not of the animal; his species and essence undergo no change. (SAQ)*

According to 'Abdul-Bahá, nothing in this world attains perfection at once; evolution is a necessary condition for any species to reach its pre-ordained destiny. He explained that humanity and human civilization continually evolve. Culture, industry and technology are ready testaments to human evolution, refinement and growth. Yet, 'Abdul-Bahá insisted that man is a unique species and that the human essence is unshared by any other life form. He affirmed that God's greatest gift to man is the intellect through which he can understand and conquer nature, all other creatures being bereft of this gift and thus captives of nature. He found the suggestion that many life forms roamed the planet before humans, the so-called pre-existence contention, as a weak and unsustainable argument to rationalize or prove the transmutation of the human life form from another species. Consider the following passage that speaks to this point:

*...the animal having preceded man is not a proof of the evolution, change and alteration of the species, nor*

*that man was raised from the animal world to the human world. For while the individual appearance of these different beings is certain, it is possible that man came into existence after the animal. So when we examine the vegetable kingdom, we see that the fruits of the different trees do not arrive at maturity at one time; on the contrary, some come first and others afterward. This priority does not prove that the later fruit of one tree was produced from the earlier fruit of another tree. (SAQ)*

In recent times, scientists have shown that certain animals possess the rudiments of intelligence such as the acquisition and use of language or equivalent modes of communication, the development and application of tools, the establishment of social order and so on. Nonetheless the human intellect is, by orders of magnitude, greater than all other animals. Dividing the world of creation into the realms of the human, the animal, the vegetable and the mineral, 'Abdul-Bahá stated that humans embody the combined attributes of animals, vegetables and minerals. Still, while all created beings may be endowed with spirit only humans possess the rational spirit, or soul. Human intellect is an emanation of the soul and scientific accomplishments are outcomes of the human intellect. Praising science as "most noble and praiseworthy," 'Abdul-Bahá affirmed that of all creation only humans could master nature through science. Consider the following passage which illuminates man's primacy over nature:

*All creation, preceding Man, is bound by the stern law of Nature. The great sun, the multitudes of stars, the oceans and seas, the mountains, the rivers, the trees, and all animals, great or small – none is able to evade obedience to nature's law. (SAQ)*

He asserted that man was the sum of all perfections and that "... in him there is an ideal power surpassing nature." (SAQ) Thus, humankind is elevated above all other creation. To further differentiate between humans and other living organisms, 'Abdul-Bahá envisioned two distinct pathways for existence: material and spiritual. The former He termed as the realm of the animal, devoid of intelligence and incapable of knowing God, while the latter He deemed as destined for mankind, a source of ethics and enlightenment and capable of bestowing the knowledge of God. (SAQ) In treading the spiritual path and perfecting his nature, mankind can

approach God by exhibiting divine attributes such as justice, mercy, love, truthfulness and kindness. But when the development of his spiritual nature is neglected or subordinated to the pursuit of material progress, he is apt to plunge into waywardness. ‘Abdul-Bahá cautioned against the prevailing impulse in society of denying the inner spiritual powers innate in human beings. This tendency, He lamented, would lead mankind to dismiss his destiny and to consent to the realm of the animal, thereby becoming a captive of nature. Consider the following passage:

*One of the strangest things witnessed is that the materialists of today are proud of their natural instincts and bondage. They state that nothing is entitled to belief and acceptance except that which is sensible or tangible. By their own statements they are captives of nature ... If this be a virtue, the animal has attained it to a superlative degree, for the animal is absolutely ignorant of the realm of spirit and out of touch with the inner world of conscious realization. The animal would agree with the materialist in denying the existence of that which transcends the senses. If we admit that being limited to the plane of the senses is a virtue, the animal is indeed more virtuous than man, for it is entirely bereft of that which lies beyond, absolutely oblivious of the Kingdom of God and its traces, whereas God has deposited within the human creature an illimitable power by which he can rule the world of nature. (PUP)*

For Bahá’ís, therefore, the development of mankind’s material temperament must transpire in tandem with the development of its spiritual disposition. This balance is crucial as it alone can facilitate the realization of man’s true potential and the fulfillment of his purpose for being created. Addressing the inevitable question that arises from a consideration of creationism, ‘Abdul-Bahá deduced that a creator without a creation was impossible. He argued that since the universe was created, there therefore had to be a creator. He further argued that the order inherent in the universe was neither accidental nor necessary. Rather, it was voluntary and willful. He explains:

*The first thing to emanate from God is that universal reality which the philosophers of the past termed the First Intellect, and which the people of Bahá call the Primal Will. (SAQ)*

'Abdul-Bahá unambiguously held that a transcendent creator willed the universe and all of creation into being. He explained that the universe was, and will ever be, governed by eternal laws bequeathed by God. In sharp contrast to Darwinian evolutionary thought, 'Abdul-Bahá taught that the human life form was original and unique, that it had a pre-ordained purpose and that it was not a mere outcome of accident or chance. Since the universe was created by a perfect creator, creation itself had to be perfect and complete. As mentioned earlier, 'Abdul-Bahá upheld intra-species evolution as incontrovertible and necessary for the human species to achieve its pre-ordained destiny. This passage sums up his vision on the origin and form of human beings:

*To recapitulate: as man in the womb of the mother passes from form to form, from shape to shape, changes and develops, and is still the human species from the beginning of the embryonic period—in the same way man, from the beginning of his existence in the matrix of the world, is also a distinct species—that is, man—and has gradually evolved from one form to another. Therefore, this change of appearance, this evolution of members, this development and growth, even though we admit the reality of growth and progress, does not prevent the species from being original. Man from the beginning was in this perfect form and composition, and possessed capacity and aptitude for acquiring material and spiritual perfections, ... He has only become more pleasing, more beautiful and more graceful. Civilization has brought him out of his wild state, just as the wild fruits which are cultivated by a gardener become finer, sweeter and acquire more freshness and delicacy. (SAQ)*

## Conclusion

The Bahá'í principle of the harmony of science and religion intends to find common ground between the domains of science and religion. Bahá'í teachings hold that human beings belong to a pre-ordained, unique life form that trumps all others and which interacts with an organic universe in accordance with a divine plan. Evolution is not only accepted but seen as a necessity for humans and other species to reach their full and destined potential. Human evolution is within the species, however, and does not derive from or span to other

forms of life. ‘Abdul-Bahá maintained that the notions of creation and evolution were complementary, not mutually exclusive. This belief lies at the root of the Bahá’í principle of the harmony of science and religion.

It should be noted that ‘Abdul-Bahá’s teachings were tendered as philosophical viewpoints and not as scientific verities.<sup>31</sup> Thus, they cannot be evaluated with the prevailing standards of science. His teachings and explanations, perhaps, can be best understood and internalized as articles of faith. Since faith requires the suspension of disbelief and the unquestioned acceptance of scientifically improvable metaphysical abstractions such as a transcendent divinity or the human soul, these concepts will continue to remain chasms to bridge for most scientifically trained minds. The religious teaching that man is more than a mere physical being, that he is essentially spiritual in nature, does not permit the unequivocal acceptance of Darwinian evolutionary hypotheses as they are understood today. The implications of an ad-hoc universe without a creator and a divine plan that animates and gives purpose to life are untenable to most people of faith, Bahá’ís included. So, how can science and spirituality truly be reconciled? Is it possible in the absence of faith and reason? Many such questions are yet to be assuaged and although we may not have satisfactory answers to these queries, one thing we do know: human evolution and the transmutation of species will likely remain a hotly debated topic for some time to come.

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## NOTES

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- <sup>6</sup> National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (2008), *Science, Evolution and Creationism*, National Academies Press. For more on the philosophy of creationism, see [plato.stanford.edu/entries/creationism](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/creationism).
- <sup>7</sup> Angier, N. (2007), *The Canon: A Whirligig Tour of the Beautiful Basics of Science*, New York, Houghton Mifflin.
- <sup>8</sup> Appleman, P., ed. (1979), *Darwin*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company.
- <sup>9</sup> Russell, B. (2007), *A History of Western Philosophy*, NY, Simon & Schuster.
- <sup>10</sup> Appleman, *Darwin*, op. cit.
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- <sup>13</sup> Appleman, *Darwin*, op. cit.
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Hawking, S. (1998), *A Brief History of Time*, New York, Bantam Books.
- <sup>16</sup> Russell, *History*, op. cit.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> Hawking, *Brief History*, op. cit.
- <sup>19</sup> Russell, *History*, op. cit.
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Hawking, *Brief History*, op. cit.
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> Dawkins, *God Delusion*, op. cit.
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Collins, F. (2006), *The Language of God*, New York, Free Press.
- <sup>28</sup> For protein evolution, see [www.eb.tuebingen.mpg.de/departments/1-protein-evolution/protein-evolution](http://www.eb.tuebingen.mpg.de/departments/1-protein-evolution/protein-evolution). I am indebted to Dr. David Zamora for providing this reference.
- <sup>29</sup> Collins, *Language*, op. cit.
- <sup>30</sup> For a scholarly treatment of ‘Abdul-Bahá explanations on this topic, see Brown, K., ed. (2001), *Evolution and Bahá’í Belief*, Los Angeles, Kalimát Press. For a shorter essay on the mutation of species and Bahá’í beliefs see Nadimi, B. (n.d.), “Do the Bahá’í Writings on evolution allow for mutation of species within kingdoms but not across kingdoms?” available at [bahai-library.com/?file=nadimi\\_evolution\\_within\\_kingdoms](http://bahai-library.com/?file=nadimi_evolution_within_kingdoms)
- <sup>31</sup> Brown, K. ed., *Evolution and Bahá’í Belief*, op. cit.



# Methods and qualities of the seekers of Reality in *Some Answered Questions* in the light of Bahá'í Scriptures

Julio Savi

In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá illustrates a number of criteria and qualities of the seekers of Reality. He mentions the senses, the method of reason or intellect, the text of the Holy Writings and the bounty of the Holy Spirit. He emphasizes the fallacy of the first three criteria and the foremost importance of the last one. A combined and balanced use of the senses, the method of reason and the text of the Holy Writings undoubtedly brings the seeker closer to Reality, but only the bounty of the Holy Spirit bestows enlightenment and certitude upon her. If the seeker wants to obtain the bounty of the Holy Spirit, she should realize a number of indispensable qualities and conditions. The enlightenment and certitude bestowed by the Holy Spirit are necessary so that any good action performed by the seeker may be conducive to her true salvation and prosperity.

Such is the importance ascribed to search after and knowledge of Reality in the Bahá'í teachings that they are described as the purpose of human life in the short Obligatory Prayer. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in *Some Answered Questions* (76-7, ch.14, para.9):

*the people of knowledge are lovers of the sun ... The people of perception are the seekers of the truth ... man must be the seeker after the Reality... He must be fascinated and enraptured, and attracted to the divine bounty; he must be like the butterfly who is the lover of the light ... and like the nightingale who is the lover of the rose ...*

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes in the same book 'four accepted methods of comprehension (*mízán-i-idrák*): [1] the senses (*hiss*) ... [2] the method of reason ('*aql*)... of the understanding (*idrák*) ... [3] tradition (*naql*) – that is, ... the text of the Holy

Scriptures (*nuşûş-i-kitáb-i-muqaddasih*) ... [4] the bounty of the Holy Spirit (*fayd-i-Rúhu'l-Quds*)' (297-9, ch.83, paras.2, 3, 4 and 5, M207-8). He also explains these four methods in other circumstances. In His Tablet to Dr. Forel He mentions the 'reasoning power (*qavá'id-i-'aqlíyyih*)', 'observation (*nazaríyyih*)', (*manţiqíyyih*, dialectic, not translated) the 'intuitive faculties (*tulú'át-i-fikríyyih*, lit. revelations of the thought) and the revealing power of ... faith (*iktisháfát-i-vidáníyyih*, lit. the discoveries of the soul)' (*Bahá'í World* 15:37-43, *Makátib* 1:259). In His talk delivered at Hotel Ansonia in New York on 17 April 1912,<sup>1</sup> He mentions 'first, sense perception; second, reason; third, traditions; fourth, inspiration'. In another talk delivered at the Eireinion in Green Acre Eliot (Maine) in 16 August 1912,<sup>2</sup> He says: 'Proofs are of four kinds: first, through sense perception; second, through the reasoning faculty; third, from traditional or scriptural authority; fourth, through the medium of inspiration. That is to say, there are four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions' (253). Also Isabel Fraser Chamberlain records a talk where 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions 'four means of knowledge' (ADP 88): 'the senses, principally through observation ... logic ... the text ... inspiration' (*ibid.*). Finally, in a talk delivered at Open Forum, or Materialists Club, in San Francisco (California) on 10 October 1912,<sup>3</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions only 'the senses (*hiss*)' and 'the intellect (*'aql*)' (356, K601).

If one reflects on these various sources, one may obtain a quite coherent concept. Human knowledge depends on four instruments: sense perception, intellect or reason, the Holy Writings and insight or inspiration. Each of these four instruments is fallible in itself. Each of them may be refined and supported through another one. The mistakes of the senses may be rectified through intellect; the mistakes of intellect may be rectified through one's study of the Holy Writings, 'the Unerring Balance established amongst men' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 13, para.99), 'the science of the love of God' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Four Valleys* 52); human mistakes in one's interpretation of the Holy Writings may be rectified through a proper use of insight or the 'inner eye' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqan* 197, para.217); the mistakes of the 'inner eye' and any other one may be corrected through 'the spirit of faith' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 144, sec.36, para.4). A balanced and co-ordinated use of all the four instruments draws the seeker closer to reality. However, what enables her to

certitude is only the bounty of the Holy Spirit, that draws her closer and closer to Reality, and finally to enlightenment and certitude.

## Sense Perception

The senses are fallacious, but the intellect may rectify their mistakes. Sight tells us that the earth is flat, but a rational observation of the universe has enabled scientists to discover that the earth is round. The senses enable us to perceive only material or outer reality, but our insight, properly refined through our study of the Holy Writings, prayer, meditation and the practice of good deeds, enables our senses to 'discover in whatever hath been created by Thee in the kingdoms of earth and heaven nothing but Thy wondrous Beauty and the revelation of the splendors of Thy face' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 337, sec. CLXXXIV, para.19). In this vein Bahá'u'lláh writes:

*Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.*

*I swear by Thy might, O Thou in Whose grasp are the reins of all mankind, and the destinies of the nations! I am so inflamed by my love for Thee, and so inebriated with the wine of Thy oneness, that I can hear from the whisper of the winds the sound of Thy glorification and praise, and can recognize in the murmur of the waters the voice that proclaimeth Thy virtues and Thine attributes, and can apprehend from the rustling of the leaves the mysteries that have been irrevocably ordained by Thee in Thy realm. (Prayers and Meditations 272, sec. CLXXVI, para.16)*

## Intellect and Logic

The modern Western world has full confidence in its intellect and thinks that intellect is, together with the senses, the supreme guarantor of human knowledge. A number of statements in *Some Answered Questions* seemingly show that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had not the same confidence in human intellect as modern Westerners. He recognizes that human intelligence and thought, when properly trained,

*may attain complete development, so that knowledge and science may increase, and the reality of things, the mysteries of beings and the properties of existence may be discovered; that, day by day, instructions, inventions and institutions may be improved; and from things perceptible to the senses conclusions as to intellectual things may be deduced.* (SAQ 9, ch.3, para.9)

However, seemingly interpreting Bahá'u'lláh's statement that 'the highest thought of men, however deep their contemplation, can never hope to outsoar the limitations imposed upon Thy creation, nor ascend beyond the state of the contingent world' (*Prayers and Meditations* 327, sec. CLXXXIV, para.6), 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that intellect by itself cannot understand metaphysical verities. He says that intellect 'must depend on the help of the spiritual and divine power to be able to undertake this mission' (SAQ 9, ch.3, para.11), 'so that intelligence and comprehension may penetrate the metaphysical world, and may receive benefit from the sanctifying breeze of the Holy Spirit, and may enter into relationship with the Supreme Concourse. (SAQ 9, ch.3, para.10)'. In the same vein 'Abdu'l-Bahá also states that

*This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul (nafs-i-nátiqih), embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith (rúḥ-i-ímání), does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it cannot discover the heavenly secrets.* (SAQ 208-9, ch.55, para.5, M148)

Only in this condition our intellect can reach its highest expression, which Bahá'u'lláh describes as follows:

*Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Day Star of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days. This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development.* (GWB 165-6, sec.83, para.4)

In summary, concerning spiritual knowledge, our intellect is inferior to the inner perception acquired through the bounty of the Spirit of Faith and of the Holy Spirit. In this vein 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

*These obvious arguments (adillah) are adduced for weak (dā'ifih) souls; but if the inner perception (dídiy-i-baṣírat) be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible. Thus, when man feels the indwelling spirit (iḥsás-i-rúḥ-i-daṣhtih bashad), he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the bounty of the spirit (fayḍ-i-rúḥ), it is necessary to establish external arguments (dalá'il-i-khárjih) (SAQ 6, ch.2, para.11, M5)*

## The Holy Writings

Infallible in themselves, the Holy Writings become fallible whenever they are analyzed by a weak human intellect, which may introduce every kind of mistakes in them. Also in this case human intellect may be assisted through the inspiration of the spiritual powers. Bahá'u'lláh explains:

*Know thou that the passages that We have called 'ambiguous (mutishábihát)' appear as such only in the eyes of them that have failed to soar above the horizon of guidance and to reach the heights of knowledge in the retreats of grace. For otherwise, unto them that have recognized the Repositories of divine Revelation and beheld through His inspiration (fí má ilqá alláh 'ala anfusahum, lit. in that which God hath handed down*

*unto them) the mysteries of divine authority, all the verses of God are perspicuous and all His allusions are clear. Such men discern the inner mysteries that have been clothed in the garment of words as clearly as ye perceive the heat of the sun or the wetness of water, nay even more distinctly. Immeasurably exalted is God above our praise of His loved ones, and beyond their praise of Him! (GDM 26-7, para.34)*

## Insight or Inspiration

A master in its use of intellect, Western man is suspicious of insight. And in many ways he is not wrong. Inspiration has been described as: 'A special immediate action or influence of the Spirit of God ... upon the human mind or soul' (*Oxford* 7:1036). It also has been defined (Battaglia 8:593) as:

A sudden enlightenment of the spirit, which appears as a guidance for one's behavior emerging from unknown depths of one's personality and coordinating past and future experience through intuitive ways ... Influence exerted by God upon a person, who is enlightened in his mind, spurred in his will, directed and sustained in his action, for the attainment of a supernatural goal ... an impulsion (considered of divine origin or arising from a mysterious force or an inner wealth) which ... leads a person, in a sort of enrapture or creative ecstasy, to translate circumstances, impressions, feelings, etc. into works of art.

'Abdu'l-Bahá said to Mrs Parson on 28 April 1912:<sup>4</sup>

*'This material world has an outer appearance. It has also a hidden aspect. All created things are interlinked in a chain leading to spirituality [the unseen', in Star of the West] and ultimately ending in abstract [spiritual' in Star of the West] realities. I hope that these spiritual links will become stronger day by day and that this communication of hearts, which is termed inspiration, will continue. When this connection exists, bodily separation is not important; this condition is beyond the world of words and above all description'. (qtd. in Mahmud's Diary 66)*

He explains elsewhere that 'inspiration' is the 'influx' (*Promulgation* 22) or 'the promptings or susceptibilities of the

human heart' (ibid. 254). He adds that the human heart may be influenced both by 'satanic' and 'divine promptings.' The former, which He also calls 'imagination' (ibid. 251), come from our lower self. The latter ones are a 'prompting of the heart through the merciful assistance' (*Promulgation* 254). 'Abdu'l-Bahá also says that imagination 'can only picture that which it is able to create' (*Paris Talks* 11, ch.5, para.6), that it is 'accidental (or non-essential)' (*Tablets* 3:562), limited and often at odds with reality. Therefore He seemingly uses the term 'imagination' as 'a creative power of the mind that conceives dreams, illusions, abstractions, fictitious and bizarre forms, activities of idle thinking, of conjecturing' (Battaglia 7:342). 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that we can differentiate between 'inspiration' and 'imagination', because 'inspiration is in conformity with the Divine Texts, but imaginations do not conform therewith' (*Tablets* 1:195). Another difference is that the ideas

*which owe their source to the Light of Truth will be realized in the outward world; while others of a different origin vanish, come and go like waves on the sea of imagination and find no realization in the world of existence.* (*Tablets* 2:301)

*As to the difference between inspiration and imagination ... A real, spiritual connection between the True One and the servant is a luminous bounty which causeth an ecstatic (or divine) flame, passion and attraction. When this connection is secured (or realized) such an ecstasy and happiness become manifest in the heart that man doth fly away (with joy) and uttereth melody and song. Just as the soul bringeth the body in motion, so that spiritual bounty and real connection likewise moveth (or cheereth) the human soul.* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets* 1:195)

In other words, 'The spirit has great perception without the intermediary of any of the five senses, such as the eyes or ears' (SAQ 252, ch.71, para.7). However,

*The mind and the thought of man sometimes discover truths, and from this thought and discovery signs and results are produced. This thought has a foundation. But many things come to the mind of man which are like the waves of the sea of imaginations; they have no*

*fruit, and no result comes from them.* (SAQ 253, ch.71, para.9)

In this context, we could say that ideas conceived under the impulse of imagination do not give fruits, that is, they do not produce fruits of unity, harmony and peace.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says that inspiration may be received through 'Obligatory Prayer' (in *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, no. XXI) and 'during meditation' (*Paris Talks* 187, ch.54, para.11). He writes in this regard:

*I ask God that He may open the gate of the knowledge of this station to thine heart so that thou mayest apprehend whatever is necessary and proper, garner spiritual bounties from the heaven of the All-Merciful, obtain the effulgences of knowledge from the Sun of Reality, and become a manifestation of inspiration from the Unseen and a source of glad-tidings from the All-Merciful.* (in *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, no. XXI)

He also writes: 'when the heart becometh confident, the imagination of Satan and evil vanisheth away. If the heart becometh absolutely tranquil, suspicion and imagination will entirely pass away' (*Tablets* 1:104). He explains this concept in details (*Tablets* 3:706):

*if thy mind become empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forget all else besides God and come in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe and of the divine doctrine.*

He also says in an address He delivered to the Paris Theosophical Society, at the Theosophical Headquarters, 59 Avenue de la Bourdonnois, on 13 February 1913:

*... the spirit of life is omnipotent, especially when it establishes a communication with God and becomes the recipient of the eternal light—then it transforms itself into a ray of the effulgence of the eternal sun.*



*This station is the greatest of all stations, for this connection of the spirit of man with God is like unto a mirror and the sun of reality is reflected in it. Thus it becomes the collective centre of all the virtues; its emanation is the bestowal of the king of bestowers; its radiations are the manifold splendours of the infinite luminary; its sanctity is from the highest summit of divine essence. This station is the station of heavenly inspiration and is called the station of the divine grace. It signifies that the rays of the sun of reality are resplendent in the mirror and the attributes of the sun of reality are reflected therein. This is the ultimate degree of human perfection, for the attainment of which the thinkers and philosophers of all time have longed and poets have dreamed; it is the mystery of mysteries and the light of lights wherein the spirit become eternal, self-subsistent, age-abiding. (ADP 161-2)*

And finally He describes (*Tablets 1:195*) the condition of a person who receives inspiration from the Holy Spirit:

*A real, spiritual connection between the True One and the servant is a luminous bounty which causeth an ecstatic ... flame, passion and attraction. When this connection is secured ... such an ecstasy and happiness become manifest in the heart that man doth fly away (with joy) and uttereth melody and song. Just as the soul bringeth the body in motion, so that spiritual bounty and real connection likewise moveth (or cheereth) the human soul.*

Shoghi Effendi explains, in a letter written on his behalf on 25 January 1943, that inspiration 'can be received through meditation' and that 'God can inspire into our minds things that we had no previous knowledge of, if He desires to do so' (in *Compilation 2:241*, no.1771). He also makes clear, in a letter written on his behalf on 19 November 1945, that 'we cannot say that any inspiration which a person, not knowing Bahá'u'lláh, or not believing in God, receives is merely from his own ego' (in *Compilation 2: 241*, no.1774).

A key to a better understanding of the guidance given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as to inspiration may be found in the following Tablet (*Tablets 3:669*):

*Know, that the pure hearts upon which the mysteries of the Kingdom of God are printed and pictured, are*

*reflections one upon another and thus the one can discover the secrets of the other, because such hearts are only mirrors confronting each other on which the secrets of unity, affinity and concord are printed and reflected. Accordingly, it would be possible that a certain servant of the servants of the Merciful might discover a treasured mystery or a preserved sign, whatever his shortcomings or defects might be; yet we do indeed rely upon God the Forgiver. I supplicate Him to deliver us from the pangs of lust and its dangers and from the destructive conditions of passion.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá uses in this Tablet the versatile metaphor of light and mirrors. He describes human hearts as mirrors capable of reflecting 'the mysteries of the Kingdom of God' (ibid.) and light may be reflected from a heart to another one. Although, 'it would be possible that a certain servant of the servants of the Merciful might discover a treasured mystery or a preserved sign, whatever his shortcomings or defects might be' (ibid.), however, the light's 'appearance in every mirror is conditioned by the colour of that mirror' (CC 3:19, no. 22). And thus it is better for a seeker trying to be delivered 'from the pangs of lust and its dangers and from the destructive conditions of passion' (TAB 3:669). Then his heart will be 'moved by the fragrance of the love of God', and his 'memory' will be 'a fountain overflowing with the water of the knowledge of God', and he will be able to express ideas whereby 'the breast of the believers may be refreshed and dilated with joy' (ibid.). In other words, the seeker's struggle toward spiritual perfection is the soundest guarantee that his words and actions may be inspired and thus capable of inspiring her fellow-beings with noble ideas and feelings. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote in a Tablet to Y. Dawud:

*'O God quicken me with the breaths of the Holy Spirit.' For that which contains the fulfilment of all human inspiration, for that which we supplicate in words is the breath of the Holy Spirit. Verily, it changeth the earthly man into a heavenly one, the materialist into a spiritual being, the unenlightened into a reflection of the divine, and the satanic man into a godly person. It maketh the blind to see and quickeneth the dead. (quoted in Rabb 100)*

A seeker is inspired mainly whenever she relies on the guidance vouchsafed by the Manifestation of God:

*Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him. If he comes under the shadow of the True Educator and is rightly trained, he becomes the essence of essences, the light of lights, the spirit of spirits; he becomes the center of the divine appearances, the source of spiritual qualities, the rising-place of heavenly lights, and the receptacle of divine inspirations (ilhámát). If he is deprived of this education, he becomes the manifestation of satanic qualities, the sum of animal vices, and the source of all dark conditions. (SAQ 236, ch.64, para.4)*

## Attaining the Bounty of the Holy Spirit

Since the only way to attain certitude is through the bounty of the Holy Spirit, it is very important for a seeker to know how to attain it. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions in *Some Answered Questions* ‘the state in which one should be to seriously search for the truth ... the condition of seeking’ (38, ch.10, paras.11, 12).

*... the seeker must be endowed with certain qualities. First of all, he must be just and severed from all else save God; his heart must be entirely turned to the supreme horizon; he must be free from the bondage of self and passion, for all these are obstacles. Furthermore, he must be able to endure all hardships. He must be absolutely pure and sanctified, and free from the love or the hatred of the inhabitants of the world. Why? because the fact of his love for any person or thing might prevent him from recognizing the truth in another, and, in the same way, hatred for anything might be a hindrance in discerning truth.*

His words are quite concise, however they are supported by many explanations of this issue given in the Bahá’í Writings. This literature include in the first place the five paragraphs in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* improperly known as ‘Tablet of the True Seeker’ (KI 192-8, paras.213-18; KMI 148-53), in the second place the *Valley of Search in the Seven Valleys*, in the third place the passages in *Gems of Divine Mysteries* where the *Garden of Search* is described, and also the *Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad bih Fársí*, a Tablet written in Adrianople describing ‘the path of faith and belief’ (Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 2:137-8). This Tablet is almost

completely translated into English by Shoghi Effendi in *Gleanings* (322-9, nos. CLII and CLIII; see *Muntakhabátí* 207-11). 'Abdu'l-Bahá dwelt on the same subject in His talk delivered on 26 May 1912 at Mount Morris Baptist Church, Fifth Avenue and 126th Street, New York, published in English in *Promulgation* 147-50 on notes taken by Esther Foster and in Persian in *Kháṭábát* 394-400:

*Behold how the sun shines upon all creation, but only surfaces that are pure and polished can reflect its glory and light. The darkened soul has no portion of the revelation of the glorious effulgence of reality; and the soil of self, unable to take advantage of that light, does not produce growth ... Therefore, man must seek capacity (isti'dád) and develop readiness (qábiliyyat). As long as he lacks susceptibility (isti'dád va qábiliyyat) to divine influences, he is incapable of reflecting the light and assimilating its benefits ... We must make the soil of our hearts receptive and fertile by tilling in order that the rain of divine mercy may refresh them and bring forth roses and hyacinths of heavenly planting. We must have perceiving eyes (chasm-i-bíná) in order to see the light of the sun ... (PUP 148-9, Kháṭábát 397-8)*

This 'capacity' or 'readiness' can be attained in several ways. Some individuals derive 'infinite significance and wisdom from the Book of Divine Revelation (*kitáb-i-vaḥíyy-i-iláhí*), and ... draw inspiration (*ilhám*) from the unseen world of God (*ghaybí-i-rabbání*)', ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 58, *Risálih* 68). Other make 'mention of the name of ... [their] Lord' and 'the hosts of Divine inspiration ... descend upon ... [them] from the heaven of ... [His] name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise' (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 280 sec.129, para.3). Still others 'for the sake of God, arise to serve His Cause' and thus become 'the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom' (Bahá'u'lláh, 'Bishárát' 27, 'Ishráqát' 129).

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes such a 'ready' soul as follows:

*This is what is meant by the Qur'anic verse: '... whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire touched it not! It is light upon light'. That is, this oil is so fully prepared, so ready to be lit, that it almost catches fire of itself, though no flame be at hand; which means that the capacity for faith, and the deserving it, can be so*

*great, that without the communication of a single word the light shines forth. (MF 77)*

The result of this kind of search and effort made according to this guidance and blessed by the bounty of the Holy Spirit is described as

*gain[ing] a true knowledge of your own selves – a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being. Ye would find yourselves independent of all else but Me, and would perceive, with your inner and outer eye, and as manifest as the revelation of My effulgent Name, the seas of My loving-kindness and bounty moving within you. (GWB 326, CLIII, para.6)*

## Enlightenment and Certitude

Having obtained the bounty of the Holy Spirit, a seeker will be able to attain enlightenment and certitude. Certitude is a kind of knowledge quite different from the ‘assured’ knowledge, pursued by the Western man, relying on his senses, his intellect, sometimes his insight, without striving to attain the bounty of the Holy Spirit. This kind of knowledge, described enlightenment and certitude, is the discovery of the image of God in oneself, a discovery that becomes manifest as the capacity of expressing the Names of God, in the form of thoughts, feelings, words and actions.

## Enlightenment and Certitude and Fulfilling the Purpose of One’s Life

Attaining enlightenment and certitude is a fundamental prerequisite in view of fulfilling the purpose of one’s life and of becoming an efficient servant of the Cause of God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the first verse of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as follows:

*good actions alone, without the knowledge of God, cannot be the cause of eternal salvation, everlasting success, and prosperity, and entrance into the Kingdom of God. (SAQ 238, ch.65, para.4)*

He also says:

*if to the knowledge of God is joined the love of God, and attraction, ecstasy and goodwill, a righteous action is then perfect and complete. Otherwise, though*

*a good action is praiseworthy, yet if it is not sustained by the knowledge of God, the love of God, and a sincere intention, it is imperfect.* (SAQ 302, ch.84, para.7)

We may conclude that the entire course of our life should be an unrelenting search after such conditions as will make us ready to receive, through a correct use of the four instruments of knowledge as well as of our willpower, the bounties of the Holy Spirit so that we may fulfill the purpose of our lives.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This talk was first published in *Star of the West* 3.10 (September 1912):10-1 and later, with a few changes, in *Promulgation* 20-2, on notes taken by Howard MacNutt.

<sup>2</sup> This talk was first published in *Star of the West* 3.16 (December 1912):5-9 and later in *Promulgation* 253-61, on notes taken by Edna McKinney from Amin Farid's translation.

<sup>3</sup> This talk was published in English in *Promulgation* 355-61, on notes taken by Bijou Straun, and in Persian in *Khatábát* 600-10. See also *Star of the West* 5.3 (April 1914):42.

<sup>4</sup> These words are also quoted in 'Communication and Divine Inspiration', in *Star of the West* 14.7 (October 1923):209.

# Elucidations

## Comments on the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice\*

### The Universal House of Justice

7 December 1969

To an individual Bahá'í

Dear Bahá'í friend,

Your recent letter, in which you share with us the questions that have occurred to some of the youth in studying "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh," has been carefully considered, and we feel that we should comment both on the particular passage you mention and on a related passage in the same work, because both bear on the relationship between the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.

The first passage concerns the Guardian's duty to insist upon a reconsideration by his fellow members in the Universal House of Justice of any enactment which he believes conflicts with the meaning and departs from the spirit of the Sacred Writings. The second passage concerns the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice without the Guardian, namely Shoghi Effendi's statement that "Without such an institution [the Guardianship] ... the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn." (WOB, p. 148)

Some of the youth, you indicate, were puzzled as to how to reconcile the former of these two passages with such statements as that in the Will of 'Abdu'l-Baha which affirms that the

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\* Published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963 to 1986*.



Universal House of Justice is “freed from all error.” (WT, p. 14) Seeking the Writings’ unity of meaning.

Just as the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Baha does not in any way contradict the Kitáb-i-Aqdas but, in the Guardian’s words, “confirms, supplements, and correlates the provisions of the Aqdas,” so the writings of the Guardian contradict neither the revealed Word nor the interpretations of the Master. (WOB, p. 19) In attempting to understand the Writings, therefore, one must first realize that there is and can be no real contradiction in them, and in the light of this we can confidently seek the unity of meaning which they contain.

The Guardian and the Universal House of Justice have certain duties and functions in common; each also operates within a separate and distinct sphere. As Shoghi Effendi explained, “... it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed.” He goes on to affirm, “Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.” It is impossible to conceive that two centres of authority, which the Master has stated “are both under the care and protection of the Abha Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One, could conflict with one another, because both are vehicles of the same Divine Guidance. (WOB, pp. 149-50; WT, p. 11)

The Universal House of Justice, beyond its function as the enactor of legislation, has been invested with the more general functions of protecting and administering the Cause, solving obscure questions and deciding upon matters that have caused difference. Nowhere is it stated that the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice is by virtue of the Guardian’s membership or presence on that body. Indeed, ‘Abdu’l-Baha in His Will and Shoghi Effendi in his “Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” have both explicitly stated that the elected

members of the Universal House of Justice in consultation are recipients of unfailing Divine Guidance. Furthermore the Guardian himself in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh asserted that "It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions." (WOB, p. 8)

While the specific responsibility of the Guardian is the interpretation of the Word, he is also invested with all the powers and prerogatives necessary to discharge his function as Guardian of the Cause, its Head and supreme protector. He is, furthermore, made the irremovable head and member for life of the supreme legislative body of the Faith. It is as the head of the Universal House of Justice, and as a member of that body, that the Guardian takes part in the process of legislation. If the following passage, which gave rise to your query, is considered as referring to this last relationship, you will see that there is no contradiction between it and the other texts: "Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh revealed utterances." (WOB, p. 150)

Although the Guardian, in relation to his fellow members within the Universal House of Justice, cannot override the decision of the majority, it is inconceivable that the other members would ignore any objection he raised in the course of consultation or pass legislation contrary to what he expressed as being in harmony with the spirit of the Cause. It is, after all, the final act of judgement delivered by the Universal House of Justice that is vouchsafed infallibility, not any views expressed in the course of the process of enactment.

It can be seen, therefore, that there is no conflict between the Master's statements concerning the unfailing divine guidance conferred upon the Universal House of Justice and the above passage from "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh."

## The Process of Legislation

It may help the friends to understand this relationship if they are aware of some of the processes that the Universal House of Justice follows when legislating. First, of course, it observes the greatest care in studying the Sacred Texts and the interpretations of the Guardian as well as considering the views of all the members. After long consultation the process of drafting a pronouncement is put into effect. During this process the whole matter may well be reconsidered. As a result of such reconsideration the final judgement may be significantly different from the conclusion earlier favoured, or possibly it may be decided not to legislate at all on that subject at that time. One can understand how great would be the attention paid to the views of the Guardian during the above process were he alive.

## The Universal House of Justice in the Absence of the Guardian

In considering the second passage we must once more hold fast to the principle that the teachings do not contradict themselves.

Future Guardians are clearly envisaged and referred to in the Writings, but there is nowhere any promise or guarantee that the line of Guardians would endure forever; on the contrary there are clear indications that the line could be broken. Yet, in spite of this, there is a repeated insistence in the Writings on the indestructibility of the Covenant and the immutability of God's Purpose for this Day.

One of the most striking passages which envisage the possibility of such a break in the line of Guardians is in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself: The endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. No one has the right to lay hold on them without leave from the Dawning-Place of Revelation.\* After Him the decision rests with the Aghsan [Branches],<sup>†</sup> and after them with the House of Justice – should it be established in the world by then – so that they may use

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\* "The Dawning-Place of Revelation' is a reference to the Manifestation of God; here, a specific reference to Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>†</sup> Aghsan (Branches) denotes the sons and male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh.

these endowments for the benefit of the Sites exalted in this Cause, and for that which they have been commanded by God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful. Otherwise the endowments should be referred to the people of Baha, who speak not without His leave and who pass no judgement but in accordance with that which God has ordained in this Tablet, they who are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth, so that they may spend them on that which has been decreed in the Holy Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful. (See KA P42)

The passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 precipitated the very situation provided for in this passage, in that the line of Aghsan ended before the House of Justice had been elected. Although, as is seen, the ending of the line of Aghsan at some stage was provided for, we must never underestimate the grievous loss that the Faith has suffered. God's purpose for mankind remains unchanged, however, and the mighty Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh remains impregnable. Has not Bahá'u'lláh stated categorically, "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation." (WOB, p. 109) While 'Abdu'l-Baha confirms: "Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favour nor oppose His Cause!" "Everything is subject to corruption; but the Covenant of thy Lord shall continue to pervade all regions." "The tests of every dispensation are in direct proportion to the greatness of the Cause, and as heretofore such a manifest Covenant, written by the Supreme Pen, hath not been entered upon, the tests are proportionately severe. ... These agitations of the violators are no more than the foam of the ocean, ... This foam of the ocean shall not endure and shall soon disperse and vanish, while the ocean of the Covenant shall eternally surge and roar." (TABA 2:598; Star of the West, IV:10, p. 170; SWAB, pp. 210-11) And Shoghi Effendi has clearly stated: "The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day." "... this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind." (WOB, p. 156, 23)

## Two Authoritative Centres

In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centres appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the

Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that centre which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book – it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one centre is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. This pattern of centres and their relationships is apparent at every stage in the unfoldment of the Cause. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh tells the believers to refer after His passing to the Book, and to “Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” (KA P121) In the ~~Kitáb-i-Aqdas~~ (the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to 'Abdu'l-Baha. (TB, pp. 217-23) In the Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh also ordains the institution of the Universal House of Justice, and confers upon it the powers necessary for it to discharge its ordained functions. The Master in His Will and Testament explicitly institutes the Guardianship, which Shoghi Effendi states was clearly anticipated in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, reaffirms and elucidates the authority of the Universal House of Justice, and refers the believers once again to the Book: “Unto the Most Holy Book everyone must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice,” and at the very end of the Will He says: “All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.” (WT, pp. 19, 26)

As the sphere of jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice in matters of legislation extends to whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Sacred Text, it is clear that the Book itself is the highest authority and delimits the sphere of action of the House of Justice. Likewise, the Interpreter of the Book must also have the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the elected representatives of the Cause. The writings of the Guardian and the advice given by him over the thirty-six years of his Guardianship show the way in which he exercised this function in relation to the Universal House of Justice as well as to National and Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The fact that the Guardian has the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the Universal House of Justice does not carry with it the corollary that without such guidance the Universal House of Justice might stray beyond the limits of its proper authority; such a deduction would conflict

with all the other texts referring to its infallibility, and specifically with the Guardian's own clear assertion that the Universal House of Justice never can or will infringe on the sacred and prescribed domain of the Guardianship. It should be remembered, however, that although National and Local Spiritual Assemblies can receive divine guidance if they consult in the manner and spirit described by 'Abdu'l-Baha, they do not share in the explicit guarantees of infallibility conferred upon the Universal House of Justice. Any careful student of the Cause can see with what care the Guardian, after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha, guided these elected representatives of the believers in the painstaking erection of the Administrative Order and in the formulation of Local and National Bahá'í Constitutions.

We hope that these elucidations will assist the friends in understanding these relationships more clearly, but we must all remember, that we stand too close to the beginnings of the System ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to be able fully to understand its potentialities or the interrelationships of its component parts. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer on 25 March 1930, "The contents of the Will of the Master are far too much for the present generation to comprehend. It needs at least a century of actual working before the treasures of wisdom hidden in it can be revealed."

With loving Bahá'í greetings,  
The Universal House of Justice

## Some Thoughts on the Ministry of the Universal House of Justice

‘Alí Nakhjavání

### Preamble

When the beloved Guardian passed away on November 4, 1957, the news of his passing convulsed the entire Bahá'í World. A second distress soon followed when the announcement was made by the Hands of the Cause that Shoghi Effendi had left no Will and Testament, had appointed no successor as Guardian of the Faith, and that the Aghsán one and all had broken the Covenant. The “first effect” of this realization, as indicated in the message of the Hands of the Cause to the Bahá'í world, “was to plunge” them “into the very abyss of despair” (MC 36). A similar sense of dismay seized the entire Bahá'í World.

Soon after the Universal House of Justice was established it sent a message (dated 6 October 1963) to the Bahá'í World. This message states that the House of Justice “finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi” (MUHJ 14). Reflecting on this message, the friends everywhere soon realized that they had not properly understood the contents of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.

Shoghi Effendi had already stated that the World Order as delineated by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will “undoubtedly” contained “manifold mysteries” (BA 8), and that we “must trust to time, and the guidance of God’s Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications” (BA 62).

The obligation of the friends was now well-defined. They had to wait for the “guidance” of the Universal House of Justice, to elucidate what certainly appeared to be “obscure questions” (WT 20). The expectations of the believers were fulfilled when, in response to questions asked, the Universal House of Justice

wrote on 9 March 1965, on 27 May 1966, and on 7 December 1969, three letters (See MUHJ items # 23, 35 & 75 respectively) and explained for the friends the basic truths underlying the evolution of the Administrative Order of our Faith, and left them free to conclude that the passing of the beloved Guardian, without having appointed a Successor as Guardian and Authorized Interpreter, was a clear possibility and an understandable event.

When the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was published in 1992, the Universal House of Justice had yet another opportunity to explain the implications of Paragraph 42 of the Most Holy Book. In relation to the Law of Succession in the Faith, this paragraph stands out as a most significant and decisive statement. In this paragraph, Bahá'u'lláh clearly envisages a time when there would be no institution to embody the functions incumbent upon the Appointed and Authorized Aghsán (that is to say, a Guardianship). Further, the Universal House of Justice would not exist at that time and it would not be propitious to elect that Body. These points are fully covered in Notes 66 and 67, (pages 196 and 197) of the English text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

### 1963

Regarding the timing of the election of the Universal House of Justice we see in its letter mentioned above, dated 9 March 1965, the manner in which Shoghi Effendi foreshadowed the election of the Universal House of Justice: "The Guardian had given the Bahá'í World explicit and detailed plans covering the period until Ridván 1963, the end of the Ten Year Crusade. From that point onward, unless the Faith were to be endangered, further divine guidance was essential". The rightness of the time was further confirmed by references in Shoghi Effendi's letters to the Ten Year Crusade being followed by other plans under the direction of the Universal House of Justice. One such reference is the following passage from a letter addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles on 25th February 1951, concerning its Two Year Plan which immediately preceded the Ten Year Crusade:

On the success of this enterprise, unprecedented in its scope, unique in its character and immense in its spiritual potentialities, must depend the initiation, at a later period in the Formative Age of the Faith of



undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá'í World... undertakings constituting in themselves a prelude to the launching of worldwide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same Age, by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and coordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies. (UD 261)

There can be no doubt that the "undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá'í World" mentioned in the above passage of the Guardian, certainly refer to the plans that Shoghi Effendi gave to each of the twelve National Assemblies which he described as the Generals of the Ten Year Plan.

With the stipulation made in Paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, as well as with such statements, as quoted above, it would be, in my opinion, totally untenable to maintain that Shoghi Effendi was not aware that his passing would occur some time during the Ten Year Crusade. If, therefore he did not appoint a second Guardian as his Successor, and if he did not write a Will and Testament in the traditional way, would it not be entirely logical to conclude that lack of action in these matters was a conscious act on his part?

In his personal conversations with pilgrims Shoghi Effendi was reported to have repeatedly said that his 'Dispensation' was like his Will and Testament. The closest statement made by him in writing, however, hinting at such a conclusion, is a letter, written on his behalf, dated 10 January 1935 to Dr. Mühlischlegel, in which he states that his 'Dispensation' constitutes "an invaluable supplement" to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as to the Book of the Covenant, which is Bahá'u'lláh's Will and Testament. (LDG Vol. 1, 65)

Regarding the prophecy of Daniel as it relates to 1963, we read the following in one of the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*Now concerning the verse in Daniel, the interpretation whereof thou didst ask, namely "Blessed is he who cometh unto the thousand three hundred and thirty five days. ...according to this calculation a century will have elapsed from the dawn of the Sun of Truth, then will the teachings of God be firmly established upon the earth, and the Divine Light shall flood the world from*

*the East even unto the West. Then, on this day, will the faithful rejoice.* (PA 49-50)

Indeed it was in 1963 that the Bahá'í World Community, under the galvanizing and sustaining motivation of Shoghi Effendi's Ten Year Crusade, was enabled to diffuse the Light of the Faith worldwide, and celebrate not only this victory, but also the emergence of the Universal House of Justice at the Bahá'í World Congress in London.

Furthermore, the following two paragraphs might well bear upon this very theme. They contain an early hint by Shoghi Effendi on the importance of this very date of 1963, which he says would witness the "final erection" of the "Edifice" of God's Holy Cause:

Ours, dearly-beloved co-workers, is the paramount duty to continue, with undimmed vision and unabated zeal, to assist in the final erection of that Edifice the foundations of which Bahá'u'lláh has laid in our hearts, to derive added hope and strength from the general trend of recent events, however dark their immediate effects, and to pray with unremitting fervor that He may hasten the approach of the realization of that Wondrous Vision which constitutes the brightest emanation of His Mind and the fairest fruit of the fairest civilization the world has yet seen.

Might not the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh mark the inauguration of so vast an era in human history? (WOB 48)

## Compatibility of Texts

From the above summary three points clearly emerge:

1. It had been contemplated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that there would be no co-existence between the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.
2. The date for the election of the Universal House of Justice had to be in 1963, at the end of the Ten Year Plan.
3. It would certainly be reasonable to assume that Shoghi Effendi was conscious of his impending passing.

It would be helpful at this point to consider the method adopted by Bahá'u'lláh in His Kitáb-i-'Ahd regarding the line of succession. In it He stipulates that Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí is to succeed 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Now, compare that with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's method in the first part of His Will and Testament. In it He stipulates that Shoghi Effendi is to be succeeded, generation after generation, by Appointed Aghsán serving as Guardians. To me there is a similarity of method here, one that provided a sense of continuity and concealed for a time the tests that were inevitably to fall on the friends as future events unfolded. Shoghi Effendi's mention of "future Guardians" in his writings could well be, in my opinion, equally understood as a further application of this same method. All would be tested in due course as to their faithful adherence to the Covenant.

Does this similarity of method not remind us of the golden key that Shoghi Effendi placed in our hands with which to unlock one of the mysteries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament? He pointed out to us that a study of the authenticated texts of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá "will reveal the close relationship that exists between them, as well as the identity of purpose and method which they inculcate" (WOB 4).

Is this not also a reminder of the warning given by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: "*from time immemorial even unto eternity the Almighty hath tried, and will continue to try, His servants, so that light may be distinguished from darkness*" (KI 8) and furthermore we read in the same Book: "*the divine Purpose hath decreed that the true should be known from the false....He hath, therefore, in every season sent down upon mankind the showers of tests from His realm of glory*" (KI 53).

## Who Limits the Spheres of Jurisdiction?

In the 'Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh' Shoghi Effendi points out that one of his duties was to provide "the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its [the Faith's] elected representatives" (WOB 148). It is obvious that the reference here is to the elected members of Local Spiritual Assemblies, National Conventions, National Spiritual Assemblies, as well as of the Universal House of Justice.

This function of the Guardianship was partly discharged when, under his guidance and direction, the Constitutions of

Local and National Spiritual Assemblies were formulated and put into effect during his own ministry. What remained was to determine the boundaries of the work of the Universal House of Justice. The terms of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were superlative. He wrote: *“Whatsoever they [the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice] decide is of God”* (WT 11). He further added: *“That which this body, [the elected members of the Universal House of Justice (WT 20)] whether unanimously or by a majority, doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself”* (WT 19).

To complete his duty as Interpreter of these words in relation to the work of the Universal House of Justice, Shoghi Effendi wrote in his ‘Dispensation’ the following:

The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been invested. (WOB 150)

It is highly significant that Shoghi Effendi, while defining his duty as Guardian to interpret what had been revealed, goes on to give the assurance to the Community, as well as to the world, that the Universal House of Justice, when elected, will never “infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain” of interpretation, which is the exclusive right of the Guardianship. This assurance was fully realized and permanently set in place when the Universal House of Justice, in its Constitution wrote:

The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the Revealed Word of Bahá’u’lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and the Guardian of the Cause... who, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá’í Scripture... constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. (CUHJ 4)

It must be remembered that apart from its vital function as the Supreme Bahá'í Legislative Body, the Universal House of Justice is named by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in Paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the Central Institution to which the Bahá'í Community must turn after the termination of the line of the Aghsán. This is confirmed by the statement made by the Guardian that the two institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are the "chosen Successors" of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (WOB 20). On the basis of these texts, the Universal House of Justice in its Constitution describes its own "fundamental object" as the responsibility "to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith" (CUHJ 4), and then adds the following statement: "There being no successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice is the Head of the Faith and its supreme institution, to which all must turn" (CUHJ 4). The position of the Universal House of Justice as Head of the Faith will be maintained, "until such time" in the words of this Constitution, "as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power" (CUHJ 4).

In light of the above quotations, it becomes clear that in addition to its legislative authority, the Universal House of Justice, while it is assured of divine guidance in not infringing upon the domain of interpretation, is invested with responsibilities which do and must include such powers and duties that are incumbent upon the Head of the Faith. Furthermore it is obvious that the two broad areas of responsibility of the Universal House of Justice — namely legislation and headship of the Faith, are as inseparable and indispensable as were, in the case of Shoghi Effendi, his responsibilities as Interpreter and Head of the Faith. Thus, if anyone may venture to state that the sphere of jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice is confined to legislation, such an assumption would clearly be baseless and entirely unwarranted and unjustified.

It follows therefore that no institution or individual can correctly determine whether the Guardian or the Universal House of Justice are, at any given time, within or without their own respective limits of jurisdiction. This point is confirmed by the Guardian in one of his letters where this truth is clearly set forth:

It is not for the individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgment. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism. The Guardian being appointed interpreter of the Teachings, it is his responsibility to state what matters which, affecting the interests of the Faith, demand on the part of the believers complete and unqualified obedience to his instructions. (LG 312)

The principle clearly outlined above by the Guardian applies equally to the Universal House of Justice, inasmuch as matters affecting the interests of the Faith on a world-scale are best judged and determined by the House itself. As indicated above, Shoghi Effendi's formal and confident assurance in his 'Dispensation' to the Bahá'ís everywhere and to the world at large, to the effect that the Universal House of Justice will never transgress its own limits of jurisdiction, should provide the ultimate safeguard and guarantee, to one and all, that the foundations on which the structure of the Administrative Order is resting are firmly set and stable.

### **Is the Universal House of Justice the Head of a Complete and Unmutilated World Order?**

Let us now consider the contents and implications of a crucial paragraph in 'The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh':

Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. 'In all the Divine Dispensations,' He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, 'the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright'. Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperiled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, and uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to

define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn. (WOB 148)

So the question is, did the ending of the Guardianship in November 1957 have the negative effects described above, or did the Cause survive this event complete and undamaged?

Shoghi Effendi definitely knew that the line of the Aghsán would at some time come to an end. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas openly contemplates this eventuality in the very paragraph (42) that anticipates the Institution of the Guardianship. Further, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes no provision in His Will and Testament for the continuation into the future of the Guardianship in the event that the line of the Aghsán is extinguished. So it is very clear that this passage in 'Dispensation' cannot be saying that the Cause will be wounded or damaged unless there is an unbroken line of living Guardians during the entirety of the Dispensation. So, how are we to understand the paragraph?

When one looks at the paragraph that immediately follows it, that is, the one that refers to the paralysis that would ensue if the World Order were 'severed' from the House of Justice, it is clear that Shoghi Effendi is simply describing, in dramatic language, the centrality and vital importance of these two institutions. Each, in turn, is anticipated to perform indispensable and essential functions.

We therefore need to consider and analyze the various points Shoghi Effendi has made and relate them to the period of his ministry, considering what his absence would have entailed. We set forth the points in brief, followed by comments:

1. Without the Guardianship, the World Order would be deprived of the hereditary principle.

COMMENT: The 36 years of the Guardianship certainly endowed the World Order with this eminent grace.

2. Without the Guardianship, the World Order would have been beset by peril and danger.

COMMENT: If 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament had not installed the Office of the Guardianship as His immediate Successor, Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí would have played havoc with the

community, using the Book of the Covenant to advance his case.

3. Without the Guardianship the prestige of the World Order would have suffered.

COMMENT: By making the Guardian the “sacred head” (WT 14) of the House of Justice, and because of the provision that the Guardian “cannot override the decisions” of the Universal House of Justice (WOB 150), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá enhanced the prestige of the Supreme Body (WOB 8).

4. Without the Guardianship the World Order would not have benefited from Shoghi Effendi’s breadth of vision.

COMMENT: The Guardian’s book ‘God Passes By’ provides an historical panorama covering the first one hundred years of Bahá’í history. Shoghi Effendi gives us an invaluable interpretation of this history and correlates it with the major events of the century. Thanks also to the Guardian’s World Order letters, his entrancing vision of the future, and the steps which would lead to its realization, have been fully laid out for us.

5. Without the Guardianship the elected institutions of the Faith, locally, nationally and internationally, would have been deprived of the Guardian’s guidance.

COMMENT: As already indicated above, Shoghi Effendi gave his guidance for the formulation of National and Local Bahá’í Constitutions. As to the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, in view of the provision that he “is debarred from laying down independently the constitution that must govern the organized activities of his fellow-members” (WOB 150), Shoghi Effendi made it clear in his ‘Dispensation’ that the two areas of authorized interpretation and binding legislation had been exclusively reserved to each of the two successive Successors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, namely the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice respectively.



## How Can the Universal House of Justice Determine That its Enactments do Not Depart from the Spirit of the Teachings?

The statement in the 'Dispensation' which gives rise to this issue is the following:

the Guardian...cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them [members of the Universal House of Justice] of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning or to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances. (WOB 150)

To understand adequately the implications of this statement, we must first consider the meaning or meanings of the word "enactment" or the word of which it is a derivative, namely "enact". According to the Webster dictionary the verb "enact" is used when a "legal and authoritative act" is performed. It also implies the act of passing a "bill" or a legal draft into a law. It is obvious that in the sentence from the "Dispensation" quoted above, the first meaning is meant, because of the categorical statement, also in the same sentence, clearly affirming that when a final decision is taken, the Guardian "cannot override" or veto such a decision. Thus the issue of reconsideration is a step to be taken in the process of arriving at the final decision.

This issue has been dealt with in the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice. In the absence of the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice has formally stated that among its "binding terms of reference" and the elements which constitute "its bedrock foundation", are the "interpretations and expositions" of the Guardian. (CUHJ 4)

Furthermore in a letter dated 27 May 1966 the Universal House of Justice assures us that "a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation." In the same letter the Universal House of Justice makes this further clear affirmation: "the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of

jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian confidently described as ‘clearly defined’”. (MUHJ 85)

In the light of the above quotations, in my view, it should not be difficult to arrive at the conclusion that Shoghi Effendi’s statement in the ‘Dispensation’ could well be understood as a reminder of, and indeed an emphasis on, the imperative obligation to refer to his interpretations and expositions prior to any act of legislation. This assurance has been explicitly given to the Bahá’í World in the statements quoted above from the writings of the Universal House of Justice.

### **Wide Range of Responsibilities of the Office of Headship, as Invested in the Universal House of Justice**

Based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s and Shoghi Effendi’s writings these responsibilities include the following duties and powers:

1. to safeguard the unity of the community (WOB 148)
2. to resolve all problems which have caused differences (WT 20)
3. to maintain the integrity of the Bahá’í teachings (WOB 148)
4. to elucidate questions that are obscure (WT 20)
5. to maintain the flexibility of the teachings of the Faith (WOB 148)
6. to promulgate and apply its laws (WOB 20 & 145)
7. to protect its institutions (WOB 20)
8. to adapt it loyally and intelligently to the requirements of progressive society (WOB 20)
9. to conduct all Bahá’í administrative affairs (WOB 153)
10. to resolve difficult problems and all important and fundamental questions (WT 14 & BA 47)
11. to create new institutions (CC Vol. 1, 329)
12. to make deductions from the sacred and authorized writings (CC Vol. 1, 323)
13. to launch and direct teaching plans (CC Vol. 1, 340)

14. to be the last refuge of a tottering civilization (WOB 89)
15. to consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world (WOB 20)

As the Universal House of Justice is, after the Guardian, the Central Authority in the Cause, the body unto which “*all things must be referred*” (WT 14), it was able to create institutions to ensure the “discharge of the functions of protection and propagation” and to provide “for the receipt and disbursement of the Huqúqu’lláh” (CUHJ 4).

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice outlines in five paragraphs what it considers to be “among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested” (CUHJ 5). The contents of these paragraphs, without any exception, are based on, and have their roots in, Tablets revealed by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as well as letters of Shoghi Effendi. They deal with the responsibilities of the Supreme Institution in such matters as preserving the sacred Texts, defending and protecting the Cause, proclaiming and propagating its Message, advancing its interests, promoting universal peace, ushering in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, safeguarding the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals, and promoting the advancement and betterment of the world. The last three paragraphs also enumerate the legislative, executive and judicial powers vested in the institution of the House of Justice.

### What does unconditional obedience imply?

Bahá’u’lláh in the thirteenth Glad-Tidings (Bishárát) wrote:

*The men of God’s House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people....Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. They that, for the sake of God, arise to serve His Cause, are the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom. It is incumbent upon all to be obedient unto them.* (TAB 26-27) (This self-same passage is repeated in the Eighth Ishráq.)

Furthermore in the Eighth Leaf of Paradise we read: *“It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together....God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily is the Provider, the Omniscient.”* (TAB 68)

We note in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament His insistent call to the friends to turn to the Universal House of Justice, and obey its directives. We read the following: *“the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, [is] under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One [the Báb].... Whoso rebelleth ...against them hath rebelled against God..., whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God”* (WT 11). *“That which this body....doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant.”* (WT 19-20)

In one of His Tablets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has furthermore written the following:

*The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.* (MUHJ 85)

To confirm the sense of the above passages we read in Shoghi Effendi’s ‘Dispensation’, the following affirmation which corroborates Bahá’u’lláh’s and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements on the inspiration and divine guidance which surround and overshadow the decisions of the Universal House of Justice. He writes: *“the members of the Universal House of Justice, ...and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.”* (WOB 153)

From these explicit and authoritative statements we should know of a certainty that when divine inspiration is well-assured, obedience becomes a spiritual obligation. This theme is fully discussed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His *Some Answered Questions*:

*Know that infallibility is of two kinds: essential infallibility and acquired infallibility.... Essential infallibility is peculiar to the supreme Manifestation, for it is His essential requirement.... But acquired infallibility is not a natural necessity; on the contrary, it is a ray of the bounty of infallibility which shines from the Sun of Reality.... Thus many of the holy beings.... were the mediators of grace between God and men. If God did not protect them from error, their error would cause believing souls to fall into error, and thus the foundations of the Religion of God would be overturned, which would not be fitting nor worthy of God...*

*... For instance, the Universal House of Justice .... will be under the protection and the unerring guidance of God.... Now the members of the House of Justice have not, individually, essential infallibility, but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God; this is called conferred infallibility. (SAQ 173)*

This statement made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá explicitly and certainly gives us the assurance that when an individual or institution, authorized in revealed sacred texts as freed from error, renders a decision or issues a directive requiring the friends to obey, the community of the faithful should be confident that such a decision or directive has been prompted and motivated by divine inspiration. Should this be otherwise, it would not only be unbecoming and unbefitting of a just God, but the result would certainly be the subversion of the very foundations of God's Holy Faith.

The friends of course realize that the objectives specified in the plans and messages of the Universal House of Justice are designed to help us in our direct teaching work. To the extent that we adhere to the wishes of the Supreme Body will we be the recipients of added confirmations and blessings.

## Classification of the Bahá'í Sacred Texts\*

### The Universal House of Justice

Your email letter dated 18 June 2001, requesting statistical information relating to the collection and classification of the Sacred Texts, which are housed in the Bahá'í World Centre Archival collection, was received, and we are to reply as follows:

The Bahá'í International Archives holds significantly more Tablets and Bahá'í Holy Writings in its collection now than it did in 1983. For your ease of reference, we provide the following information as an explanation to the data presented in this document. The Archival collection held at the World Centre is divided into three categories, and between these three groups there are varying degrees of overlap. They are as follows:

**Authenticated items:** Originals or reproductions of Tablets and letters as dispatched to or received by their addressees.

**Transcribed items:** Secondary copies of Tablets or letters, copied by scribes of varying degrees of reliability, sometimes copied from an authenticated item, sometimes copied from another transcribed item.

**Draft copies or Working copies:** These include copies prepared by a scribe/secretary for checking prior to preparing the final copy, copies kept by the scribe/secretary or by Shoghi Effendi for later reference.

In light of the information provided above, we are able to inform you that there are some 7,169 original and photocopies of original Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, 15,815 by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and 17,118 letters of Shoghi Effendi. In addition, there are some 98,000 copies of other such Tablets and letters, many of which have not as yet been authenticated.

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\* Response from the Universal House of Justice to an individual.

With regard to the Writings of the Báb, the Archival collection holds approximately 135 original Tablets, and 55 photocopies. We are unable to provide you with any figures for transcribed copies of His Writings since there is not yet a computer inventory of them.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,  
Department of the Secretariat

## Development of Bahá'í Scholarly Activities

### The Universal House of Justice

24 April 2008

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

Your email letter dated ... has been received by the Universal House of Justice, which has asked us to respond as follows.

The House of Justice is fully committed to fostering the development of Bahá'í scholarly activity in all parts of the Bahá'í world. Through their scholarly endeavours believers are able to enrich the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community, to explore new insights into the Bahá'í teachings and their relevance to the needs of society, and to attract the investigation of the Faith by thoughtful people from all backgrounds. Far from being a diversion from the worldwide effort to advance the process of entry by troops, Bahá'í scholarship can be a powerful reinforcement to that endeavour and a valuable source of new enquirers.

The hope of the House of Justice is that, as the Bahá'í community develops in each country, the concerned National Spiritual Assembly will encourage those so inclined to embark on Bahá'í scholarly activities. When the number of believers involved reaches a sufficient size, an Association for Bahá'í Studies may well come into being and act as a focus for support and encouragement; in due course, such an association may be moved to launch, under the aegis of its National Spiritual Assembly, a journal by which the findings of those engaged in this pursuit can be shared with others. Such associations are generally formed at a national level, although the situation in Europe is such that transnational associations have, at this time, been permitted within that continent. In time the House of Justice will give consideration to whether or not the objectives of the Faith would best be served by the formation of some international organization to coordinate



the work of the associations and to stimulate the creation of new ones in other countries and whether an international journal should be brought into being.

When there are relatively few believers engaged in Bahá'í scholarly activity in a country, the formation of an association there is not viable. However, believers from any part of the world are free to submit papers to Bahá'í journals being published in other countries or to seek to make presentations at meetings arranged by the existing associations elsewhere.

...The individuals having an interest in Bahá'í scholarship are, of course, free to pursue their own scholarly endeavours and to submit their conclusions to existing journals in Europe, North America or elsewhere. They should also be advised to consider means by which they can participate in the work of existing associations.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

## Appendices

### Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their abbreviations used in this book

- ABL 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London*
- ADJ Shoghi Effendi. *Advent of Divine Justice*
- ADP Abdu'l-Bahá. *Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*
- BA Shoghi Effendi. *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932*
- BP Compilation. *Bahá'í Prayers*
- BW World Centre Publications. *Bahá'í World, The*, volumes I (1925) through XX (1986-92); new series 1993-2007
- BWF Compilation. *Bahá'í World Faith*
- CUHJ The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice
- CC *Compilation of Compilations* volumes I-3. World Centre Publications / Bahá'í Publications Australia. Vol. 1-2: 1991; Vol. 3: 1993
- CF Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947-1957*
- ESW Bahá'u'lláh. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*
- FWU 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Foundations of World Unity*
- GPB Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*
- GDM Bahá'u'lláh. *Gems of Divine Mysteries*
- GWB Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*
- HW Bahá'u'lláh. *Hidden Words*
- KA Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*
- KI Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*
- KJV King James Version, The Bible
- LDG Shoghi Effendi. *Lights of Divine Guidance*
- LG compilation. *Lights of Guidance*. India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust
- MBW Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Bahá'í World: 1950-1957*
- MC Universal House of Justice and Ruhyyih Rabbani. *Ministry of the Custodians: An Account of the Stewardship of the Hands of the Cause 1957-63*
- MF Abdu'l-Bahá. *Memorials of the Faithful*
- MSEI Shoghi Effendi. *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent*
- MUHJ63 Universal House of Justice. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-86: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*
- OCF Bahá'u'lláh. *One Common Faith*
- PA Shoghi Effendi and Lady Blomfield. *The Passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha*
- PB Bahá'u'lláh. *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*
- PM Bahá'u'lláh. *Prayers and Meditations*
- PT 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*
- PUP 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Promulgation of Universal Peace*
- Q Qur'an
- SAQ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, comp. and trans. Laura Clifford Barney. *Some Answered Questions*

SDC	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Secret of Divine Civilization</i>
SLH	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i>
SV	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys</i>
SWAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i>
SWB	Báb, The. <i>Selections from the Writings of the Báb</i>
TAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas</i> , volumes 1-3
TAF	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Tablet to Auguste Forel</i>
TB	Bahá'u'lláh. <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
TDH	Shoghi Effendi. <i>This Decisive Hour, Messages from Shoghi Effendi to the North American Bahá'is 1932-1946</i>
TN	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Traveller's Narrative, A</i>
UD	Shoghi Effendi. <i>Unfolding Destiny</i>
WOB	Shoghi Effendi. <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i>
WT	'Abdu'l-Bahá. <i>Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i>

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