

The Principle of the Oneness of Humankind: Strong Foundationalism, Non-Adversarialism, and the Imperatives of our Time¹

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to Sepideh and Darian and their generation

*In memory of Donald Streets
and Glen Eyford*

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“How often the beloved Master was heard to say. Should each one of the friends take upon himself to carry out, in all its integrity and implications, only one of the teachings of the Faith, with devotion, detachment, constancy and perseverance and exemplify it in all his deeds and pursuits of life, the world would become another world and the face of the earth would mirror forth the splendours of the Abha Paradise.”

(From a letter dated 12 January 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Persia - translated from the Persian)²

I. Introduction

The Bahá'í Faith is one of the newest world religions. Its extensive corpus of teachings deals directly with themes that today we can summarize under terms such as that of ‘globalization.’ One key principle that speaks directly to the theme of globalization, and which can even be imagined as its spiritual correspondent in religious discourse, is the principle of the oneness of humankind. This paper seeks to review some of the ways in which the concept has been framed in the recent past. This is largely a subjective exercise developed out of the personal views of the author. Nevertheless, this imaginative exercise also asks us to reflect on current and past understandings and discourses within the Bahá'í community. It is hoped that this type of reflexivity makes the crystallization of a future domain of Bahá'í cultural studies possible.

In a recent article, Jean Marc-Lepain³ (p.179) reminisces on a particular reductionist tendency observed in Bahá'í culture several decades ago:

² Effendi, Shoghi. *Living the Life*. https://bahai-library.com/compilation_living_the_life#1267. Accessed 2 Apr. 2022.

³ Marc-Lepain, J. ‘Tractatus: A Logical Introduction to Bahá'í Philosophy’. In Sergeev, Mikhail, editor. *Studies in Bahá'í Epistemology: Essays and Commentaries*. M-Graphics Publishing, 2021.

“In the 1970s and the 1980s, Bahá’ís had only simple and often naive answers to contemporary problems. One of these simple answers was that establishing the unity of humanity would solve all the problems of the world; however, there was no clear idea offered to us on the ways to bring about that unity. I heard once Douglas Martin calling this naive approach to addressing contemporary issues ‘the Disneyland version of the Faith.’”

There is nothing essentially wrong with admitting from time to time that some of the mental constructs we share might constitute childish and naive imaginations rather than accurate representations of the real. The advancement of knowledge often implies letting go of previously held strong beliefs or ingrained cultural reflexes. There is nostalgia in this. Each of us can remember an earlier time when we saw the world in much simpler and innocent terms. Such frames of understanding or cultural reflexes will always exist at the level of popular culture. These have an educational role to play as transitional elements towards more complex forms of knowledge. The problem, of course, is not to become too attached to them and enclosed within their horizon, or to allow them to resurface as dominant cultural forms. This is a perennial problem, and each generation will have their own ‘Disneyland version of the Faith’ to grow up with and leave behind. For such frames evolve as well. The naive frame highlighted by Douglas Martin, I would like to point out, has found its more evolved continuation today. One can nowadays distinguish a tendency reinforced by strong foundationalism to assert that the unity of humankind is to be established through the very propagation of the concept itself as an ontological truth. Past solutions to the world’s problems are thus recast anew: as the far and wide proclamation of the normative foundational truth⁴ of the oneness of humankind until it has become widely accepted.

⁴ According to Karlberg (p.3), *normative truths* “denote the existence of objective features or properties or governing principles of reality that underlie and inform *the way things ought to be*”; these can also be called *spiritual principles*, which is how Bahá’ís refer to them. These constitute “foundational aspects of reality” (p.1), “truths, or laws, or properties, or indelible features of existence that exist independently of the degree to which

This repositioning of the principle of the oneness of humankind, it is my assertion, seems to produce effects that can be seen to narrow rather than expand our frames of understanding and inhibit rather than uphold processes of ethical formation. Such effects occur despite some progress⁵ in the direction of requiring that “the Bahá’í community pursue external change at the level of social meanings” (Danesh, p.187)⁶, through a process of spiritualization that can complement external political processes of formulating a new world order (Glenford Mitchell).⁷

The remainder of this paper will focus on interrogating such effects and will consist largely of two parts. The first part will concern itself with an abstract discussion. Here, the notion of ontological truths as framed by strong foundationalism will be examined in relation to issues of knowledge and ethics. The rest of the paper will then provide a more concrete expression to this discussion through an analysis of tendencies and discourses currently underpinning the notion of the oneness of humankind.

II. Ontological Truths and Ethical Formation

Elsewhere, I have highlighted in more detail the negative impact which the assigning of ontological truths from a perspective of strong foundationalism can have on ethical

we comprehend them.” (p.3) They are “transcendent truths” that “exist independently of human comprehension.” (p.3) “Ontological foundationalism refers to the view that reality is characterized by foundational truths, or laws, or properties, or indelible features of existence that exist independently of whether human minds are aware of them and independently of the degree to which we comprehend them.” (p.3) Karlberg, Michael. *Constructing Social Reality. An Inquiry into the Normative Foundations of Social Change*. Association for Bahá’í Studies, 2020.

⁵ After all, we are clearly talking here about the selection of a methodology of social change that is primarily epistemic, although the epistemic part requires much more serious elaboration.

⁶ Danesh, Roshan and Musta, Lex. “Some Reflections on Bahá’í Approaches to Social Change”. In *Dimensions of Bahá’í Law*. Bahá’í Publishing, 2019.

⁷ Bahá’í Perspective. *Bahá’í Concept of World Civilization with Glenford Mitchell*. 2021. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8K1SnSXXpNk>.

formation.⁸ This section is concerned with a narrower question: what happens when we ascribe the character of ontological or normative foundational truth to a particular principle?

Roger Coe has advanced an acceptable formulation of the Bahá'í problem of truth:

“In operating with the concept of ‘truth’, which is fundamentally a philosophical concern, Bahá'ís must resolve the apparent contradiction between the statement from ‘Abdu'l-Bahá that ‘truth is one, ...and not divisible’ (PUP 106) and the statement from Shoghi Effendi that ‘religious truth is not absolute but relative. (WOB 58)’”⁹

The aim here is not to attempt to resolve this philosophical conundrum. What is emphasized in this section are two issues. The first, an issue of balance, the second, an issue of taxonomy.

II.1 Balance and Deficits

Let us first examine the issue of balance. If we choose to identify a spiritual principle like that of the oneness of humankind as an ontological truth (or normative foundational truth) then we are on relatively safe ground if it is clear for everyone that this ontological truth remains unknown. It should also be clear that the understandings we might develop about this principle are relative. How relative and whether some understandings might be less relative than others are complex issues that I would prefer not to address here, although progress in

⁸ See chapter entitled “Karlberg’s Notion of Consultation and Bahá'í Consultation (Ontological principles and Ethics)” in Boicu, Filip. *Strong Foundationalism in the Bahá'í Faith? With an Analysis of Michael Karlberg’s Ontological Foundationalism*. www.academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/77126110/Strong Foundationalism in the Bah%C3%A1%C3%AD Faith With an Analysis of Michael Karlbergs Ontological Foundationalism](https://www.academia.edu/77126110/Strong_Foundationalism_in_the_Bah%C3%A1%C3%AD_Faith_With_an_Analysis_of_Michael_Karlbergs_Ontological_Foundationalism). Accessed 23 Apr. 2022.

⁹ Coe, Roger. *Consultation in the Quest for World Peace*. https://bahai-library.com/coe_consultation_world_peace. Accessed 26 Apr. 2022.

this area is possible if one proceeds with extreme caution. Suffice it to say that even in science, objectivity is produced within the confines of a particular conceptual model underpinned by a larger paradigm. Even in science, therefore, objectivity is a construct according to different procedures.

Furthermore, different paradigms, such as those of different versions of foundationalism (strong, medium, and weak, for example), anti-foundationalism or nonfoundationalism, propose each different theoretical frameworks and methodologies. These paradigms and their methodologies ascertain truth and ascribe to it different degrees of objectivity, certainty, or relativity. Employing such frameworks to investigate the truth claims that can be made about a spiritual principle is a very complex exercise. Such an exercise requires an interpretative hermeneutics, a Bahá'í epistemology, and a Bahá'í theory of ethics that are in accord with modern science. All these are needed just to propose a conceptual model that would allow one to advance certain findings or conclusions for the consideration of those working from within other paradigms.

Unfortunately, all this complexity tends to be lost on us once we ascribe to a principle the status of ontological truth. It seems, at least for now, that the more we emphasize the divine, the objective, the ontological character of a principle, the more quickly and completely we tend to forget that its meaning is still unknown, and that whatever our knowledge of it is, it remains highly uncertain. The same tends to happen when we highlight the primacy or centrality of a principle. It is not that spiritual principles or concepts cannot be emphasized as mysteries and unknowns to engage with, it is that we choose not to do so. As a result, what could be an endless but potent area of investigation, and a spiritual quest and adventure, becomes reduced to limited and fixed interpretations which take on the appearance of

unquestionable truth and prescriptive guides to action. This imbalance gets even worse if the character of ontological truth gets ascribed from a perspective of strong foundationalism.

This is so because strong foundationalism cannot but assume that it holds objective truth or knowledge about the basic or foundational principles of reality and human nature (and tends to constantly overplay its hand). The following definition explains this epistemological position in philosophical terms:

“Strong foundationalists hold that the properly basic beliefs are epistemically exalted in some interesting sense. In addition to basic beliefs possessing the kind of justification necessary for knowledge (let us refer to this as ‘knowledge level justification’) strong foundationalists claim the properly basic beliefs are infallible, indubitable, or incorrigible. Infallible beliefs are not possibly false. Indubitable beliefs are not possible to doubt even though the content may be false, and incorrigible beliefs cannot be undermined by further information.”

(Poston)¹⁰

Let us now consider how this position differs from those of a modest foundationalism and a weak foundationalism. A *modest foundationalism* would have ascribed to basic beliefs “a level of positive epistemic status independent of warranting relations from other beliefs” but not more (such as the attributes of being “infallible, incorrigible, or indubitable”).¹¹ A *weak foundationalism* (see Laurence Bonjour’s book *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*) could have affirmed that “some non-inferential [a type of nonargument characterized by the lack of a claim that anything is being proved] beliefs are minimally justified” because “coherence is required for the basic beliefs to serve as premises for other beliefs.”¹²

¹⁰ Poston, Ted. Foundationalism | Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://iep.utm.edu/found-ep/> . Accessed 11 Mar. 2022.

¹¹ Idem

¹² Idem.

Let us also contrast foundationalism overall with anti-foundationalism or nonfoundationalism:

“As a theory of belief-justification, foundationalism distinguishes between ‘basic’ beliefs, which are justified without reference to other beliefs, and ‘non-basic’ beliefs, which are justified by their inferential relation to basic beliefs. In this view, basic beliefs emerge out of and are immediately justified by experience (whether rational or empirical); inferential justification then flows in one direction—from basic to nonbasic beliefs. One can imagine a ‘pyramid’ of knowledge secured by its firm foundation. Nonfoundationalists typically hold to a form of coherentism, which is the main competitor of foundationalism vis-à-vis the debate over the justification of belief. The favorite images here are a ‘web’ of interconnected beliefs or a ‘raft’ that must be repaired while afloat. Foundationalism has difficulty defending its criteria for the basicity of a belief and accounting for the interdependence of all human beliefs; nonfoundationalism, insofar as it maintains strict adherence to coherent relations among beliefs as the only criterion of justification, has difficulty indicating the truth of its beliefs outside the system.”¹³

The beloved Guardian offers the following hermeneutical criteria for the study of the Bahá’í Faith:

“We must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole, not seek out and oppose to each other two strong statements that have different meanings; somewhere in between there are

¹³ *Postfoundationalism* | *Encyclopedia.Com*. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/postfoundationalism>. Accessed 6 Apr. 2022.

links uniting the two. That is what makes our Faith so flexible and well balanced.” (19 March 1945 to an individual believer)¹⁴

“Likewise he is constantly urging them [the Bahá’ís] to really study the Bahá’í teachings more deeply. One may liken Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them. We believe in balance in all things; we believe in moderation in all things . . .” (5 July 1949 to an individual believer)¹⁵

Doesn’t this description correspond more to the ‘coherentism’ or ‘web of interconnected beliefs’ approach characteristic of nonfoundationalism? Isn’t strong foundationalism, with its quest for verticality and the establishing of hierarchy, the more likely approach to erroneously single out a statement, or several, as more foundational than others (or even than all others)? Does the pyramid of knowledge that strong foundationalism seeks to erect, where the entire structure derives from one or several principles, correspond to a model of the sphere in which the teachings are like points on its surface, meaning, deeply connected, of equal relevance, and inseparable from the whole? These are questions worth pondering on before the start of any larger investigation.

It is worthwhile to note that both foundationalism and anti-foundationalism, as well as positions that seek to mediate between the two, such as postfoundationalism or some versions of nonfoundationalism, are necessary positions. Some degree of foundationalism is completely inescapable, useful, and also necessary. For example, the Anisa Model can be taken to represent a viable example of foundationalism, and maybe even of strong

¹⁴ This fits well the dilemma highlighted by Roger Coe in relation to the nature of truth.

¹⁵ Letters written on behalf of the Guardian, cited in Fananapazir, Khazeh, et al. *Some Interpretive Principles in the Bahá’í Writings*. 1992, https://bahai-library.com/fananapazir_fazel_interpretive_principles. Accessed 18 Mar. 2022.

foundationalism. The integration of the Bahá'í teachings¹⁶ with the process philosophy of Whitehead led Daniel Jordan to identify “the translation of potentiality into actuality” as the key organizing principle of his philosophy (Jordan 1982: minutes 12–16).¹⁷ A pyramidal theoretical structure for education was then constructed around this first principle (idem).

There is a huge difference, however, between the foundationalism of Daniel Jordan and current approaches which assume that Bahá'í principles or teachings are rather clear and transparent in meaning, and hence, easily selected as ontological truths in conformity with divine wisdom. The process of selecting even the shortest statement from the Bahá'í Writings as a normative foundational truth will always imply a prior act of interpretation that must be accounted for, while the truth of the statement in question would still need to be justified both within the domain of religion (in light of its own principles of hermeneutics and in relationship with the whole of the Revelation), and within the domains of science and philosophy (according to their logic and procedures), as the principle of the harmony of science and religion demands. Abizadeh has emphasized this epistemological concern as follows:

“So to determine the basis for the Bahá'í position on some question in ethics, one must consider Bahá'í ethical theory as a whole, and justify the position in those terms, and not in terms of the divine say-so. What is more, given the Bahá'í principle of the harmony of science and religion, and that religion must be scientific in its method, the Bahá'í position

¹⁶ Here, the following Bahá'í teaching is of utmost importance: “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom” Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (2020, August) ‘Social Action’, viewed 11 November 2020, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/social-action/> no. 177.

¹⁷ Jordan, D. C. (1982) Dr Dan Jordan Anisa workshop Lethbridge 1982 part 1, viewed 11 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZ6MTxBvNnY>

must be interpreted in light of some background knowledge gleaned from the natural and social sciences.”¹⁸

Failure to apply such processes can lead to unsophisticated forms of foundationalism and unsophisticated foundationalism can be extremely problematic, especially if of a strong variant.

Through the notion of normative foundational truths characteristic of strong foundationalisms (such as ‘ontological foundationalism’) emphasis is placed on the recognition and acceptance of certain given ontological truths and on their promotion as such into the wider society. This is so because in such a perspective the direct assertion of ontological truths is envisaged as the solution to the world’s problems. Only ontological truths, this vision maintains, can succeed in imposing order over the chaos of relativism and nihilism in human affairs.

Admittedly, it is difficult to promote truths (or rather, concepts or principles) on the basis that their meanings are uncertain and largely unknown.¹⁹ This is even more so if such truths are claimed to be ontological or foundational truths. However, a possible consequence of advancing claims of strong foundationalism is that, without clear warnings, assumptions will invariably be made by either those transmitting or receiving such claims (and, oftentimes, by both) that the content of such ontological truths presents us with objective knowledge or foundational truth. This is where imbalance sets in.

Currently, for example, a surprisingly common assumption is that such truths can be ‘lifted’ straight from the Bahá’í Writings, that they are clear and transparent in meaning (and hence,

¹⁸ *Because Baha'u'llah Said So*. https://bahai-library.com/abizadeh_moral_reasoning. Accessed 14 Mar. 2022.

¹⁹ Although I would argue this is necessary and that we should see teaching as inviting others to investigate themes of great complexity for which we do not hold the answers.

easily selected), and simply requiring massive horizontal distribution. Such distribution, it is further assumed, would automatically trigger processes of personal transformation and social change. This approach seems reflective of the very famous Bahá'í children song²⁰ from 1948: “God is one²¹, man is one, and all religions agree ... If everyone learned the three onenesses, we'd have world unity” (Margaret J. King 1948, cited in Echevarria 2005).²² As you would have noticed, the song assumes the meanings of these ‘onenesses’ as self-evident, which is what we tend to do. It is here, I would argue, that significant deficits²³ between normative principles and their understanding and practice set in.

²⁰ I quite like this video version of the song: Belize Baha'í Videos. ‘*God Is One*’ Children Song. 2017. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GESLy4H3KyE>.

²¹ As Steven Phelps (mins.57-59) observes, even as lofty and central a notion as the oneness of God (“God is one” from the song) can be deemed as relative: “and various of Bahá'u'lláh's statements and those of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá as well I think suggest that even these kinds of, what we might take to be the rock bottom fundamentals that we should all agree on, you know, ‘oneness of God,’ even that is conditioned by culture, is conditioned by time and space. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá himself in *Some Answered Questions* says the reality of God is sanctified beyond singleness, then how much more beyond plurality. And it's statements like that that which I think can be highlighted as signaling a kind of theological posture which takes it outside of the orbit of, certainly of Shia Islam and outside of the orbit of Western theological thinking. And through this idea of the relativity of religious truth and the relative validity of radically different perspectives on the Divine it offers I think a kind of sandbox, a kind of theological sandbox within which all the traditions on the planet can come together.” *Bahá'ís of Austin. Steven Phelps Fireside – ‘What Is Real?’ 2021. YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltTiMQiZzHY>.

The statement in question from ‘Abdu'l-Bahá is: “The reality of the Divinity is sanctified above singleness, then how much more above plurality.” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, and Laura Clifford Barney. *Some Answered Questions*. Newly revised, Bahá'í World Centre, 2014, ‘The Trinity,’ p.127. While there can be no doubt that the oneness of God is a key spiritual principle, should we ascribe to it the status of ontological foundational truth? What happens if we do and that is not the case? Would that help or inhibit our understanding of Divinity? More importantly, what are the implications of such strong foundationalism for other concepts, particularly when these are not direct descriptions of transcendental ontology (the hardest ones to question for a religion), but rather, principles referring to social matters, knowledge, or human nature?

²² Echevarria, Lynn. *The Canadian Bahá'ís 1938-2000: Constructions of Oneness in Personal and Collective Identity*. https://bahai-library.com/echevarria_canadian_bahais_1938-2000. Accessed 22 Apr. 2022.

²³ For an example of such deficits see the examples provided by Jamey Heath and Barbara Talley:

“And I wonder like okay so we're Bahá'ís and we believe in this principle that we know the world cannot transform until we elevate women, then why is it we preach it but is not in practice as much? ... I know they believe in their hearts, we believe it in our hearts, but if we are not practicing it how can we demonstrate it to the rest of the world?” Jamey Heath, in Mahmoudi, Mona et al. “Panel: Creating a Society Founded on Divine Principles.” Grand Canyon Bahá'í Conference, Phoenix, AZ. Bahá'í Blog 25 December 2017 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFMDyy_Mfi4. Accessed 13 March 2021. mins, 14-16.

“Let's look at interracial fellowship. In many communities we come together and we pray together, we will have a devotional, we may be in a study circle together, we may be in a Feast, we may be in a LSA meeting, but from what I have been hearing from many pupil of the eye [POTE], and it's definitely clear in my circumstances, that's where it ends. We don't hang out together, we're not part of each others' lives, we might as well call it the Bahá'í Association in many spaces.” (Talley and Talley 1:04:00-1:05:00) Barbara Talley and Radiance Talley. “Baha'í Blogcast with Rainn Wilson – Episode 51: Barbara & Radiance Talley.” 19 June

The problem with setting up ontological truths in this manner is that forms of knowledge associated with certainty foreclose the possibility of exploration beyond already established limits. Once a notion is assigned the character of ontological truth its given definition stays and claims permanence, and the focus shifts to acceptance and recognition rather than to the full investigation of its meaning. To foreclose knowledge in such manner is to deny the believer or the learner the capacity to think for themselves and of engaging in a process of discovery and experimentation. Also denied is the necessary habit of peering into the unknown and admitting of the complexity of meanings found in the Bahá'í Revelation. If such complexity of thought is denied, intellectual maturity, personal emotional connection, and the development of moral character all suffer – as all depend on the capacity to live with the tension of facing the unknown. As Father Walter Ong tells us: “maturity is not achieved until a person has the ability to face with some equanimity into the unknown.” (cited in O’Dea 1958, p.44)²⁴

The problem is also pedagogical as the static and top-down approaches to knowledge implied by the notion of ontological truths framed by forms of strong foundationalism cannot provide the personal, intimate, ground-up, open-ended, and dynamic mode of relation that learners should have with reality and knowledge. For this reason too then, this approach fails “to communicate religious knowledge in such a way that it becomes part of the student’s very being.”²⁵ (p.64) With the introduction of normative foundational truths in the manner of ontological foundationalism what is being lost, therefore, is the dynamic mode of relation to

2020, 1:24:12. <https://www.bahaiblog.net/2020/06/bahai-blogcast-with-rainn-wilson-episode-51-barbara-radiance-talley/>

²⁴ O’Dea, Thomas. *American Catholic Dilemma. A Sociologist Challenges the Attitude of His Fellow Catholics toward the Intellectual in Today’s Society*. Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1958.

²⁵ Idem.

virtues and spiritual principles. This effectively undermines the capacity of normative discernment in individuals.

An assumption of strong foundationalism is that moral development and social change are processes triggered by the acceptance of normative foundational truths. Once triggered, it is further assumed, such processes will automatically unfold to their completion. The key aspect of the Bahá'í approach to moral transformation and social change, therefore, becomes the promotion, recognition, and acceptance of Bahá'í ontological truths as these have been stipulated in advance. This can be extremely unhelpful in a number of ways. If the focus is on speed and the spread of 'truth' then the tendency that ensues is to package truth for transmission (banking education), rather than create a journey or activate an endless quest in which each individual is a creator of meaning and able to investigate reality in their own way. As a result, our confidence becomes invested in our principles and their divine status, rather than in the horizon of their meaning and the sphere of their application, i.e., in our ethics. Consequently, we fail to develop the capacity for normative discernment, and we also fail to develop dynamic forms of ethical living. In this manner, deficits set in. We emphasize and promote a particular normative principle as foundational, but we display ignorance of its conceptual meanings and a constant inability to operate with it in basic terms at the level of social reality. We undermine in thought and practice what we uphold in principle. What we are faced with then is a choice between different forms of pedagogy and educational systems²⁶: one which aims for spread, adherence, social control and the shaping of

²⁶ This choice is also one between different forms of teaching that fall between two poles on a continuum, one more akin to prozelytizing, the other more similar to an in-depth and open-ended study of the phenomenon of religion as a whole. Depending on what options we select on this continuum we activate different processes of understanding and modes of ethical formation. The first option might be the most attractive in terms of immediate growth, but over time, that progress comes at the expense of substance. And the loss of substance is a fundamental threat to any endeavour.

mentalities and conduct via a predetermined set of meanings to be internalized, the other for instilling in each soul the capacity to participate in the generation and application of truth and of attempting to identify normative principles as the basis for a collective process of investigation into the meanings of Revelation.

The first approach can lead to external problems. First, such an approach can expose its believers to a huge gap between moral rhetoric and actual ethical thought and practice. If you are heavily promoting key moral principles in the wider society the expectation is that such moral principles are strongly reflected in your patterns of individual and community life.

Second, the cultural strategy of promoting one's normative foundational truths at global scale and in all areas of life could be read as a Gramscian strategy: the strategy of extending 'counter-hegemony' to challenge the ruling-elites. Neo-Gramscians view the extension of 'counter-hegemony' in very conflictual terms, as a 'war of position' to be later followed by a 'war of manouevre' (the revolutionary capture of political power and of the state). Clearly, the Bahá'í methodology of social change is antithetical to 'the war of manouevre,' and seems largely incompatible with this neo-Gramscian notion of 'counter-hegemony.' The imposition of values, cultural perspectives, ideologies, or worldviews is completely incompatible with the Bahá'í methodology for social change. Bahá'í approaches to social change must be based on a politics of friendship to all, not on one of distinction between friends and enemies.²⁷

They must be based on the principle of the independent investigation of truth and not on the spread of ideology or dogma. This seems to me incompatible with the neo-Gramscian notion of 'counter-hegemony', which is a form of war by cultural means. Cultural wars and marketing/advertising strategies already pervade all forms of public discourse. Bombardment

²⁷ Abizadeh, Arash. 'Review: Politics beyond War: Ulrich Gollmer's Contribution to Bahá'í Political Thought'. *Arash*, 20 Dec. 2004, <https://abizadeh.wixsite.com/arash/post-1/2004/12/20/review-politics-beyond-war-ulrich-gollmers-contribution-to-bahai-political-thought>.

with specific type of information both at large scale and through microtargeting is already the main characteristic of our public sphere. Here, the common approach is that any idea, if repeated often enough, will at some point become convincing, and if people around you can be shown to have adopted it so will you. Such exercises aim to influence individual and collective behavior and mindsets towards allegiance to different ideologies, agencies, actors, policies, consumer products, and forms of action. There is great danger in entering the public sphere in the same manner. As Roshan Danesh²⁸ has observed in relation to the concept of oneness: “a post-hegemonic world must be created by non-hegemonic means.” (p.73)

Finally, the most serious issue with strong foundationalism and its impositions on freedom of thought is that, over time, it can surreptitiously lead to the re-activation or the crystallization of dogma: “We cannot and must not simply take on faith what other people tell us, through whatever position of authority they tell us. This is central to the Bahá’í teachings, it enables the seeker after reality to break free of the restricted dogma of the past.”²⁹ (Phelps, min.37)

Another interrelated point also merits emphasis here. The decline of religions begins when incorrect hermeneutics are being applied, and when the positions of strong foundationalism and biblical literalism have become aligned and dominant.

To end with, a tentative conclusion can be put forward. We are on safer ground if our perpetual aim is to get closer and closer to the meaning of a spiritual principle that remains largely unknown rather than promoting such a principle as an ontological truth, trying to locate its objective meaning, or presuming we have already done so. At this early stage of development, a better choice might be to focus on opening access to the study of the

²⁸ Danesh, Roshan. “Hegemony and Revelation: A Bahá’í Perspective on World Order”. In *Dimensions of Bahá’í Law*. Bahá’í Publishing, 2019.

²⁹ *Baha’is of Austin. Steven Phelps Fireside – ‘What Is Real?’ 2021. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltTiMOiTzHY>.*

Revelation in light of knowledge from the academic disciplines and on setting up investigative open-ended processes that could result in the construction of exploratory conceptual models and paradigms. With such processes underway we could then aim for more consistent answers.

II.2 Issues of Taxonomy

The section above discusses how we easily take it for granted that the oneness of humankind is a normative foundational truth. And, indeed, there is justification for this in one clear instance: “World order can be founded only on an unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life.” The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p.4.³⁰

However, of note here in this instance, is that this truth refers only to a specific provision of the notion of the oneness of humankind, namely, that there is only one human species. It is also significant that, in this reasoning, the House of Justice employs both science and religion as arguments supporting the legitimacy of this truth. This is the method underlined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

“Consider what it is that singles man out from among created beings, and makes of him a creature apart. Is it not his reasoning power, his intelligence? Shall he not make use of these

³⁰ Universal House of Justice (1985), ‘The Promise of World Peace’, viewed 11 November 2020, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/#19851001_001

in his study of religion? I say unto you: weigh carefully in the balance of reason and science everything that is presented to you as religion. If it passes this test, then accept it, for it is truth! If, however, it does not so conform, then reject it, for it is ignorance!”³¹

This very precise definition, however, cannot be the only definition of the principle of the oneness of humankind. A question thus emerges: is the principle of the oneness of humankind one truth, several, or a multiplicity? Christopher Buck, for example, has identified fifty Bahá’í principles of unity.³² Buck has also emphasized this heterogeneity through his analysis of the Tablet of Glad-Tidings (Lawḥ-i Bishārāt) from his book *Paradise and Paradigm*³³ (see section entitled “The Bahá’í Faith as a Response to Modernity”).

Moreover, what has been taken as an ontological truth might in fact represent an interpretative paradigm yet to be constituted and an extremely complex program for social change – a vision of world order given by Bahá’u’lláh that is yet to be analyzed and understood. The focus on the aspect of ontological truth tends, in this case, to occult the vision of world order associated with the principle of the oneness of humankind.

In addition, I would argue that rather than highlighting the supremacy of a particular abstract value (such as unity) from which a metaphysical system could be then derived, this principle demands that all decision-making (particularly the decisions of national governments and of regional and national parliaments) be framed in terms of its effects on the wellbeing of the

³¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Bahá’í Reference Library - Paris Talks, Pages 141-146*. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PT/pt-45.html>. Accessed 14 Mar. 2022.

³² Buck, Christopher. “Fifty Baha’i Principles of Unity: A Paradigm of Social Salvation” (2017 Update)’. *Baha’i Studies Review*, Jan. 2015. www.academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/35016378/Fifty_Baha_i_Principles_of_Unity_A_Paradigm_of_Social_Salvation_2017_update.

³³ Buck, Christopher. ‘Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha’i Faith (SUNY Press, 1999)’. May 1999. www.academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/4333440/Paradise_and_Paradigm_Key_Symbols_in_Persian_Christianity_and_the_Baha_i_Faith_SUNY_Press_1999.

entire human race. The last few decades show, however, that fixating the notion as an ontological truth can suspend these important dimensions and processes of inquiry, a topic I set out to explore in the next section.

III. Epistemological Concerns

The promotion of the principle of the oneness of humankind as an ontological truth implies that the concept is relatively well delineated and understood or at least elaborated well enough for the focus to be on its promulgation. This sort of epistemological finality and specific focus have arguably contributed to the conceptual underdevelopment of the term. In relation to this some key epistemological concerns are:

- i. the need to better engage the vision of Shoghi Effendi;
- ii. understanding *The Seven Valleys* as the problematic of global social change;
- iii. responding to the imperatives of our time;
- iv. the need for a new knowledge infrastructure and new educational processes;
- v. encouraging a partial redefinition of the methodology for social change;
- vi. working towards new moral codes and forms of ethical living;
- vii. addressing the current strong foundationalism and non-adversarialism discursive formation framing the notion of the oneness of humankind.

III.1 Engaging the Vision of Shoghi Effendi

The principle of the oneness of humankind seems currently to be primarily perceived as an issue of how individuals should generally treat each other (for example, with kindness and consideration), and not as a concept illuminating the structural inequalities existing in society. From such a perspective, the moral imperatives associated with the concept are almost exclusively directed towards the individual and his/her attitudes, rather than towards institutions and the community. The use of the principle to highlight structural inequalities is not as actively encouraged as it could be. In some settings such use might even be considered too challenging to the current unity and consensus, too uncomfortable, contested, and divisive, and therefore, too adversarial. Highlighting structural inequalities in the society at large or critiquing social realities and processes within the Bahá'í community may be frowned upon as inviting disunity. It can thus be said that the principle of the oneness of humankind has suffered from a lack of conceptual development in relation to its social dimensions. At the same time, it is much easier to promote a smooth and relatively accessible concept of the oneness of humankind projecting an image of unity than one laden with ambivalence and complexity and projecting an image of the structural issues in society that must be addressed.

Even more surprising is the failure to develop the most important aspect of the principle of the oneness of humankind. Shoghi Effendi³⁴ makes it very clear that this principle “is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human

³⁴ Effendi, Shoghi. *Bahá'í Reference Library - The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Pages 42-45. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/WOB/wob-22.html>. Accessed 2 Apr. 2022.

family.” The principle of the oneness of humankind is therefore primarily concerned with the relationships between states and nations, and implies a need for political education³⁵ that relates from the local and the national to the global. Such education, however, is currently missing in the Bahá’í community.³⁶

The definition of Shoghi Effendi further positions the principle of the oneness of humankind as a global notion, namely, as one that applies primarily at global scale:

“Bahá’u’lláh is designating and establishing a new unit of analysis – the global level – at which to reconceptualize human, spiritual, economic, and political culture and institutions. His perspective intentionally transcends the limited nationalistically oriented discourse of political theory because solutions based on the category of the nation-state are inadequate to meet the needs and moral challenges of a global human society.” (Saiedi, p.324)³⁷

This dimension of the concept is essential to our understanding of the present and future, yet remains largely unacknowledged (as with the sociological and political dimensions of the concept). An important question therefore is: What are we promoting when we are promoting the concept of the oneness of humankind as an ontological truth?

³⁵ A good introductory resource here is Knight, W. Andy, and Thomas F. Keating, *Global Politics: Emerging Networks, Trends and Challenges*. Oxford University Press Canada, 2010. Andy W. Knight has been one of the most prominent Bahá’í intellectuals in the field of political science for the last couple of decades. An even more comprehensive introduction is provided by the following course of Ian Shapiro - a non-Bahá’í political thinker: Shapiro, Ian. (35) *Power and Politics in Today’s World - YouTube*. University of Yale Course <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLh9mgdi4rNeyViG2ar68jkgEi4y6doNZy>

³⁶ Graham Hassall noted this problem back in 1993: “The genuine concern expressed by Bahá’ís that they should not comment on matters political has come in time to form an isolationist attitude, and has encouraged a passive acceptance of the many struggles that this country is facing in its attempt to locate itself in a rapidly changing world ... Where are those actively preparing to ‘guard’ themselves in preparation for future emergencies?” (Hassall, Graham. *The Spirit of Learning*. Association for Bahá’í Studies, 17-18 April 1993, pp.3-4, 7).

³⁷ Saiedi, Nader. *Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. Univ. Press of Maryland, 2000.

Essentially, these perspectives, sociological – concerning structural inequalities; political – concerning the relations between nations and states; and global – concerning a new unit of analysis for all dimensions (spiritual, economic, political, environmental, educational, etc.), require new forms of morality or ethics. Such forms of ethics would have to engage structural inequalities, the asymmetric relations between nations and regions, forms of global inequality, and the global concerns, crises, and trends of the present age. This cannot happen without in-depth knowledge of the global and of one’s society in all its aspects. However, such re-orientation in knowledge in light of this key teaching of Shoghi Effendi has not yet occurred.³⁸ Therefore, a corresponding ethical alignment derived from such knowledge has not occurred either. Overcoming such issues requires an acceleration in open and democratic processes of knowledge and intense experimentation with dynamic forms of ethical living in light of the sociological, political, and global dimensions of the principle of the oneness of humankind. Experimentation with dynamic forms of ethical living must occur not only at the individual level but, essentially, at the level of institutions and communities. Shoghi Effendi’s

³⁸ I need to acknowledge here that in a 2001-2002 study of popular opinion in the Bahá’í community on the theme of “unity in diversity” Will C. van den Hoonard has highlighted similar issues. Van den Hoonard (2005) starts by observing that Shoghi Effendi’s framing of the theme of ‘unity in diversity’ “is bound up with issues of human governance and social structure” (p.255). He then asks: “*How well does the dimension of unity in diversity match the explicit allusions in the writings of Shoghi Effendi to the ‘complete unification of the diverse elements that constitute human society’ (1967:122)? What do we make of Shoghi Effendi’s references to a vision of ‘a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration..., its script and language,’ involving ‘the fusion of all races, creeds, classes and nations (ibid. 1967:43, 128)?*”

The findings of the study reveal a real discordance between Bahá’í popular understandings of ‘unity in diversity’ and the framing of Shoghi Effendi: “*What is striking about the current Bahá’í popular discourse and usage of ‘unity in diversity’ is that it seems rather at variance with the meaning advocated in the writings of Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice. The former focuses on such tangible qualities of cultural diversity such as dress, language, race, tribe, ethnicity, human temperament, etc. The latter focuses on human governance.*” (p.257) The implications are instructive for our current discussion of how the principle of the oneness of humankind has been understood in ways not aligned with Shoghi Effendi’s key instructions: “*On an empirical level, we see that when we privilege the popular meaning of unity in diversity, we privilege the norms of mainstream, dominant culture. Alternatively, when we adopt unity in diversity as a principle of human governance, we know that ‘diversity’ is an essential factor of unity. In the former, we ‘other,’ rather than befriend, members of minorities, i.e., strangers. In the latter, we pay tribute to the phrase of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to ‘call none a stranger’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1978: 280) and we touch upon a very fundamental principle of social and institutional interaction and relations that only then will come home to roost in microscoping a globalized world.*” Van den Hoonard, Will. *Etching the Idea of ‘Unity in Diversity’ in the Bahá’í Community: Popular Opinion and Organizing Principle*. Warburg, Margit, et al., editors. *Bahá’í and Globalisation*. Aarhus University Press, 2005, pp.245-267.

call for a new and more profound form of scholarship and his suggestion that “the deeper teachings” of the Faith can be discovered through analysis of “the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society” provides a clear direction ahead:

“It seems what we need now is a more profound and co-ordinated Bahá’í scholarship in order to attract such men as you are contacting. The world has - at least the thinking world - caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound ‘new’ to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men.” (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 3 July 1949, qtd. in *A Compilation on Scholarship* nr.75)

III.2 The Seven Valleys as the Problematic of Global Social Change

When asked about the purpose of life for a Bahá’í, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (cited in Jordan 1977: 23-24) said it was ‘to acquire virtues’ and Shoghi Effendi answered that it was ‘to promote the oneness of mankind’ (Rúhíyyih Khánúm, cited in idem).³⁹ With reference to *The Seven Valleys*, these responses can be seen to define the station of “true poverty and absolute nothingness” (i.e. of selflessness and mystical union)⁴⁰ as concrete self-effacement in service to humankind. As described in *Gleanings* (Bahá’u’lláh 1990: 285)⁴¹ this means taking a stand:

³⁹ Jordan, Daniel C. (1973). *The meaning of deepening: gaining a clearer apprehension of the purpose of God for man*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust.

⁴⁰ Bahá’u’lláh. The Seven Valleys, in *The Call of the Divine Beloved: Selected Mystical Works of Bahá’u’lláh*. Bahá’í World Center, 2018, p.45.

⁴¹ “Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry

- against poverty *'be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich'*;
- against racism, class, gender and religious discrimination *'[be] a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression'*;
- against the systematic discrimination of immigrants *'be a home for the stranger ... a tower of strength for the fugitive'*;
- against nationality as the main criterion of global inequality *'be...a breath of life to the body of mankind.'*

'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Second Tablet to the Hague" illustrates again how selflessness must be directed at 'securing the very life and felicity of mankind':

"We Bahá'ís have the greatest affinity for your esteemed organization, and dispatched therefore two distinguished individuals to you in order to forge a strong bond. For in this day the cause of universal peace is of paramount importance amongst all human affairs and is the greatest instrument for securing the very life and felicity of mankind. Bereft of this effulgent reality, humanity can in no wise find true composure or real advancement but will, day by day, sink ever deeper into misery and wretchedness. This last terrible war hath clearly proven that humanity cannot withstand the effects of modern instruments of warfare. The future can in no wise be compared to the past, for earlier weapons and armaments had but a feeble effect, whilst modern ones can, in a brief span of time, strike at the very roots of the world of

of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility." Bahá'u'lláh. *Bahá'í Reference Library - Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Page 285. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/GWB/gwb-130.html>. Accessed 7 May 2022.

humanity and surpass the limits of its endurance. In this age, therefore, universal peace is like unto the sun, which bestoweth life upon all things, and it is thus incumbent upon all to endeavour in the path of this mighty cause. Now, we indeed share this common goal with you and strive toward it with all our strength, renouncing even our lives, our kindred, and our substance for its sake. ... We long with heart and soul for the day to arrive when the tabernacle of the oneness of humanity will have been raised in the midmost heart of the world and the banner of universal peace unfurled in all regions. The oneness of humanity must therefore be established, that the edifice of universal peace may be raised in turn.”⁴²

III.3. The Imperatives of our Time

The first significant consequence of this redefinition for the Bahá’í community is that individual intellectual and moral/spiritual development has become inextricably linked with the issue of global social change. Our notions of spirituality must recognize this essential fact. Various overlapping global trends threaten our G-zero⁴³ world with unprecedented and unforeseen crises and with the specter of partial extinction by 2040 to 2050⁴⁴:

⁴² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Tablet to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace, The Hague*. https://bahai-library.com/abdul-baha_lawh_hague_bwc. Accessed 28 Apr. 2022.

⁴³ Ian Bremmer, "[From G8 to G20 to G-Zero: Why no one wants to take charge in the new global order](#)", *Newstatesman*, June 11, 2013

⁴⁴ “In the latter part of the twentieth century (1960-2000), water use doubled, food consumption and production increased 2.5 times and wood consumption tripled. The upsurge was driven by demographic growth. The world population almost tripled in the second half of the twentieth century, growing from some 2.5 billion in 1950 to over 7 billion in 2013, and it is expected to climb to over 8 billion in 2025. It is estimated that by 2030, demand for food will rise at least 35 per cent, demand for water by 40 per cent, and demand for energy by 50 per cent.” (UNESCO, *Rethinking Education: Towards the Common Good*, 2015, p.21)

“Moreover, for the first time, more than half of the world’s population lives in urban areas. By 2050, two-thirds of the world population, or over 6 billion persons, will do so. By then, it is estimated that 80 per cent of the urban population of the world will be concentrated in cities and towns of the global South. The growth of the world’s urban population, combined with the expansion of middle class lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production, are having an adverse impact on the environment and on climate change, and increasing the risk of natural disasters worldwide. These upheavals pose a fundamental threat to lives, livelihoods and public health across the world. Unplanned or poorly planned urbanization is increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters and extreme climate conditions. The unprecedented rate of urban growth is setting the social, political, cultural and environmental trends of the world. Consequently, sustainable urbanization has become one of the most pressing challenges facing the global community in the twenty-first century.” (UNESCO, *Rethinking Education: Towards the Common Good*, 2015, p.22-23) *Rethinking Education (UNESCO, 2015) | Education within the*

- imperial contests to assert zones of influence resulting in economic, informational, and military wars, nuclear proliferation, a new arms race, and the activation of hunger plans as war strategy;
- the erosion of individuality, of human nature, and of democracy through behavior modification via surveillance capitalism⁴⁵;
- the demise of liberal democracy, the rise of authoritarianism, and the hijack of the division of learning in global society⁴⁶ by a handful of unaccountable private companies and imperialistic states that control hidden forms of technology;
- the demise of neoliberalism and the crisis of capitalism, the Global North and Global South⁴⁷ divide, global poverty, the increase in inequality and social divisions, and the rise of automisation with its impact on unemployment, and of precarious work;
- the climate crisis, the urbanization crisis, the animal agriculture crisis⁴⁸, the water crisis, land degradation⁴⁹, deforestation, the collapse of biodiversity, food shortages, plastic pollution, air pollution, the release of chemicals such as PFOS, PFOA or

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. <https://www.sdg4education2030.org/rethinking-education-unesco-2015>. Accessed 23 Apr. 2022. This section of the UNESCO dossier relied on data from reports such as those of UN DESA, UN-HABITAT, and the National Intelligence Council in Washington. Below are some examples: UN DESA. 2013. World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision. New York, United Nations. UN DESA. 2012. World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision. New York, United Nations. UN-HABITAT. 2013. UN-HABITAT Global Activities Report 2013. Our presence and partnerships. Nairobi, UN-HABITAT.

National Intelligence Council. 2012. Global Trends 2030: Alternative worlds. Washington, DC, National Intelligence Council.

SPREAD Sustainable Lifestyle 2050. 2011. Sustainable Lifestyle: Today's facts and Tomorrow's trends.

⁴⁵ See side by side: Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Profile books, 2019 and Foster, John Bellamy, and Robert W. 'Surveillance Capitalism'. *Monthly Review*, 1 July 2014, <https://monthlyreview.org/2014/07/01/surveillance-capitalism/>.

⁴⁶ Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. Profile books, 2019.

⁴⁷ See Haug, Sebastian, et al. 'The "Global South" in the Study of World Politics: Examining a Meta Category'. *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 9, Sept. 2021, pp. 1923–44. Taylor and Francis+NEJM, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1948831>.

⁴⁸ See for example *Eating Our Way To Extinction | The Documentary*. <https://www.eating2extinction.com>. Accessed 29 Apr. 2022.

⁴⁹ "Without urgent action, degradation will spread further. By 2050, an area the size of South America will be added to the toll if current rates of harm continue, according to the [Global Land Outlook 2 report](#)." Harvey, Fiona, and Fiona Harvey Environment correspondent. 'UN Says up to 40% of World's Land Now Degraded'. *The Guardian*, 27 Apr. 2022. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/27/united-nations-40-per-cent-planet-land-degraded>.

PFAS⁵⁰ (also known as ‘forever chemicals’) into the environment, and the large scale waste crisis;

- the rise of post-truth and disinformation and the subsequent fragmentation of social trust stoking global risks associated with fragile states and the derailment of developed nations;
- demographic growth, mass migration, pandemics, the global youth mental health epidemic, the genetic engineering of different biological species and, indeed, of human beings.
- and last but not least, the current consensus that the financialization⁵¹ of all aspects of existence constitutes the primary mechanism for addressing such global crises – a solution which at the present time only serves to exponentially accelerate the crises at hand.

In the last few years, respectable Bahá’í figures from the World Bank and the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) such as Augusto Lopez-Claros⁵² and Arthur Dahl⁵³ have raised these same concerns pointing towards a similarly problematic timeline. These concerns have also entered public consciousness through the film of Paul Schrader *First Reformed*.

⁵⁰ See Rich, Nathaniel. ‘The Lawyer Who Became DuPont’s Worst Nightmare’. *The New York Times*, 6 Jan. 2016. *NYTimes.com*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/magazine/the-lawyer-who-became-duponts-worst-nightmare.html>. This story has been made into an excellent film entitled “Dark Waters” (2019) with the Bahá’í actor Mark Ruffalo in a leading role.

⁵¹ As the primary paradigm in the field of development (SDGs in particular), and as the key financial methodology for addressing the global challenges facing humankind between now and 2050, the Wall-Street Consensus, must, be called into question. In 2018, the international journal “Development and Change” detailed this very problematique in issue 49(2). A Wall-Street Consensus approach is likely to increase financial vulnerability in the Global South, while achieving limited sustainability-aligned development and preventing alternative solutions (such as a Green New Deal) from emerging. The WSC would likely deepen the growing inequality between the Global North and the Global South and the North/South divide while accelerating, rather than responding to, the global challenges facing humankind. See also Gabor, Daniela. ‘The Wall Street Consensus’. *Development and Change*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2021, pp. 429–59. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12645>.

⁵² Lopez-Claros’s 2021 heartfelt presentation to the Global Governance Forum is one of the most important talks given by a Bahá’í in the last couple of years and essential to engaging with the concept of the oneness of humankind: Augusto Lopez-Claros. *Global Governance and the Emergence of of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*. 2021. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5T0H6-YYYI>.

⁵³ Wilmette Institute. *Climate Change - Navigating the Urgent Transition Toward Sustainability* | Arthur Dahl. 2022. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzAF9LpEYnA>.

The sense of impending doom that has begun to transfer from the research domain to popular culture through movies like *First Reformed* and an army of documentaries already indicate that the decades ahead will be marked by an unprecedented struggle for existence as competition for essential but increasingly more scarce resources is set to grow exponentially. As some of the American military officers and intelligence analysts seem to confirm, “the state of geopolitical competition today” already bears “an uncanny reflection” to the world of conflict, human competition and asymmetric warfare depicted in Frank Herbert’s “Dune”.⁵⁴ The ability to display mental resilience and moral rectitude, to engage in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and reconstruction from the ashes, as well as the capacity for hope⁵⁵, for empathy, and the quality of displaying tranquility in the face of danger and destruction⁵⁶ will, therefore, be essential in the decades to come. However, such qualities must be assisted by vision, planning, appropriate education programs used strategically⁵⁷, and the systems of knowledge needed to accurately interpret and predict such dynamic and contested realities well in advance.

⁵⁴ Greenberg, Andy. “‘Dune’ Foresaw—and Influenced—Half a Century of Global Conflict”. *Wired*. [www.wired.com](https://www.wired.com/story/dune-geopolitics-cybersecurity/), <https://www.wired.com/story/dune-geopolitics-cybersecurity/>. Accessed 29 Apr. 2022.

⁵⁵ The significance of the value of hope has been underlined by Dr Michael Penn in *Michael Penn - The Nature of Hope | Awakin Calls*. <https://www.awakin.org/v2/calls/372/michael-penn/recording?check=1>. Accessed 29 Apr. 2022.

⁵⁶ Here developing Bahá’í educational materials and programs (especially for today’s junior youth) from compilations such as that of Brian Kurzios - *Fire and Gold: Benefiting from Life’s Tests*. Ronald, 1995 and books such as ‘The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life’ by David Brooks should constitute a priority for the Bahá’í community. For a review of ‘The Second Mountain’ see Wehner, Peter. ‘David Brooks’s Journey Toward Faith’. *The Atlantic*, 7 May 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/05/second-mountain-brooks-discusses-his-faith/588766/>.

⁵⁷ For example, the planet needs poor rural communities to transition to sustainable forms of agriculture and reverse rural-urban migration and urban communities to alter consumption patterns and adopt energy-renewal schemes and this is hard to achieve through formal education. In theory, the SAT (Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial) program of FUNDAEC could be supported to serve the first aim, and the Ruhi program of FUNDAEC could be altered to address the second.

III.4. The Need for a Knowledge Infrastructure and New Educational Processes

Only a predictive knowledge architecture (conceptual, digital, material, and social) that unites all disciplines and embraces the global as its main level of analysis can provide real solutions. For the time being, however, the Bahá'í community seems far removed from the task of designing such a predictive knowledge architecture. This is so even though all the main UN agencies have highlighted a decade ago the nature of the global challenges ahead and although this concerns the ability of the Bahá'í community to defend itself and safeguard the populations under its care from the global pressures and dark forces it might encounter. Can we really believe that an emphasis on promoting ontological truths or normative foundational truths such as that of the oneness of humankind or the harmony of science and religion can by itself make any significant contribution to addressing these issues given what has been discussed in this paper so far? One is reminded here of an imbalance highlighted by Roshan Danesh:

“A current challenge of the Bahá'í community is to move towards a positive and constructive articulation of how Bahá'ís as individuals and as a community will set out to advance social change towards unity as envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. Not surprisingly, current answers often focus on the growing Bahá'í community and its efforts to build a pattern of global community life and a system of administration that holds as its starting premise a commitment to unity in diversity, spiritualization of daily life, consultative decision-making, and non-partisan democratic structures. Although there is value and merit in such an answer, it begs the question of whether and how Bahá'ís may be interested in the welfare of humanity as a whole, short of a conversionist paradigm of salvation. Within the Bahá'í community there is a very strong ethic and discourse of teaching the Bahá'í Faith to others that leads

some to state that the path towards social change is primarily, or perhaps exclusively, through increasing the number of Bahá'ís. ... There is ample evidence within the Bahá'í writings, however, that processes of growth of the Bahá'í community and processes of social change, while interrelated, cannot be conflated and understood as one and the same.”⁵⁸ (p.165)

Despite progress, such ambivalence and tensions remain, discernible in the tendency to equate Bahá'í community-building with community-building in general, meaning, with social-economic development⁵⁹, an equation that limits a much needed interaction with the real world and with practices, paradigms and advances in the field of development. Such interactions are essential because knowledge architectures, social systems, alternative types of institutions and forms of organizational strategy and ethical living must be constructed anew based on knowledge, modes of being and forms of action yet to be brought into existence. If the Bahá'í community is to play any meaningful role in what is likely to be a hugely significant period in the history of humankind, the next 20 to 30 years are critical for developing the knowledge systems, institutions, and general administrative architecture and community life needed to address the challenges ahead.

Knowledge is, therefore, key. Not any forms of knowledge, but new forms of knowledge in action that are global and transnational and not confined within national perspectives, by race, class, gender, or other social markers, or by disciplinary boundaries and divisions between the sacred and the profane. Such new forms of knowledge would have to underpin identities, regimes of ethics, and types of communities that emerge as resilient solutions to

⁵⁸ Danesh, Roshan and Musta, Lex. “Some Reflections on Bahá'í Approaches to Social Change”. In *Dimensions of Bahá'í Law*. Bahá'í Publishing, 2019.

⁵⁹ This was remarked by Glen Eyford back in 1990 and his cogent argument is even more relevant today: Eyford, Glen. *Social and Economic Development: A Bahá'í Approach*, by Holly Hanson Vick. 1990, https://bahai-library.com/eyford_vick_social_economic.

the imperatives of our time. However, the conceptual work for designing evolutionary devices and processes that could take us there has not been prioritized by the Bahá'ís. An educational system or a research architecture that could get us there does not yet exist. A general working assumption seems to be that “the radical constructive program” of the Bahá'í Faith (a notion Michael Karlberg has developed by recourse to Ghandi's “non-violent philosophy of social change”⁶⁰) will eventually resolve all social and structural issues in society over time. However, is this ‘constructive program’ currently based on initializing a revolution in knowledge and knowledge systems? And does it not too often fall under a particular mental habit: that of assuming the constructive program of the Faith should be mainly about the growth and the spread of the Faith, a goal under which all activities should be subsumed, and which would by itself automatically resolve the structural, social, political, and global issues at hand in due time? Isn't this stance responsible for indefinitely postponing our engagement with the global issues at hand as if time will continue to endlessly run in our favor, ensuring a continuous, unproblematic, and safe pace of growth? Have such assumptions served us well in our understanding and application of the principle of the oneness of humankind during the last two decades, considering the themes I have highlighted above?

⁶⁰ See the section entitled “Toward a Radical Constructive Program” in Karlberg, Michael. *Constructing Social Reality. An Inquiry into the Normative Foundations of Social Change*. Association for Bahá'í Studies, 2020, pp.180-189, and the more recent presentation at the Wilmette Institute: *Responding to Injustice with Constructive Agency | Michael Karlberg REPLAY*. 2022. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pgwe7wz1Eok>.

III.5. A Partial Redefinition of the Methodology for Social Change?

Only by such analyses of the global, of the asymmetrical relations between nations, states, and regions, and of the structural issues in every society can the principle of the oneness of humankind begin to be comprehended, and forms of normative discernment and of dynamic ethical living reflective of it identified. To be a lover of humankind is to understand the global and to develop authentic forms of unity where injustices are examined in local, national, and global settings. Considering that these aspects are essential to the attaining of spirituality and the construction of a peaceful world civilization, the hesitance in the Bahá'í community in pursuing such deeper connections with the principle of the oneness of humankind is a concern.

We cannot hide our participation in forms of oppression and the need to develop forms of ethical responsibility by hiding behind a faith-based identification with the perfect and divine status of ontological truths. And we cannot safely rely on the promotion of an unelaborated notion of the principle of the oneness of humankind as ontological truth to result in meaningful social change and personal transformation. Asserting the principle of the oneness of humankind as an ontological truth in the manner of strong foundationalism hinders both the understanding of the concept and the formation of those dynamic forms of ethical living that such a principle calls for. The focus on the ontological status of the religious principles of the Bahá'í Faith and on their acceptance as such by others also undermines a key Bahá'í injunction regarding moral development, teaching, and the appropriate methodology for pursuing social change. This teaching holds that arguments, words, and, therefore, the assertion of spiritual principles as ontological truths should not be prioritized over or imagined as somehow identical with the pursuance of goodly deeds, selflessness, the

edification of moral character, and the development of a spirit and way of life that mirrors the divine teachings (as already mentioned, such ethical forms or spiritual modes of being must activate processes of global social change and global transformation). Of these two, only the latter constitute the primary orientation of a Bahá'í methodology for teaching and social change (this point is also relevant in relation to Gramscian approaches to social change):

“The wish of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that which attracts His good pleasure and, indeed, His binding command, is that Bahá’ís, in all matters, even in small daily transactions and dealings with others, should act in accordance with the divine Teachings. He has commanded us not to be content with lowliness, humility and meekness, but rather to become manifestations of selflessness and utter nothingness. Of old, all have been exhorted to loyalty and fidelity, compassion and love; in this supreme Dispensation, the people of Bahá are called upon to sacrifice their very lives. Notice the extent to which the friends have been required in the Sacred Epistles and Tablets, as well as in our Beloved’s Testament, to be righteous, well-wishing, forbearing, sanctified, pure, detached from all else save God, severed from the trappings of this world and adorned with the mantle of a goodly character and godly attributes. ... It is primarily through the potency of noble deeds and character, rather than by the power of exposition and proofs, that the friends of God should demonstrate to the world that what has been promised by God is bound to happen, that it is already taking place and that the divine glad-tidings⁶¹ are clear, evident and complete. For unless some illustrious souls step forth into the arena of service and shine out resplendent in the assemblage of men, the task of vindicating the truth of this Cause before the eyes of enlightened people would be formidable indeed. However, if the friends become embodiments of virtue and good

⁶¹ One should link these words with Christopher Buck’s analysis of the Tablet of Glad-Tidings (*Lawḥ-i Bishārāt*) from his book *Paradise and Paradigm*⁶¹ (see section entitled “The Bahá’í Faith as a Response to Modernity”) which highlights the correspondence between the concept of ‘glad-tidings’ and the principles of unity associated with the notions of the oneness of humankind and of a new world order.

character, words and arguments will be superfluous. Their very deeds will well serve as eloquent testimony, and their noble conduct will ensure the preservation, integrity and glory of the Cause of God.”⁶² (Shoghi Effendi)

“The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds; he whose words exceed his deeds, know verily his death is better than his life.”⁶³ (Bahá’u’lláh)

“Without the spirit of real love for Bahá’u’lláh, for His Faith and its Institutions, and the believers for each other, the Cause can never really bring in large numbers of people. **For it is not preaching and rules the world wants, but love and action.**”⁶⁴

“The great thing is to ‘live the life’-- to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teachings and the Bahá’í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us. ... If we do this sincerely then we shall have perfect unity and harmony with each other. Where there is want of harmony, there is lack of the true Bahá’í Spirit. Unless we can show this transformation in our lives, this new power, this mutual love and harmony, then the Bahá’í teachings are but a name to us.”⁶⁵ (Shoghi Effendi)

⁶² Effendi, Shoghi. *Living the Life*. https://bahai-library.com/compilation_living_the_life#1267. Accessed 2 Apr. 2022.

⁶³ Bahá’u’lláh. *Words of Wisdom. Bahá’í Reference Library - Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Pages 155-157*. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/TB/tb-11.html>. Accessed 29 Apr. 2022.

⁶⁴ Effendi, Shoghi. *Living the Life*. https://bahai-library.com/compilation_living_the_life#1267. Accessed 6 May 2022.

⁶⁵ Effendi, Shoghi. *Living the Life*. https://bahai-library.com/compilation_living_the_life#1271. Accessed 2 Apr. 2022.

This is a key point worth emphasizing again and again. It is the re-positioning of virtues and divine qualities (from knowledge, to love, to justice, to unity, to harmony, to inner tranquility, to hope and empathy and so on) as operating in the global context that constitute the essential innovation in ethics that Bahá'u'lláh's principle of the oneness of humankind brings. The issue here is not only what but, especially, how to create such new forms of ethical being that access global knowledge and assert global responsibility?

III.6. The Need for New Moral Codes and Forms of Ethical Living

The analysis of the unique moral dilemmas of our time requires the invention of new moral codes and forms of ethical living. None of the virtues we used to know, or the virtues we now know, will mean the same thing in the near future. This is an aspect forms of strong foundationalism simply cannot envisage, as they are unable to grasp the new or engage with dynamism and fluidity. See, for example the ethical dilemmas emphasized by Paul Hanley in his book “Eleven” and which are unique to our time because 1) of the crises faced, 2) of how they link our everyday actions to global issues, 3) of how the different crises connect to each other – which makes addressing them through ethical or moral thought and action extremely complex. From the environment to food industry, to healthcare, to education, to law, to politics, to travel, to consumerism, to paying taxes, to entertainment, to sports, to using gas and electricity, to surfing the internet, to agreeing to terms and conditions for a particular app, to wearing a mask, to practicing religion, and so on, there is no aspect of our everyday lives that does not link us to past, present and emerging and hidden chains of oppression that either endanger the planet or hurt populations if not around us then in some other parts of the world. These are not the ethical dilemmas of previous generations, though many aspects of them are not necessarily new either. Because we are in a search to identify how these different forms

of oppression link together from the local to the global, and in a search for what kind of normative and ethical responses would be needed to address them, we are in unknown territory. Participating in the formulation of new forms of ethics (and a new global ethic) is therefore an essential part of normative discernment for each of us, but unattainable if such discernment is not freely allowed to flourish and is not supported by appropriate knowledge infrastructures (conceptual, material, digital and social) and processes (open consultation⁶⁶). It should also not escape us here that the development of moral character requires facing into the unknown, developing normative discernment, admitting and having the courage to discuss limitations, flaws, and the magnitude of impending challenges with calm, serenity and hope, and the attainment of intellectual maturity. Ethical and epistemological processes are inextricably linked, and these are the foundation for any processes of growth or social transformation.

⁶⁶ Randy T.'s take on how the concept of unity in diversity should inform our consultation processes is of note here: "It's one thing to have lofty theories, but they're worth nothing till the rubber hits the road, and that's where institutions and individuals are shaped. ... It's not arid and empty talk and concepts, it's the daily reality of self-management, group dynamics and institutional forms that validate rather than stifle variety, it's polycentrism on steroids, hyped up and singing as loud and happily as possible in every musical style on the planet, it's a riotous blend of every flower that can possibly be thriving in every corner of the garden of humanity, and it's every opinion and character finding its place in the mixing bowl of consultation and collaborative decision-making." (Randy T, cited in Van den Hoonard, 2005, p.252)

III.7. The Current Discursive Formation Framing the Notion of the Oneness of Humankind: Strong Foundationalism and Non-Adversarialism

It is an uncontested fact of history that in particular periods (I would say between 1921 and 1924, in 1927 and in 1929, between 1939 and 1944, in 1953,⁶⁷ during the 1960s and early 1970s and in the early 1990s⁶⁸, although the matter is more nuanced and open to correction) the American Baha'í community has been at the forefront of the issue of racial justice. This, however, has not been the case in the last few decades. In fact, rather than being recognized for what it was (meaning 'structural racism'), racism has truly caught the attention of the Bahá'í community as a fundamental contravention of the principle of the oneness of humankind only after George Floyd's murder (on May 25, 2020) and the global awareness campaigns triggered by *Black Lives Matter*. It took a global wave of awareness doubled by the efforts of Black and Native American Bahá'ís, which now found more receptivity in the Bahá'í community, to bring the theme into focus (although this transitional process has also activated more subtle but stronger than before forms of resistance to it and deepened existing conservative concerns with the advancement of cultural relativism and identity politics). How could such a loss of focus occur in the first place considering the clear provisions on the issues of racial justice and racial unity provided by the notion of the oneness of humankind, the historically strong tradition of anti-racism, and a piece of writing as magnificent as Shoghi Effendi's 'The Advent of Divine Justice'? What has caused the American Bahá'í community to lose its position at the forefront of the issue of racial justice and fall behind the curve? What is the manner of interaction with the principle of the oneness of humankind that

⁶⁷ See Thomas, Richard. 'A Long and Thorny Path: Race Relations in the American Bahá'í Community' Lee, Anthony A., editor. *Circle of Unity: Bahá'í Approaches to Current Social Issues*. 1st ed, Kalimát Press, 1984.

⁶⁸ A key document of this period is the following: The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. *The Vision of Race Unity: America's Most Challenging Issue*.

<https://www.ibiblio.org/Bahai/Texts/English/The-Vision-Of-Race-Unity.html>. Accessed 7 May 2022.

is responsible for such an outcome? How could this happen precisely while the notion of the oneness of humankind was more than ever publicly promoted as the most significant principle of the Bahá'í Faith? The espousal of a principle as a value, it would seem, does little for social action and spiritual development if its conceptual content is not connected to the understanding of our immediate social reality and fixed on the structural issues in our global society. While trying to make up for lost time, anti-racism work in the Bahá'í community now faces a strong inertia because of how the notion of the oneness of humankind has been defined in the North American Bahá'í community in the past twenty years. Nevertheless, in the last two years momentum has grown in the direction of change. In fact, it could be said that through many bottom-up and grass-roots initiatives, supported by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, the Bahá'í community is currently in the process of rediscovering its anti-racism tradition. At the same time, this newly generated momentum has also been met by resistance and countervailing tendencies. How should we understand these past and present dynamics and the current tension and ambivalence between momentum and inertia, between opening up spaces and narrowing them down, that has become a constant constraint weighing down on many of the current initiatives for change?

From a Foucauldian perspective, the principle of the oneness of humankind does not constitute a truth or a normative foundational truth but rather a notion always embedded in a discursive formation developed around it or which backgrounds it. There is a discourse of the oneness of humankind (and a practice) that is underpinned or determined by institutions, and which pervades community life. The question that we must ask is what has been the discursive formation framing the notion of the oneness of humankind in the last two decades?

Let it be noted here that to position the notion of the oneness of humankind as a normative foundational truth is to assert a particular discourse: that of ontological foundationalism.⁶⁹

The discursive field of the principle of the oneness of humankind in North America, I would argue, has been largely shaped by the discourse of ontological foundationalism and by the paradigm of non-adversarialism associated with it. Other factors might also come into play, but these features are easily discernible and have been on the rise since the mid-2000s.

I have already touched on the limitations relating to conceptualizing the principle of the oneness of humankind from a position of strong foundationalism of which ‘ontological foundationalism’ is just one current expression. During the same period, however, this principle has also been envisioned from a related angle. From this other standpoint, the principle of the oneness of humankind has been framed not so much in relation to the issues of racism, gender and class inequality, imperialism, and neo-colonization (that is, in relation to structural, sociological, political and global issues), but rather, in contradistinction to individualism, materialism and, especially, adversarialism (so as issues of Western culture affecting individual mindsets and attitudes), seen as the key cultural features of a Western liberalism and liberal democracy that must now be discarded. Out of these three elements, it is adversarialism that has been most emphasized over the years, resulting in its own counter-opposed paradigm of non-adversarialism (or “mutualism”). What are adversarialism and mutualism? I will let Michael Karlberg explain this:

“We live in a *culture of contest*. In western-liberal societies our economic, political and legal systems, as well as many of our social institutions and practices, are competitive and conflictual. Surrounding this culture of contest is a *culture of protest*. In response to the social

⁶⁹ “Ontological foundationalism refers to the view that reality is characterized by foundational truths, or laws, or properties, or indelible features of existence that exist independently of whether human minds are aware of them and independently of the degree to which we comprehend them.” (p.3) Karlberg, Michael. *Constructing Social Reality. An Inquiry into the Normative Foundations of Social Change*. Association for Bahá’í Studies, 2020.

and ecological problems engendered by our culture of contest, we engage in protests, demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, partisan organizing, litigation, strikes and other oppositional strategies for social advocacy and change.

These competitive and conflictual social norms have become so ubiquitous that they appear natural and inevitable to many people. ... Throughout this book, the terms *adversarialism* and *mutualism* will be used to denote two contrasting modes of social behaviour. In this regard, *adversarialism* will refer to the pursuit of mutually *exclusive* interests by individuals or groups working *against* each other. In contrast, the term *mutualism* will refer to the pursuit of mutually *inclusive* gains by individuals or groups working *with* one another. Cooperation, collaboration and concerted or coordinated action are all expressions of mutualism.”⁷⁰ (pp. xiii-xiv)

Through his 2004 book *Beyond the Culture of Contest* the paradigm of non-adversarialism promoted by Michael Karlberg has gained a degree of recognition and acceptance at the institutional levels of the Bahá’í community, which have welcomed it as part of their functioning, particularly so in North America. Even today when anti-racism discourses have picked up, the North American Bahá’í official discourse on racism is circumscribed within the paradigm of non-adversarialism and riddled with the challenges posed to it by strong forms of foundationalism such as ontological foundationalism. There are many positives to discussions about non-adversarialism and the culture of contest, and critiques of this kind. However, the unreserved embrace of this paradigm at the institutional level has meant that no critical assessments of it and of its effects in practice have taken place. I have challenged the naive notions of power and ‘mutualism’ (the alternatives Karlberg proposes to

⁷⁰ Karlberg, Michael Robert. *Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence*. George Ronald, 2004.

adversarialism) that such a paradigm advances in a previous paper.⁷¹ Others have wondered if certain forms of resistance and even protest should not be deemed still acceptable considering certain historical⁷² examples⁷³ of Bahá'í thought and practice, while yet others have argued that phenomena like trade-unionism fulfill a unique and important function and should still be considered relevant. Such concerns suggest that the clear-cut binary of adversarialism vs. mutualism might have the disadvantage of limiting legitimate forms of action and inhibiting the exploration and transformation of approaches developed in the wider society. This, however, is not the direction of inquiry I want to follow here. My interest in this area is primarily epistemological. Specifically, my concern lies with how ontological foundationalism and the paradigm of non-adversarialism have combined to produce a particular reading and orientation that devalues the bodies of knowledge and traditions of thought which underpin anti-racism, and which inhibits a structural, sociological, political, and global understanding of the principle of the oneness of humankind.

Karlberg's critique of agonism offers a good entry point into this discussion. In reviewing this philosophical tradition, Karlberg focuses on the 'agonistic pluralism' of Chantal Mouffe (and Ernesto Laclau). What, in short, is the critique that Karlberg puts forward? That Mouffe is wrong to adopt a tragic view of the world that stipulates 1) that conflict cannot be removed

⁷¹ Boicu, Filip. *Strong Foundationalism in the Bahá'í Faith? With an Analysis of Michael Karlberg's Ontological Foundationalism*. www.academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/77126110/Strong_Foundationalism_in_the_Bah%C3%A1%AD_Faith_With_an_Analysis_of_Michael_Karlbergs_Ontological_Foundationalism. Accessed 23 Apr. 2022.

⁷² "Bahá'í promotion of interracial marriage ran contrary to much of the current thinking concerning 'race mixing' as well as many state laws against interracial marriage that were not invalidated until the US Supreme Court case of Loving v. Virginia (1967)." Hughey, Matthew. *Race and Racism*. https://bahai-library.com/hughey_racism_theology_sociology. Accessed 2 May 2022

⁷³ For more historical examples of interest here see Cole, Juan. *Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought in the Nineteenth Century*. 1992, https://bahai-library.com/cole_iranian_millenarianism, Schaefer, Udo, et al. *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics*. G. Ronald, 2002, pp.451-454, and Yazdani, Mina. *Abdu'l-Bahá and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*. 2014. https://bahai-library.com/yazdani_abdul-baha_constitutional_revolution

from political processes, and 2) that conflict is a reality we must accept and control by drawing different social groups into the social contract of agonistic pluralism. Such a method, Mouffe argues, would ensure that conflict does not erupt into violence.

Karlberg's claim, however, is that by adopting this position, Mouffe legitimizes and promotes 'the culture of contest' that constitutes a dominant feature of Western thought and politics.

Mouffe's 'culture of contest' is then seen to derive from two principles:

1. that all social identities are formed "oppositionally", with division and antagonism perpetual features between different social groups. (p.144)
2. "that there are no universal objective values or foundational normative truths that diverse identity groups can discover or rationally agree on."⁷⁴ (p.144)

The first principle is reflective of adversarialism and, the second, of anti-foundationalism.

Anti-foundationalism is such a concern because of a particular cultural reading of reality.

This cultural perspective assumes that "the modern world is in a state of crisis due to the widespread rejection of any ontological or transcendent basis for normative agreement, along with the consequent adoption of purely relativistic theories of social constructivism."

(pp.154-155) Broadly speaking, from such a perspective, continental philosophy, in particular post-structuralism and postmodern philosophy (we can think of names like those of Baudrillard, Foucault, Derrida), critical theory (including the Frankfurt School of thought and Habermas), neopragmatism (such as Rorty and Putnam) and social constructionism (someone like Bruno Latour, for example), is largely suspect. Consequently, also suspect are the social

⁷⁴ Karlberg, Michael. *Constructing Social Reality. An Inquiry into the Normative Foundations of Social Change*. Association for Bahá'í Studies, 2020.

sciences and any other academic disciplines that draw on such philosophical traditions. While this perspective is prone to identify postmodern philosophy as the most dangerous form of continental philosophy, it also tends to highlight race theories, black studies, Hispanic studies, indigenous studies, feminisms, gender studies, queer theory and postcolonial theories as the most threatening forms of social science. These types of identifications, however, do not stem only from a concern with rejecting anti-foundationalism. These traditions of thought, or academic disciplines and subdisciplines, are also assumed to be most problematic because of their association with Marxism, post-Marxism, or other Leftist traditions of thought, orientations considered to promote and engender adversarialism most acutely.⁷⁵

We can now see the limits of this discursive formation that combines ontological foundationalism with non-adversarialism, and from a particular cultural perspective that assumes cultural relativism is the primary cause for the problems of modernity. This discursive formation is underpinned by a philosophical vision that is highly suspicious and opposed to the bodies of thought associated with anti-racism, race, gender, and queer theories and broadly mistrustful of key philosophical, sociological, historical, and political traditions that offer critical analyses of the structural issues in our societies (this is not to argue that rigorous scrutiny and a degree of skepticism are not necessary elements in engaging such theories and bodies of thought). Thus, when transformed in institutional and official

⁷⁵ One can also argue that Marxist and post-Marxist theories do in fact contain very strong notions highlighting forms of oneness, such as that of ‘solidarity.’ The same applies to race, gender, and postcolonial theories – where older notions of ‘cosmopolitanism’ or ‘solidarity’ combine with newer concepts such as “intersectionality”, “allyship”, and even decolonial visions of a revised world order that would transcend imperialism and establish “a domination-free and egalitarian international order.” Getachew, Adom. 2019. “Worldmaking After Empire. The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination” Princeton, Princeton University Press, p.2. Certainly, there are extreme strands present in or associated with all existing theories and social movements that must be considered and criticized (a lot of learning can be derived from interacting with such bodies of thought), but so is there a need to maintain an informed and balanced perspective through forms of close and dynamic interaction (at least at the level of theory).

discourse this discursive formation and cultural theory naturally tends to inhibit meaningful engagement with anti-racist traditions of thought and forms of practice and the development of a structural, sociological, political, and global understanding of the principle of the oneness of humankind.

III.8 Epistemological Effects

What are some of the effects of this discursive formation?

First, one can locate a certain tendency in the Western Bahá'í world to interpret such movements and theories as problematic and not compatible with Bahá'í life and with Bahá'í scholarship because (and here the thinking is very similar with Karlberg's critique of agonism):

1. they are deemed to bring disunity through their emphasis on particular social identities or markers (such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc.) and this is taken to go against notions of 'oneness', meaning, against the Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humankind. (*the charge is disunity and 'adversarialism' – a reading from the angle of non-adversarialism*)
2. they are not espousing the notion of universal objective values or foundational normative truths – which is taken as a full-on rejection of the realm of moral and spiritual values. (*the charge is 'materialism' and 'nihilism' – a reading from the angle of ontological foundationalism*)

This is then taken to imply that such movements and theories are just expressions of ‘identity politics’, which is to say, they constitute illegitimate expressions of a will to amass power for specific groups at the expense of the majority. From this perspective then, such theories and movements are deemed to operate on a notion of power that is incompatible with the Bahá’í conceptual framework (and its own notion of ‘power’) and to be directly responsible for instituting or exacerbating a ‘culture of contest’ in society.

David Palmer⁷⁶ (p.59) provides us with an eloquent though more subtle example of this manner of thinking:

“By extension, true justice and emancipation entail the realization in thought, action, and social structure of the oneness of humanity. ... Many attempts to overcome injustice fall short of this realization by framing their efforts as struggles against specific populations, groups, organizations, or institutions that are identified as being the causes of oppression. As a result, they end up reproducing the structural root of injustice, which is the tearing apart of the oneness of humanity.”

It is easy to see how at the level of general culture or of Bahá’í popular opinion such understandings can favor the maintenance of the status quo. After all, such readings are not entirely unlike the alt-right position of Jordan B. Peterson, reminiscent of American Conservatism and its push to reject and ban “critical race theory” (which in that view operates as an umbrella term for race theories in general) and not far removed from the Conservative British government’s assertions that those highlighting the existence of

⁷⁶ Palmer, David. ‘Religion, Spiritual Principles, and Civil Society’. Cameron, Geoffrey, and Benjamin Schewel (Eds.). *Religion and Public Discourse in an Age of Transition Reflections on Bahá’í Practice and Thought*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017, pp. 37–69. *Open WorldCat*, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/57468/>. His critical analysis of the sphere of civil society makes for very interesting reading.

structural or systemic racism are attempting to bring disunity into a relatively unified and just society because of seeking to unfairly advance specific claims to power. This reminds one of Van den Hoonard's finding about Bahá'í popular opinion, except that in our case, the discourse analyzed here has benefitted from institutional support: "On an empirical level, we see that when we privilege the popular meaning of unity in diversity, we privilege the norms of mainstream, dominant culture."⁷⁷

This discursive formation has also led to a paradoxical situation where we are attempting to tackle racism by resisting or avoiding 'anti-racism' traditions of thought and practice, and to pursue social transformation without reliance on key mainstream philosophical and social theories pursuing the themes of social change and social transformation. Not surprisingly then, quite a number of Bahá'í individuals and institutions officially engaged in advancing discourses on racial unity and racial unity work are caught between these two perspectives ('anti-racism' traditions of thought versus the discursive formation combining 'ontological foundationalism' with 'non-adversarialism') – some unaware of these internal contradictions, others partially aware but believing the right course of action is a moderate position between the two. While the search for a moderate position might produce interesting results over time, there is also a strong possibility (as the recent past indicates), that such an orientation might reinforce patterns of turning a blind eye to forms of oppression by prioritizing non-adversarialism over the search for truth and justice, silence, or even silencing, over the raising of concerns and critique, and non-action over forms of social action. A privileging of the status quo and of the dominant culture in society has clearly been one of the main outcomes so far. This confused, contradictory, and self-limiting dynamic that we witness in relation to

⁷⁷ Van den Hoonard, Will. *Etching the Idea of 'Unity in Diversity' in the Bahá'í Community: Popular Opinion and Organizing Principle*. Warburg, Margit, et al., editors. *Bahá'í and Globalisation*. Aarhus University Press, 2005, pp.245-267.

the issue of race also applies to discourses and work on the issues of gender and class inequality. Since a very similar discursive orientation in general lines has been adopted by the conservative forces aiming to preserve the status quo in Anglo-Saxon countries, one wonders about the extent to which the Bahá'í discursive formation combining non-adversarialism with ontological foundationalism will be able to act as a force for social change and social justice in such settings. The issue is as much one internal to the Bahá'í community as it is an external one.

Furthermore, the impact of this discursive formation has also been felt in research institutional structures. The search for methodologies that by-pass 'anti-foundational' and 'adversarial' theories has been subtly but quite effectively emphasized. This has seen some young scholars turn from critical theory approaches towards critical realist approaches.⁷⁸ Young scholars have also been encouraged to adopt participatory research methodologies but divest them of their normative foundations in critical theory or Third Worldism and supplement them with normative ontological truths: "although participatory action research has an obvious normative dimension, it does not yet rest on a coherent normative ontology" (Karlberg, p.179).⁷⁹ At the same time as distance is being taken from what could be deemed to constitute anti-foundational theories (post-structuralist and postmodernist theories, social constructionism, critical theory, race theories, feminisms, queer theory, postcolonial theories, decolonial theories etc.) an extremely close relationship has been established with analytical

⁷⁸ I am not at all unsympathetic to Roy Bhaskar and critical realist approaches and I strongly welcome such explorations, but I do not believe critical theory approaches need be discarded or avoided. If anything, I believe it would be more useful to study such approaches together and in dialogue with each other. See for example, the dialogues between Roy Bhaskar and Ernesto Laclau and between Chomsky and Foucault: Laclau, Ernesto, and Roy Bhaskar. 'Discourse Theory vs Critical Realism'. *Alethia*, vol. 1, no. 2, July 1998, pp. 9–14. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1558/aleth.v1i2.9>. and Theory & Philosophy. *The Chomsky/Foucault Debate*. 2021. *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_v5oTaqfoY.

⁷⁹ Karlberg, Michael. *Constructing Social Reality. An Inquiry into the Normative Foundations of Social Change*. Association for Bahá'í Studies, 2020.

philosophy.⁸⁰ Probably the most spectacular turn of this kind has been in the theoretical framework of FUNDAEC (The Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences).

III.9. Continuity or Discontinuity? FUNDAEC's Epistemological Turn

FUNDAEC was formed in a particular ideological context in which radical forms of Marxism and Catholicism coalesced into a specific brand of South American Third Worldism (see Roosta and Townsend 2002).⁸¹ Marx, Gramsci and Paolo Freire (a Christian socialist), on the one hand, the Colombian left-wing intellectual and activist Orlando Fals Borda (one of the founders of the Participatory Action Research), the left-anarchist (at least in orientation and friends) and radical Catholic Ivan Illich⁸² (organizer of a network of radical Latin American theologians that opposed Eurocentric theology and which would eventually initiate liberation theology) and possibly later Manfred Max Neef – the Chilean economist preoccupied with the problem of development in the Third World, on the other, are all likely to have constituted indirect or even direct ideological sources for FUNDAEC in its first decades. Much of the development of the worldwide Bahá'í community and policies regarding research and education since the 1990s onward cannot be fully understood without the tracing back of these ideological connections, although such identifications have never been made

⁸⁰ The conceptual beginnings that have made this general turn possible can be traced at least as far back as Farzam Arbab's chapter on "Promoting a Discourse on Science, Religion and Development" in *The Lab, the Temple and the Market* (2000) and Paul Lample's 2005 talk on "Knowledge" (Lample, Paul. *Knowledge*. https://bahai-library.com/lample_knowledge. November 2005.)

⁸¹ Roosta, Manigeh and Townsend, Lucy F. 2002. *Hope for the poor in the "Mad Country": the Rural University of Colombia, South America*. Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Lisbon, 11-14 September 2002.

⁸² Illich sees Western forms of education, Western academia, and Western development agencies as the very sources of oppression. To him, these are channels for oppression, these are the circuits through which cultural hegemony is imposed (to use Gramsci's terms), and the only way forward is to reject them, weaken their influence, and create totally new approaches from within the Third World.

explicit to the Bahá'í world by FUNDAEC or others and remain largely unexplored within Bahá'í scholarship.

Since these likely constituted the philosophical underpinnings of the conceptual framework of FUNDAEC in its first decades the 2016 official turn⁸³ to the domains of analytical philosophy and the philosophy of the mind to theoretically ground and flesh-out the elements of this same conceptual framework should have come as a major surprise. The subsequent disavowal of its former but strong affiliations with critical theory should have also caught the eye. Instead, the switch barely registered in the field of Bahá'í scholarship despite eulogistic and informative reviews such as that of Gerald Filson.⁸⁴ Farid-Arbab's (2016) attempt to rehabilitate aspects of 'banking education'⁸⁵ as important elements of a Bahá'í pedagogy and to distance FUNDAEC and Bahá'í inspired education from learner-centered (which have a long history within Bahá'í educational thought and practice from Stanwood Cobb to Montessori⁸⁶ Schools, through to Dwight Allen, Daniel Jordan and Donald Streets), problem-posing, and critical pedagogy approaches in the name of a more moderate, and therefore, a more Bahá'í outlook associated with the London School philosophers of education (R. S. Peters, Paul Hirst, etc.) and analytical philosophy, can only be made sense of in this light. Such considerations are of note because FUNDAEC provides the original model for the conceptual framework coordinating all Bahá'í efforts in the areas of education, expansion and consolidation, public discourses/academic discourses, and social transformation.

⁸³ Farid-Arbab, Sona. *Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy*. Bahá'í Publishing, 2016.

⁸⁴ Filson, Gerald. *A Reading of Sona Farid-Arbab's Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy*. https://bahai-library.com/filson_moral_empowerment_pedagogy. Accessed 24 Apr. 2022.

⁸⁵ See section entitled "Banking Education and Problem Posing" (pp.277-287). This is not to state that Farid-Arbab rehabilitates past models of 'banking-education' but simply that she develops an educational model on the lines of analytical philosophy in which because knowledge is seen as objective, its direct transmission in clear language and the internalization of its concepts and content as these have been stipulated (through memorization, too) become essential.

⁸⁶ Hacker, Barbara. *Montessori and the Bahá'í Faith*. https://bahai-library.com/hacker_montessori_bahai. Accessed 30 Apr. 2022.

Furthermore, it is in this work that the key elements of the conceptual framework to inspire all Bahá'í activities have been allegedly identified, groundwork sanctioned as complete by Farzam Arbab himself in the Preface to Farid-Arbab's book on "Moral Empowerment." Sona Farid-Arbab's book, one quickly notices, is remarkably compatible with the discursive formation combining ontological foundationalism with the paradigm of non-adversarialism. It proceeds from the same broad theoretical orientation or cultural perspective. First, her book highlights the need to introduce spiritual values from the Bahá'í Faith, considered to constitute objective and ontological truths, into the educational disciplines. Second, her work establishes the notion of objective and ontological truths (and of a language that mirrors them) as key notions in Bahá'í pedagogy, which then deprioritizes constructionism and learner centered and problem-posing approaches in education: "But, even when the various dimensions of MacIntyre's narrative are taken into account, something fundamental seems to be missing: the possibility that certain virtues, apart from being instrumental in achieving internal goods in one or more practices, may be essential components of being human." (p.85) Third, her work proposes a reformulation of power on the lines of Karlberg's non-adversarialism, though this also draws on the conception of power of Hannah Arendt, and, therefore, involuntarily, on a version of mild agonism.

What has occasioned this huge shift remains a key question but one that has not even been acknowledged at the level of Bahá'í scholarship. The same can be said about the recent re-definition of the philosophical foundations of FUNDAEC in relation to problem-posing education, and in particular, to critical pedagogies such as that of Paolo Freire, a distancing which one would have expected to generate considerable surprise. Consider, for example, the following passage:

“It is doubtful that a pedagogy [Paulo Freire’s in this case] so heavily dependent on problem-posing would ever be able to empower the students to deal with the complex reality that they have to understand and transform. There is no evidence that a people thus liberated have been able to build a better society simply by the force of their new critical consciousness. ... Ira Shor, for example suggests that the problem-posing approach ‘views human beings, knowledge, and society as unfinished products in history, where various forces are still contending.’ ... **We need to question the relativism underlying the conception of a human being as an unfinished product who has a claim on knowledge by virtue of his or her perspective.**” (Farid-Arbab, pp.280-283)

One wonders where this abrupt realignment leaves the FUNDAEC’s program directors, collaborators, and researchers whose work and research for FUNDAEC (and later, even academic careers) were developed on the understanding that Freire’s critical pedagogy, and critical theory in general, were closely aligned with the Bahá’í Faith. What is the conceptual horizon in which they now must operate, negotiating between such divergent theoretical positions, one deeply embedded in the past, the other strongly asserted in the present? How do they make sense of this shift in the conceptual framework of FUNDAEC and in the conceptual framework set to guide all Bahá’í activities, and of the discontinuities, incoherence, and contradictions this might engender? How can one simultaneously operate with two frameworks from which at least one seems to attempt to invalidate the other?

Whatever the case, the past and present connections with Freire’s pedagogy and critical theory are hard to ignore. For example, Erin Murphy-Graham⁸⁷ (2012, pp.24-25), while

⁸⁷ Murphy-Graham, Erin. *Opening Minds, Improving Lives: Education and Women’s Empowerment in Honduras*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2012.

noting the limitations of Freirean-inspired programs and of critical education, endorses “critical pedagogy as the most promising framework for tapping into the transformative power of education”, suggesting that FUNDAEC’s SAT program could be seen as a “critical education project.” Likewise, in recent research on FUNDAEC’s Preparation for Social Action (PSA) program, Bitá Correa (the current program director of FUNDAEC) and Erin Murphy-Graham (2019)⁸⁸ and, also, Elena VanderDussen (2009) proceed to evaluate the PSA program from within theoretical frameworks associated with Paulo Freire and critical education. While Correa and Murphy-Graham (2019) rely on Freire’s concept of ‘agency’ and Monisha Bajaj’s notion of “transformative agency”, VanderDussen (2009) draws on the theories of Freire, Ellsworth, Giroux, and Ira Shor etc. Similarly, Haleh Arbab’s (1995) PhD dissertation⁸⁹ on teacher training in the North of Cauca region in Colombia, where she was at the time coordinating the teacher training university program of FUNDAEC known as ‘Licenciatura en Educacion Rural’ (p.13) draws on three philosophical and theoretical traditions: critical and emancipatory research (Freire, Giroux, Patii Lather), feminist research, and participatory research. Meanwhile Chitra Golestani, another early researcher of FUNDAEC’s programs in Columbia and Zambia (and the current associate director of the Wilmette institute), later becomes a co-founder of the Paulo Freire Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) designing and delivering courses with Carlos Alberto Torres (Founding Director of the Paulo Freire Institute in São Paulo, Brazil with Paulo Freire).

⁸⁸ Correa, Bitá, and Erin Murphy-Graham. “‘Everything Has a Beginning and an End and We Are on Our Way’: Transformative Agency in the Colombian Preparation for Social Action Program’. *Educational Alternatives in Latin America: New Modes of Counter-Hegemonic Learning*, edited by Robert Aman and Timothy Ireland, Springer International Publishing, 2019, pp. 89–112. *Springer Link*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53450-3_5.

⁸⁹ Arbab, Haleh. “The image of the teacher in rural Colombia : an inquiry into themes, metaphors, and implications for education.” (1995). *Doctoral Dissertations 1896 - February 2014*. 2258. https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_1/2258

While these might seem arcane and unnecessary matters to engage with for some, theoretical shifts such as these are essential, and very rare, in the history of Bahá'í education and development. Their influence on how we understand and seek to apply principles such as that of the oneness of humankind is crucial. These matters also point to the fact that the conceptual framework guiding all Bahá'í activities at this moment is not theory free, but has its own theoretical underpinnings, which can shift and change over time quite considerably, and not necessarily in a clear, logical, organic, or non-contradictory manner that would evade ambiguity, confusion, and tension. That these matters have received no attention in current Bahá'í scholarship (And why is that?) is hardly a guarantee that the elaboration of the conceptual framework guiding all Bahá'í activities will proceed in a more coherent, clear, harmonious, and more theoretically robust manner from here onward. What also remains a question is whether the discursive formation that combines ontological foundationalism with the paradigm of non-adversarialism should be seen as different from (meaning, as the independent proposals of several Bahá'í scholars and maybe even particular agencies) or identical with the conceptual framework of the Bahá'í Faith (namely, as a discourse originating from or sanctioned by the central institutions). Elsewhere⁹⁰, for specific reasons, my initial opinion has been that the conceptual framework inspired by ontological foundationalism should be seen as distinct from the conceptual framework of the Bahá'í Faith. Nevertheless, in that piece I have also outlined the need for patience, sensitivity, and discernment:

⁹⁰ Boicu, Filip. *Strong Foundationalism in the Bahá'í Faith? With an Analysis of Michael Karlberg's Ontological Foundationalism*. www.academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/77126110/Strong Foundationalism in the Bah%C3%A1%C3%AD Faith With an Analysis of Michael Karlbergs Ontological Foundationalism](https://www.academia.edu/77126110/Strong_Foundationalism_in_the_Bah%C3%A1%C3%AD_Faith_With_an_Analysis_of_Michael_Karlbergs_Ontological_Foundationalism). Accessed 23 Apr. 2022.

“One’s take, or an agency’s take (be it FUNDAEC, the ISGP⁹¹ or even the ABS⁹²) on the conceptual framework of the Bahá’í Faith might not be the same with the conceptual framework of the Universal House of Justice (or of the Bahá’í Faith), even when the attempt is to mirror it most faithfully. All these conceptual frameworks are distinct but interrelated and evolving through relative experimentation. It is, therefore, key not to confuse the two categories, while also important is to have an open space where different interpretations or ways to employ the conceptual framework of the Bahá’í Faith can be tested out.” (p.22)

At this point I feel that I should sound a note of caution. Some might want to read this paper as an effort to assert the primacy of Leftist traditions of thought and either approve or disprove of the paper for that reason. While I am concerned with issues of epistemological balance and inclusivity (allowing the bodies of thought of black and indigenous populations to question racism and other civilizational issues, and the theoretical standpoints of women to challenge gender inequality and other issues of the age, and allowing the working-classes and the precariat the interrogation of class inequality and so on) this is only so because I feel a more complex, fluid, and diverse epistemological set of perspectives or framework is needed to acknowledge the key dimensions of meaning associated with the principle of the oneness of humankind (and to curtail excessive tendencies in any one tradition or body of thought). Of course, a complex balancing act is needed. However, whatever our current forms of knowledge are (and they are not as inclusive as they could be), they do not seem to have served us well enough so far in understanding the principle of the oneness of humankind. This is the point from where I am starting this discussion. But this is only one of the many key points I highlight in this paper, none of which can be reduced to the issue of the assertion

⁹¹ The Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity.

⁹² The Association/s for Bahá’í Studies.

or non-assertion of Leftist traditions of thought. The entire paper highlights the importance of theory in framing Bahá'í culture at all levels. It emphasizes knowledge, the development of Bahá'í fields of study, and the need for a global knowledge infrastructure and for dynamic forms of ethical living. It opens research areas and points to the challenges of the future. It asks for reflexivity and for appreciating past contributions. It asks us to transcend a cultural paradigm and investigate the structural, sociological, and political dimensions of the principle of the oneness of humankind. If Leftist traditions are part of the field of sociology or of international political economy or of global studies or international law, so be it. They are not the only ones. Furthermore, Leftist traditions are also part of our Bahá'í culture, as emphasized in this paper through the example of FUNDAEC. If anything, my concern is rather with how we are going to transcend such polarized mindsets, the hesitance to engage the social sciences, and the fear of knowledge or epistemologies that might be different from ours. Even more importantly, I am concerned here with investigating the possibility of developing new forms of thought that are deeper, integrative, more robust, much more reflexive, and considerably more nuanced. I challenge incoherence, lack of nuance, and limited outlooks, and I experience this as a mighty internal challenge within myself and my own language. The epistemological issues I raise are ones of tiny but important adjustments in balance. Nevertheless, small adjustments at the level of epistemology can have large effects on knowledge production and the construction of social reality.

Furthermore, a careful reading of my paper will indicate three things.

First, I consider foundationalism, nonfoundationalism, and anti-foundationalism essential traditions of thought (an example of a valid form of strong foundationalism – the Anisa

Model – has been provided in this paper). This stance has been more clearly emphasized in a previous work from which I would like to cite here:

“Foundationalism and anti-foundationalism can be seen as different systems of knowledge (such as religion and science, or analytical philosophy and continental philosophy), philosophical orientations (such as realism and idealism), epistemological methodologies, or even as a sort of classificatory framing used to differentiate between many types of philosophical, scientific, and even religious traditions. Due to their complexity, such complex categories are impossible to evaluate, or measure against each other, with any degree of objectivity. ... We need foundationalism, nonfoundationalism and anti-foundationalism at all times, as each of them, and, each of their specific theoretical subsets or philosophical traditions, capture in a unique way something essential about how we frame knowledge and seek to interpret reality. They represent different essential ways and traditions of building theoretical models or conceptual frameworks [see the hierarchical model of the ‘pyramid’ versus that of a ‘web of interconnected beliefs’ or that of ‘a raft that must be repaired afloat’]; they constitute different epistemological orientations. Foundationalism seeks the underlying structures of reality, certain knowledge and order, anti-foundationalism seeks to understand what knowledge is, how it is constructed, how it shapes forms of subjectivity, and whether its character prevents or engenders oppression and freedom, while nonfoundationalism seeks to bridge and bring together the first two. This is valid inside and outside the Bahá’í community. These systems of knowledge cannot and should not annihilate each other; it is their tension and interaction that advances the process of knowledge.”⁹³ (pp.74, 39-40)

⁹³ Boicu, Filip. *Strong Foundationalism in the Bahá’í Faith? With an Analysis of Michael Karlberg’s Ontological Foundationalism*. www.academia.edu, [https://www.academia.edu/77126110/Strong Foundationalism in the Bah%C3%A1%C3%AD Faith With an Analysis of Michael Karlbergs Ontological Foundationalism](https://www.academia.edu/77126110/Strong_Foundationalism_in_the_Bah%C3%A1%C3%AD_Faith_With_an_Analysis_of_Michael_Karlbergs_Ontological_Foundationalism). Accessed 23 Apr. 2022, pp.74, 39-40.

In relation to this, a Romanian Conservative intellectual has raised a very interesting point. According to Patapievici⁹⁴, we already have a viable method for balancing out dogmatism (strong foundationalism) and skepticism (anti-foundationalism) in knowledge creation. This method is that of modern science. Modern science, Patapievici argues, is the innovation of modernity which attempts to resolve the opposition between two irreconcilable attitudes towards truth: dogmatism (which affirms truth in apodictic manner) and skepticism (which believes none of the apodictic truths identified through dogmatism are clearly established or beyond dispute). Again, the solution given by modernity does not choose among these two sides, but rather maintains both of them in a creative tension through a procedural instrument we now refer to as the scientific method. What is this solution? The modern science of nature. Modern science is not a philosophy but a “methodology of knowledge” which constantly succeeds in finding the truth “with a precision that is never absolute” through a procedure that considers all theories involving such truth as provisional findings until a definite proof or counterproof is found (Patapievici 2019, mins.27-29). Is Patapievici’s observation worth considering and exploring? I would think so.

Second, would I even have to talk about epistemological balance and inclusivity if the understanding, the thinking, and the presentation of the Bahá’í teachings were framed in a way that kept perspectives on the Right and on the Left (and others) in some kind of equilibrium? This entire discussion was triggered by the conceptual framework of FUNDAEC that is currently shaping Bahá’í culture. Can we talk about the Bahá’í Faith without a heavy reliance on the more radical forms of any of these two traditions and without overwhelmingly subscribing to one radical tradition at one time, and to another radical

⁹⁴ Patapievici, H.-R. (2019). "Sinuciderea Europei?" [The Suicide of Europe?]. Humanitas. Retrieved 01-05-2019, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=552D8M6gYSE>

tradition at another time, based on the dominant trends of the age we live in? Why not explore more centrist positions where the Left and the Right can meet and coalesce? This seems important at a time when social media relies on algorithms that drive people towards “content that is more extreme than what they started with” or towards “incendiary content in general” in order to capture attention and secure engagement with their sites and advertisers: “The Wall Street Journal conducted an investigation⁹⁵ of YouTube content with the help of Mr. Chaslot. It found that YouTube often ‘fed far-right or far-left videos to users who watched relatively mainstream news sources,’ and that such extremist tendencies were evident with a wide variety of material. ... YouTube leads viewers down a rabbit hole of extremism, while Google racks up the ad sales.”⁹⁶ This political and cultural polarization and radicalization is not only driven, however, by business imperatives. Political forces of all types vie for attention and engagement as well: “The stronger a person’s partisan identity, the more likely that person is to actually vote as opposed to merely complaining about the opposition.”⁹⁷ If one finds himself to have become more left-wing or right-wing than they used to be, or to have shifted from one position to the other in this digital context, real questions must be asked if this has been an independent process or one influenced by artificial intelligence (via recommender systems, for example).

Third, I have already expressed my skepticism regarding the viability of applying a Gramscian counter-hegemonic approach to promoting the teachings of the Faith, which by extension also affects the radical Leftist and Third-Worldism tradition framing the context

⁹⁵ Nicas, Jack. ‘How YouTube Drives People to the Internet’s Darkest Corners’. *WSJ*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-youtube-drives-viewers-to-the-internets-darkest-corners-1518020478>. Accessed 16 May 2022.

⁹⁶ Tufekci, Zeynep. *Perma | Opinion | YouTube, the Great Radicalizer - The New York Times*. <https://perma.cc/KE3A-HZPN>. Accessed 16 May 2022.

⁹⁷ Baraniuk, Chris. ‘How Twitter Bots Help Fuel Political Feuds’. *Scientific American*, 27 Mar. 2018, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-twitter-bots-help-fuel-political-feuds/>.

from which FUNDAEC has originated. I have also indicated where the left-anarchism of Ivan Illich is extremely problematic and how if this had been extended to the Bahá'í community it would have led to the undermining and discontinuation of Western academic forms, structures, and scholarship at least in some measure (not to say that such forms should not be seriously interrogated, including from a Third World perspective). The questions I raise in this paper far transcend the issue of asserting Leftist traditions of thought. For example, why is it that periods when the (anarchist) Left is in the ascendant (such as 1968-1971) and periods in which societies are generally taking a sharp turn to the Right seem to have so much influence over our intellectual processes and conceptual frameworks? Furthermore, how can one radical tradition switch into and find continuation in a tradition that is counter-opposed to it? Can we point out the element of coherence that might be underpinning such shifts? Equally, why do concerns with racism in North America lately tend to surface in periods when racism has already become a major concern in the general society and not prior, when such concerns need recognition and escalating the most? And what would happen to our forms of knowledge if we ever lived during a period in which racism has surfaced as a key social problem, but the general context is that of a very strong and sharp turn to the Right? Would we be caught between such tendencies? These are questions I might not even be able to formulate properly, much less to answer. However, if such fluctuations were to be discerned that could indicate that Bahá'í thought is not secure enough in its own knowledge. This would then highlight the need for deeper structures of knowledge. Meanwhile, the issue remains that of maintaining an open, empathetic, nuanced, and fluid form of moderation. Such forms of moderation would be deeply aware of (or at least open to) all forms of thought and of the social issues of the day while also being intellectually robust, and brave and ready to act when needed: "A good character is in the sight of God and His chosen ones and the possessors of insight, the most excellent and praiseworthy of all things, but always on

condition that its center of emanation should be reason and knowledge and its base should be true moderation.”⁹⁸ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p.60)

IV. Postscript

The epistemological imbalances I have highlighted in this paper are easy to adjust at least at the conceptual level. They should not obscure the joy and radiance of our faith and commitment. The identification of new forms of knowledge and new regimes of ethics and the construction of a global knowledge infrastructure (conceptual, digital, social, and material) that would correspond to the requirements of the principle of the oneness of humankind are a more difficult challenge, but a uniquely exciting one: “The prophets of old wish they were alive in this day so that they may accomplish a service.”⁹⁹

Elsewhere¹⁰⁰ I have described these challenges as typical of the transition from the first stage to the second stage of Sabet’s model of religious development.¹⁰¹ In other words, addressing these epistemological issues require platforms of knowledge, modes of scholarship, consultative processes, an institutional culture, and educational systems that would correspond to the second phase of Sabet’s model. This highlights the need for connecting the

⁹⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, et al. *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. 1st pocket-Sized ed, Bahá’i Pub. Trust, 1990.

⁹⁹ This is cited in ‘The Story of Mona’. *Drama Circle*, <https://www.dramacircle.org/the-story-of-mona>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Boicu, Filip. *On the Notion of a ‘Conceptual Framework’ in Bahá’i Education*. https://bahai-library.com/boicu_conceptual_framework_education. Accessed 30 Apr. 2022.

¹⁰¹ Religions, Sabet claims, follow particular stages in their interaction with existing scholarship. They begin, characteristically, with a period of self-focus, in which the believers strive to understand what is contained in the nucleus of the new revelation (“the essential subject matters of education at this stage are the teachings of the religion”) (p.107). This is followed by a phase that opens this nucleus of new knowledge to dialogue with the outside world and existing branches of knowledge (here the nucleus of Revelation eventually engages with the core of knowledge structuring our societies). The third and final stage is one in which the new revelation can reinterpret the outside world and interact with its branches of knowledge to the point of producing a new system of knowledge (idem). In other words, the synthesis between the nucleus of the Revelation and the core of existing knowledge results, in this third phase, in a new system of knowledge that can support a world civilization. Sabet, Behrooz. “Bahá’i Education: A Conceptual Perspective.” (unpublished manuscript) 2002, p.107.

Revelation with deep knowledge about society, namely, the need to correlate the Bahá'í Writings with specialized forms of knowledge such as academic disciplines, practitioner knowledge from fields of practice, the subordinate knowledge of marginalized cultures, other bodies of religious knowledge etc. but in a free of imposition, humble, balanced, open-ended, dialogical, experimental, complex, non-instrumental and robust manner.

An incipient conceptual, social, material, and even digital infrastructure has already been formed in Bahá'í community.¹⁰² The question is how to clarify, strengthen and elevate the substance, the spirit, the knowledge that flows through this knowledge architecture and how to reposition and develop it so that it can successfully navigate the current transition from the first stage to the second stage of Sabet's model. Such a knowledge infrastructure must also have different regional nodes and a command center that can pull in all its knowledge processes and produce syntheses, predictions, and coordination. More specifically, the evolution of this infrastructure can follow Shoghi Effendi's delineation of the principle of the oneness of humankind as essentially requiring consideration of three perspectives: sociological – concerning structural inequalities, political/economical – concerning the relations between nations and states, and global – concerning a new unit of analysis for all dimensions (spiritual, economic, political, ethical, legal, environmental, educational, etc.). Resulting forms of new knowledge and the prioritizing of moral discernment and moral action over the promotion of ontological truths can then pave the way for the identification of new dynamic forms of ethical living. In these efforts, Bahá'í scholarship can assist greatly, as

¹⁰² See for example: Arbab, Haleh. "Generation of Knowledge and the Advancement of Civilization." *The Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies – North America*, August 2007. https://bahai-library.com/pdf/a/arbab_generation_knowledge.pdf and Lample, Paul. *Revelation & Social Reality. Learning to Translate What Is Written into Reality*. Palabra Publications, 2009, and Lample, Paul. "Toward a Framework for Action." *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2018, pp. 11-53, [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-28.3.2\(2018\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-28.3.2(2018)) .

the different Associations for Bahá'í Studies, Offices of Public Affairs, and other institutions are beginning to show. Nevertheless, the challenge is to raise the intellectual level of the Bahá'í community as a whole, and here study of the Bahá'í writings in light of the guidance from the Universal House of Justice and other institutions would benefit from familiarity with at least Bahá'í scholarship, if not academic scholarship in general. Does Bahá'í scholarship nowadays play a central role in the creation of Bahá'í identities, perspectives, efforts in community-building, and institutional culture? Does it unveil 'the deeper teachings' of the Bahá'í Faith Shoghi Effendi talks about? Does it map a path into the unknown for humanity and for the Bahá'í community? Can it stand aside research in the academia and make contributions universally acknowledged? Is it able to scrutinize its own nature and the development of the Bahá'í community? Is it able to produce new forms of global knowledge and ethics? One could argue that this is not yet the case. That might be so also because the development of Bahá'í inspired fields of study has not been a priority in recent decades. The inadequate¹⁰³ development of Bahá'í inspired fields of study is in itself an indication that we are still in the first stage of the religious developmental model described by Sabet. Although salient Bahá'í contributions exist in every general field of study, these contributions have rarely been examined, gathered together, put into relation with each other, and ordered into the foundation of a coherent discipline or of a research enterprise with momentum and continuity. This also signals a weakness in developing Bahá'í scholarly communities around specific fields of study, indicating that Bahá'í scholarship has been generally framed as a lone

¹⁰³ Roshan Danesh, for example, assesses the field of Bahá'í law as follows: "Very little has been written about Bahá'í law, and even less about how it may be understood, expanded, and applied in the future. In the Bahá'í Faith, a discussion of the principles of legal interpretation and methodology has yet to begin" ("Imagining Bahá'í Law, p.195). In another place, he further adds: "It is perhaps surprising that in a quarter century, the central written work of the Bahá'í religious system has not garnered broader scholarly attention outside the Bahá'í community. From one perspective, this lack of attention might be considered symptomatic of the fact that the study of the Bahá'í Faith generally remains in its infancy." ("Themes in the Study of Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Aqdas", p.17) Danesh, R. P. *Dimensions of Bahá'í Law*. Bahá'í Publishing, 2019.

pursuit in the past. When one thinks of Bahá'í scholarship, therefore, one thinks of fits and starts and of brief but intense periods of achievements punctuated by long periods of stagnation and forgetfulness. The same seems to apply to Bahá'í scholarship in relation to the key topic of this paper: the principle of the oneness of humankind.

V. A Subjective Account: Bahá'í Sources for the Principle of the Oneness of Humankind

What follows constitutes a very subjective account. These are just initial exploratory thoughts. The Bahá'í journey into the conceptual or theoretical mapping of the principle of the oneness of humankind is in its initial phases. No one author or collective has produced substantial work of this kind, work that synthesizes, that takes decades to develop, work that draws on what the diverse academic disciplines have to say on this topic. As a result, we do not quite know how to introduce this principle in our educational curricula, how to apply it in our social environments, or how to frame an ethics around it. What we have had, however, are diverse attempts at preparing the way for such a pursuit, with some quite noteworthy.

As already outlined in this paper, I favour an approach that envisages the concept of the oneness of humankind from multiple but interrelated and overlapping perspectives:

1. as a principle concerning structural inequalities (nation¹⁰⁴, race, class, and gender based, for example)

¹⁰⁴ “I feel it is essential to emphasize something that strangely is very rarely at the center of such discussions, namely, ‘that over the last two centuries nationality has become the crucial ascribed characteristic shaping the status of people within global stratification’ (Korzeniewicz and Moran 2009, p.xix). This is how Milanovic (2016, p.132) explains this in terms of income inequality: ‘It is hardly necessary to point out that the world is unequal in terms of individuals’ incomes. The global Gini value of slightly under 70 is significantly greater than the national Gini value in even the most unequal countries in the world, such as South Africa and Colombia. But

2. as a principle concerning the relations between nations and states, global challenges, and issues of world order.
3. as a principle concerning a new unit of analysis - the global, for all dimensions (spiritual, economic, political, environmental, sociological, historical, cultural, educational etc.) – this constitutes an epistemological shift.
4. as a principle requiring new forms of morality and ethics.
5. as a cultural concept: a) relating to issues of identity or social justice or b) as value or truth
6. as scientific truth.
7. as an issue of procedure/methodology or forms of practice: decision-making, consultation, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, development etc.
8. as an issue of law, global policy, and human rights.
9. as an issue of global citizenship and global citizenship education.¹⁰⁵
10. as an issue relating to the creation of a global or universal curriculum.¹⁰⁶

as we have just seen, the world is unequal in a very particular way: most of the inequality, when we break it down into inequality within countries and inequality among countries, is due to the latter.’ ... Moreover, as sociologist and religious scholar Nader Saiedi (2010, 17-19 mins.) explains, the biological accident of the place of one’s birth determines not only the income but the entire span of life-chances and opportunities of an individual, from life expectancy to health-care and welfare provision, to educational and occupational opportunities, social and political rights and so on: ‘Nationalism –what it means – that the rights, opportunities of the human being are going to be determined primarily by the accident of the place of their birth – is the ultimate form of dehumanization. A child is born in Sub-Saharan Africa, the entire life of this child, whether this child has the right to remain alive ten years from the birth or is already dead because of high infant mortality rate, let alone the rights to education, the rights to have an occupation, the rights for freedom, expression and a variety of things; all these things are predetermined by the accident of birth, the place of birth. Now, this child has done nothing so this phenomenon is purely meaningless, absurd and accidental. Another child is by another accident born in a part of the world in which there are a lot of resources and a lot of social rights for everybody. So the prospects of life, the opportunities and so on are completely predetermined. Predetermined by what? By this meaningless accident of birth.’ From this perspective, therefore, immigration and refugees are key symptoms of the highest form of global inequality and social injustice, meaning, the criterion of nationality or citizenship.” Boicu, Filip. *Social Justice, Higher Education and the Oneness of Humankind*. https://bahai-library.com/boicu_justice_education_oneness. Accessed 1 May 2022, pp.2-3

¹⁰⁵ UNESCO’s work in this field [global citizenship education] is guided by the [Education 2030 Agenda and Framework for Action](#), notably Target 4.7 of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDG 4 on Education), which calls on countries to ‘ensure that all learners are provided with the knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development’.

UNESCO. ‘What Is Global Citizenship Education?’ *UNESCO*, 9 Jan. 2018, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced/definition>.

¹⁰⁶ “...education is essential, and all standards of training and teaching throughout the world of mankind should be brought into conformity and agreement; a universal curriculum should be established, and the

11. as the issue of building a peaceful world civilization.
12. as a mystical reality (a fundamental aspect of our spirituality).
13. when combining all of them: as Bahá'u'lláh's program for the unification of the world (into a world civilization that reflects the Kingdom of God), and for addressing the global challenges associated with the current state of world disorder.

I have also hinted before at the fact that I am suspicious of cultural interpretations, particularly when these fail to consider structural issues and issues of world order. This is for two reasons. First, I do not believe the principle of the oneness of humankind should be taken to refer to the supremacy of a particular abstract value (such as unity) from which a metaphysical system, metanarrative, or ideology could then be derived. This is an objection born from experience. But there are also theoretical justifications: such a cultural definition would very much divest the principle from its key aspect of being primarily concerned with the relations between nations and states, which is the key standpoint from which we should be looking at the issues of the world and at the concept itself. Second, I believe that unity is the outcome of love and justice and that if there was to be a supreme single value of any kind

basis of ethics be the same." Abdu'l-Bahá. *Bahá'í Reference Library - The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Pages 176-182. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/ab/PUP/pup-63.html>. Accessed 1 May 2022. p.182.

"The universities and colleges of the world must hold fast to three cardinal principles.

*First: Whole-hearted service to the cause of education, the unfolding of the mysteries of nature, the extension of the boundaries of pure science, the elimination of the causes of ignorance and social evils, a **standard universal system of instruction**, and the diffusion of the lights of knowledge and reality.*

Second: Service to the cause of morality, raising the moral tone of the students, inspiring them with the sublimest ideals of ethical refinement, teaching them altruism, inculcating in their lives the beauty of holiness and the excellency of virtue and animating them with the excellences and perfections of the religion of God.

Third: Service to the oneness of the world of humanity; so that each student may consciously realize that he is a brother to all mankind, irrespective of religion or race. The thoughts of universal peace must be instilled into the minds of all the scholars, in order that they may become the armies of peace, the real servants of the body politic—the world. God is the Father of all. Mankind are His children. This globe is one home. Nations are the members of one family. The mothers in their homes, the teachers in the schools, the professors in the college, the presidents in the universities, must teach these ideals to the young from the cradle up to the age of manhood." ['Abdu'l-Bahá, in "Bahai Methods of Education," in *Star of the West*, vol. 9, no. 9 (Aug. 20, 1918), p. 98] in *Foundations for a Spiritual Education*. https://bahai-library.com/nsa_foundations_spiritual_education. Accessed 1 May 2022, p.9.

that should be love (precisely because love cannot be imposed in the manner that unity can be). Nonetheless, my thinking wishes to operate outside notions of unique supreme values (see the sphere model of knowledge vs. the pyramidal model of knowledge discussed earlier).

In general, I think we should be very careful to avoid the general tendency that seeks to equate the principle of the oneness of humankind, which constitutes a very specific discursive formation in the writings of Shoghi Effendi (the key features of which have been overlooked) with the general concepts (or values) of oneness or unity. At this point in time, to avoid the confusion responsible for obscuring the meanings of Shoghi Effendi's understanding of this principle I prefer to alert others that the notions of oneness or unity are not the same as the principle of the oneness of humankind. The principle of the oneness of humankind, is in my view, a distinct and more important meta-category, and a starting point for framing understanding in this age. Thus, I often have to point out that "the pivot around which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve"¹⁰⁷ is not the concept of oneness or unity, but the principle of the oneness of humankind. Terminology is important and we must be precise in our use of religious concepts and terminology. Connections with the concepts of oneness or unity can then be mapped out later, after the meanings of the principle of the oneness of humankind have become clear.

When I think of Bahá'í authors in relation to this multi-faceted principle, I ask myself three questions: 1. Who has really devoted a lifetime, their career, or their scholarly output to working with this principle? 2. Who is working with the notion of the oneness of humankind from multiple perspectives but with a focus on structural inequalities and issues of world

¹⁰⁷ Effendi, Shoghi. *Bahá'í Reference Library - The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Pages 42-45. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/WOB/wob-22.html>. Accessed 2 Apr. 2022.

order? 3. Who is working with the notion of the oneness of humankind in complex ways, offering a broad vision or conceptual formulation that illuminates other areas in innovative ways?

I have my own personal, subjective, and tentative answers to how I would explore these questions at this point in time. I suppose a lot of Bahá'í figures and scholars could fall under these criteria, some that I will never even become aware of. Nonetheless, there are authors close to me that I keep referring to, that I keep re-visiting and others I am aware of and interested in.

Ideally, one would start this discussion with bibliographies of pertinent works, thinkers and activists addressing the structural issues of race, class, and gender inequality. In relation to issues of race things are advancing so fast I feel I am unable to capture an accurate image of the state of the field, particularly as much also involves anti-racism workshops, zoom presentations, and a huge number of activities. Here, a constellation of names should be captured, which I am unable to do because I am not informed enough of the diversity of efforts underway and the connections between them. Richard Thomas¹⁰⁸ (*Racial Unity: An Imperative for Social Progress*), June Manning Thomas¹⁰⁹ (*Redevelopment and Race*), Joy

¹⁰⁸ Darden, Joe T., and Richard W. Thomas. *Detroit: Race Riots, Racial Conflicts, and Efforts to Bridge the Racial Divide*. Michigan State University Press, 2013. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.14321/j.ctt7ztb49>, 'The Bahá'í Response to Racial Injustice and Pursuit of Racial Unity (Part 1)'. *Bahai World*, 16 Jan. 2021, <https://bahaiworld.bahai.org/library/the-bahai-response-to-racial-injustice-and-pursuit-of-racial-unity/>, with Lample, Emily. 'The Bahá'í Response to Racial Injustice and Pursuit of Racial Unity (Part 2)'. *Bahai World*, 12 Jan. 2022, <https://bahaiworld.bahai.org/library/the-bahai-response-to-racial-injustice-and-pursuit-of-racial-unity-2/>.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas, June Manning. *Redevelopment and Race: Planning a Finer City in Postwar Detroit*. Paperback ed, Wayne State University Press, 2013.

DeGruy (*Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*), Tod Ewing¹¹⁰, Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis¹¹¹ (*Lights of the Spirit*), William (Billy) Roberts¹¹², Reggie Newkirk (*Racial Healing: The Institutes for the Healing of Racism*), Donald Streets¹¹³, Derek Smith¹¹⁴, Ruha Benjamin¹¹⁵ (*People's Science, Race After Technology*, and *Viral Justice*), Barbara Talley¹¹⁶, Arta Monjazez¹¹⁷, Michael Penn¹¹⁸, and Matthew Hughey¹¹⁹ are authors I have followed and used insights from. In this area, the 1984 book chapter of Richard Thomas “A Long and Thorny Path: Race Relations in the American Bahá’í Community”¹²⁰ remains, for me, the most important contribution, and a crisp style of writing that I wish was continued today. “Poverty and

¹¹⁰ Baha’i Blog. ‘Race Unity: Advancing the Conversation’ (Part 1 of 2) by Tod Ewing & Ken Bowers. 2018. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFLd2Iq-mso>.

Baha’i Blog. ‘Race Unity: Advancing the Conversation’ (Part 2 of 2) by Tod Ewing & Ken Bowers. 2018. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A25AeJY0T50>.

¹¹¹ Etter-Lewis, Gwendolyn. ‘African American Women in the Bahá’í Faith: Intersectionality, Myths and Restorative History’. *WilmetteInstitute.Org/*, 2 Dec. 2020, <https://wilmetteinstitute.org/ablaze-with-fire/>. See also, Etter-Lewis, Gwendolyn, and Richard Walter Thomas, editors. *Lights of the Spirit: Historical Portraits of Black Bahá’is in North America, 1898-2004*. Bahá’í Pub, 2006.

¹¹² Roberts, Billy. ‘The Purpose of the Black Men’s Gathering’. *Green Acre*, <https://www.greenacre.org/show-video/purpose-black-mens-gathering/>. Accessed 3 May 2022. See also Thomas, Richard W., and Frederick Landry. *Anchor of Faith: The Enduring Spirit of the Black Men’s Gathering (Paperback) | Herringbone Books*. <https://herringbonebooks.indielite.org/book/9781618512093>.

¹¹³ Streets, Donald. *A Journey to Explore the ANISA Model of Education*. 2020. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ncr0G4Nsqk>. Jordan, D., & Streets, D. (1972). *Releasing the potentialities of the child: A new conceptual basis for comprehensive educational planning*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts. <http://edpsycinteractive.org/anisa/index.html>

¹¹⁴ Smith, Derek. *Centering the ‘Pupil of the Eye’*. https://bahai-library.com/smith_centering_pupil_eye. Accessed 1 May 2022.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin, Ruha. *Beautiful Struggle: Understanding Racism & Transforming Words into Deeds - Ruha Benjamin (ABS 2017) - Bahá’í Blog*. <https://www.bahaiiblog.net/2017/09/beautiful-struggle-understanding-racism-transforming-words-deeds-ruha-benjamin-abs-2017/>. Accessed 2 May 2022.

¹¹⁶ Talley, Barbara. *Bahá’í Blogcast with Rainn Wilson - Episode 51: Barbara & Radiance Talley - Bahá’í Blog*. <https://www.bahaiiblog.net/2020/06/bahai-blogcast-with-rainn-wilson-episode-51-barbara-radiance-talley/>. Accessed 2 May 2022.

¹¹⁷ Monjazez, Arta. *Foundation Hall University Speaker - Arta Monjazez (June 7, 2020)*. *soundcloud.com*, <https://soundcloud.com/thepoetspeaks/foundation-hall-university-speaker-arta-monjazez-june-7-2020>. Accessed 6 May 2022.

¹¹⁸ I found Michael Penn’s contributions in this presentation thought provoking: Global Peace and Prosperity Forum: Webinars. *Racial Justice and Equity: Pathways to Peace*. 2021. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6s73MhApXTI>. These were based on the book Penn, Michael. ‘Our Common Humanity - Reflections on the Reclamation of the Human Spirit’. 2021. *George Ronald Publisher*, <https://www.grbooks.com/products/our-common-humanity-reflections-on-the-reclamation-of-the-human-spirit>.

¹¹⁹ See Hughey, Matthew. *Race and Racism*. https://bahai-library.com/hughey_racism_theology_sociology. Accessed 2 May 2022 and Hughey, Matthew W. ‘The (Dis)Similarities of White Racial Identities: The Conceptual Framework of “Hegemonic Whiteness”’. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 33, no. 8, Sept. 2010, pp. 1289–309. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870903125069>.

¹²⁰ Thomas, Richard. ‘A Long and Thorny Path: Race Relations in the American Bahá’í Community’ Lee, Anthony A., editor. *Circle of Unity: Bahá’í Approaches to Current Social Issues*. 1st ed, Kalimát Press, 1984.

Wealth in America: A Bahá'í Perspective"¹²¹ by June Manning Thomas, present in the same volume, complements it well by looking at structural inequality. Returning to our days, the very recently published *Systemic Racism in America: Sociological Theory, Education Inequality, and Social Change*, edited by Rashawn Ray and Hoda Mahmoudi seems to hold a lot of promise.¹²² Patricia Verge¹²³, Linda S. Covey¹²⁴, Chelsea Horton¹²⁵, Joyce Baldwin¹²⁶ and Alfred Khan Jr¹²⁷ also belong here for their wonderful contributions “on the intersection between the Bahá'í Faith and Indigenous peoples”¹²⁸ in Vol.26 No.3 (2016) of the *ABS Journal of Bahá'í Studies*. The number of people that should be included in this list should probably be in the hundreds. In short, this list or category will need to be provided by someone else, as also must be the case for gender and class issues, where I am even more out of my depth in terms of providing a rigorous review of current and past contributions (although a paucity of resources on class inequality is a contributing factor). Those struggling in these efforts are really all Champions of Oneness, to use a phrase by Janet Ruhe-Schoen. This exemplifies why even theoretical work on the principle of the oneness of humankind must be a collective rather than an individual endeavour.

¹²¹ Manning Thomas, June. “Poverty and Wealth in America: A Bahá'í Perspective”. Lee, Anthony A., editor. *Circle of Unity: Bahá'í Approaches to Current Social Issues*. 1st ed, Kalimát Press, 1984.

¹²² Also forthcoming is Ray, Rashawn, and Hoda Mahmoudi, editors. *Systemic Racism in America: Sociological Theory, Education Inequality, and Social Change*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022.

¹²³ Verge, Patricia. ‘A Personal Journey toward Reconciliation’. *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, Sept. 2016, pp. 23–42. *journal.bahaistudies.ca*, [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.3\(2016\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.3(2016)).

¹²⁴ Covey, Linda. ‘A Necessary History: Teaching On and Off the Reservations’. *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, Sept. 2016, pp. 43–64. *journal.bahaistudies.ca*, [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.4\(2016\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.4(2016)).

¹²⁵ Horton, Chelsea. ‘Building Intercultural Community: Insights from Indigenous Bahá'í History’. *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, Sept. 2016, pp. 65–87. *journal.bahaistudies.ca*, [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.5\(2016\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.5(2016)).

¹²⁶ Baldwin, Joyce. ‘Walking the Spiritual Path with Both Feet Planted Firmly on the Ground’. *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, Sept. 2016, pp. 7–22. *journal.bahaistudies.ca*, [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.2\(2016\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.2(2016)).

¹²⁷ Kahn, Alfred. ‘Encouragement, Challenges, Healing, and Progress: The Bahá'í Faith in Indigenous Communities’. *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, Sept. 2016, pp. 89–102. *journal.bahaistudies.ca*, [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.6\(2016\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-26.3.6(2016)).

¹²⁸ Covey, Linda, and Roshan Danesh. ‘From the Editor’s Desk’. *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, Sept. 2016, pp. 3–6. <https://journal.bahaistudies.ca/online/article/view/396>

1. First on the remainder of my list is Glenford Mitchell. It seems important to constantly revisit whatever talks and writings of his are still available online (unfortunately many of his more recent talks to the youth are no longer available online – I hope someone in the US Bahá'í Community will look into this). Mitchell's Q&A session¹²⁹ with the youth at the English Bahá'í Summer School in Wellington, England, is a model for intellectual dialogue. Mitchell provides here great insights into the methodology of social change and the role of the Bahá'í community in participating, with quite a specific role, in the creation of a new world order. In relation to social change, his emphasis on Shoghi Effendi's notion of the double crusade¹³⁰ remains as relevant now as it was in 1996. I combine his insight that a process of spiritualization should complement external political processes of formulating a new world order with the works of Paul Lample¹³¹, Nader Saiedi¹³², Huschmand Sabet and George Townshend. *The Heart of the Gospel* of Townshend remains one of the most underrated works in relation to this notion.

2. The second name on the remainder of my list is Roshan Danesh. His thinking on social change continues the direction of thought of Mitchell. His book *Dimension of Bahá'í Law* is truly a study of the notion of unity, particularly between pages 43 and 195. This is the richest conceptual work on the notion of unity that I have come across and the one most useful for me to engage with, as I can see how many different types of ideas play out. The principle of

¹²⁹ Baha'i Perspective. *Baha'i Concept of World Civilization with Glenford Mitchell*. 2021. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8K1SnSXXpNk>.

¹³⁰ Mitchell, Glenford. *Whatever Happened to the Double Crusade?* https://bahai-library.com/mitchell_double_crusade. Accessed 1 May 2022.

¹³¹ Lample, Paul. *Revelation & Social Reality: Learning to Translate What Is Written into Reality*. Palabra Publications, 2009.

¹³² My favourite material outside his books is this series of talks: Saiedi, Nader. 'Nader Saiedi - Text and Context in the Baha'i Heroic Age'. *SoundCloud*, 2014, <https://soundcloud.com/bahai-blog/sets/nader-saiedi-text-and-context>. Nader Saiedi touches on issues of world order, church and state, politics, social economic development, oneness as mystical reality, the abolition of slavery and oppression and is the only Bahá'í author to talk about the inequality based on the category of the nation as being the most significant form of inequality today. I am still waiting for his book on 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

unity or oneness is explored in relation to social change,¹³³ world order, hegemony¹³⁴, the problematic of church and state¹³⁵, divine law, and internationalism.¹³⁶ If unity could be a relevant theoretical perspective, this is where it is outlined. Furthermore, his 2014 ABS presentation entitled “Re-telling Reconciliation”¹³⁷ is exemplary for what the demands imposed upon us by the principle of the oneness of humankind are when considering the structural issues of inequality and oppression embedded in our nations and civilization. Van der Hoonard’s essay on “unity in diversity”¹³⁸ (with a brilliant bibliography) and Christopher Buck’s analyses of the principle of unity¹³⁹ fall within the direction of thought of Danesh, as do Abizadeh’s review of Gollmer’s take on politics¹⁴⁰, parts of *Making the Crooked Straight*, by Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, and Ulrich Gollmer, Kiser Barnes’s take on human rights and multiculturalism¹⁴¹, and Robert Stockman’s¹⁴² recent book chapter on the concepts of oneness and unity. This is a subjective choice, but I would also add here an essay¹⁴³ from

¹³³ Danesh, Roshan, and Lex Musta. *Some Reflections on Bahá’í Approaches to Social Change*. 2012, https://bahai-library.com/danesh_musta_social_change.

¹³⁴ Danesh, Roshan. *Hegemony and Revelation: A Bahá’í Perspective on World Order - ProQuest*. 2010, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/d46c90cb71a8f16a711c8844d02de399/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=36810>.

¹³⁵ Danesh, Roshan. *Church and State in the Bahá’í Faith*. 2008, https://bahai-library.com/danesh_church_state_bahai.

¹³⁶ Danesh, Roshan. *Internationalism and Divine Law*. 2004, https://bahai-library.com/danesh_internationalism_divine_law.

¹³⁷ Danesh, Roshan. ‘Re-Telling Reconciliation - A Talk by Roshan Danesh - Baha’i Blog’. *Arts, Podcasts, Videos and Articles*, 7 Feb. 2015, <https://www.bahai-blog.net/2015/02/re-telling-reconciliation-talk-roshan-danesh/>.

¹³⁸ Van den Hoonard, Will. *Etching the Idea of ‘Unity in Diversity’ in the Bahá’í Community: Popular Opinion and Organizing Principle*. Warburg, Margit, et al., editors. *Bahá’í and Globalisation*. Aarhus University Press, 2005, pp.245-267.

¹³⁹ Buck, Christopher. “Fifty Baha’i Principles of Unity: A Paradigm of Social Salvation” (2017 Update)’. *Baha’i Studies Review*, Jan. 2015. www.academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/35016378/Fifty_Baha_i_Principles_of_Unity_A_Paradigm_of_Social_Salvation_2017_update.

Buck, Christopher. ‘Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha’i Faith (SUNY Press, 1999)’. May 1999. www.academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/4333440/Paradise_and_Paradigm_Key_Symbols_in_Persian_Christianity_and_the_Baha_i_Faith_SUNY_Press_1999.

¹⁴⁰ Abizadeh, Arash. ‘Review: Politics beyond War: Ulrich Gollmer’s Contribution to Baha’i Political Thought’. *Arash*, 20 Dec. 2004, <https://abizadeh.wixsite.com/arash/post-1/2004/12/20/review-politics-beyond-war-ulrich-gollmers-contribution-to-bahai-political-thought>.

¹⁴¹ Barnes, Kiser. *Human Rights and Multiculturalism*. https://bahai-library.com/barnes_human_rights_multiculturalism. Accessed 2 May 2022.

¹⁴² Stockman, Robert H. ‘Oneness and Unity’. *The World of the Bahá’í Faith*, Routledge, 2021.

¹⁴³ Penn, Michael. ‘The Journey Out of the Racial Divide,’ in *World Order* 28:2 (Winter 1996-97).

Michael Penn and particular statements from Bani Dugal (Principal Representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the UN) and the BIC, for example on global governance¹⁴⁴, immigration, human rights, or the environment. The BIC statement entitled “The Oneness of Humanity - Implications for the Africa - European Union Partnership”¹⁴⁵ constitutes a most recent example of such statements.

3. The third name is W. Andy Knight¹⁴⁶, former editor of “Global Governance Journal,” co-publisher with Rosenau¹⁴⁷, and the premier Bahá'í intellectual on multilateralism, global governance, and issues of world order/disorder¹⁴⁸. W. Andy Knight has a large numbers of publications.¹⁴⁹ His 1995 review of the “Report of the Commission on Global Governance, Our Global Neighbourhood”¹⁵⁰, his 2000 book *A Changing United Nations*¹⁵¹, his 2001 edited book *Adapting the United Nations to a Post-Modern Era*¹⁵², his paper and presentation “Time for a New Global Governance Paradigm”¹⁵³, the essays I have already referenced here,

¹⁴⁴ Bahá'í International Community. *A Governance Befitting: Humanity and the Path Toward a Just Global Order*. 21 Sept. 2020, <https://www.bic.org/statements/governance-befitting-humanity-and-path-toward-just-global-order>.

¹⁴⁵ *The Oneness of Humanity - Implications for the Africa - European Union Partnership*. 14 Feb. 2022, <https://www.bic.org/statements/oneness-humanity-implications-africa-european-union-partnership-0>.

¹⁴⁶ Knight, W. Andy. ‘New Thinking About Global Governance in an Intermestic World’. *Fundamental Challenges to Global Peace and Security: The Future of Humanity*, edited by Hoda Mahmoudi et al., Springer International Publishing, 2022, pp. 47–75. *Springer Link*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79072-1_4.

¹⁴⁷ Knight, W. Andy. ‘Global Governance as a Summative Phenomenon’. *Palgrave Advances in Global Governance*, edited by Jim Whitman, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009, pp. 160–88. *Springer Link*, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230245310_9.

¹⁴⁸ W. Andy Knight, ‘Global Governance and World (Dis)orders,’ in Janine Brodie and Sandra Rein (eds), *Critical Concepts: An Introduction to Politics*, 3rd edition (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2005), pp. 252–263.

¹⁴⁹ Knight, W. Andy. *Andy Knight, FRSC, PhD, MA, Hons BA - Directory@UAlberta*. <https://apps.ualberta.ca/directory/person/knight>. Accessed 1 May 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Knight, W. Andy. ‘Straddling the Fence: An Equivocal Proposal for Future Multilateral Governance’. *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3, Sept. 1995, pp. 557–79. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436599550036068>.

¹⁵¹ Knight, W. Andy. *A Changing United Nations: Multilateral Evolution and the Quest for Global Governance*. *link.springer.com*, 2000 <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780333984420>. Accessed 1 May 2022.

¹⁵² Knight, W. Andy. *Adapting the United Nations to a Post-Modern Era*. *link.springer.com*, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9780333977774>. Accessed 1 May 2022.

¹⁵³ Citizens for Global Solutions. *Time for a New Global Governance Paradigm W Andy Knight*. 2021. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVeau9ACJIQ>.

and his forthcoming book *International Organization Today*¹⁵⁴ should be of interest to any Bahá'í scholar. In my view, however, his *Global Politics* book¹⁵⁵ with Thomas Keating occupies a special place. In an age which has seen the return to dominance of realist approaches in political science and politics at large, this textbook remains the most appropriate and accessible introduction into global politics and world affairs for any Bahá'í. In my view, every Bahá'í community would benefit from having this book available in its training and educational programs. I also recommend it as an entry-point into the larger body of work of Knight, and as preparation for engaging with other Bahá'í contributions on similar topics.

In this area of thought other contributions are also of direct interest to me. The 2022 book edited by Hoda Mahmoudi, Michael Allen and Kate Seaman, *Fundamental Challenges to Global Peace and Security*¹⁵⁶ (which includes chapters by Andy Knight and collaborators of his such as Charlotte Ku) and *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*, by Augusto Lopez-Claros, Arthur L. Dahl and Maja Groff¹⁵⁷ are two such recent examples. Steve Cooney's (2007) listing of materials from the Bahá'í World Centre and analysis of secondary literature on the notion of the world order of Bahá'u'lláh is a fundamental resource.¹⁵⁸ A lot of works I have not included here can be found referenced

¹⁵⁴ McMaster, Geoff. *International Politics Expert to Shed Light on 'New World Disorder'*. <https://www.ualberta.ca/folio/2021/10/international-politics-expert-to-shed-light-on-new-world-disorder.html>. Accessed 1 May 2022.

¹⁵⁵ Knight, W. Andy, and Thomas F. Keating. *Global Politics: Emerging Networks, Trends and Challenges*. Oxford University Press Canada, 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Mahmoudi, Hoda, et al. *Fundamental Challenges to Global Peace and Security*. [link.springer.com](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-79072-1), <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-79072-1>. 2022

¹⁵⁷ Available online for download here: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/global-governance-and-the-emergence-of-global-institutions-for-the-21st-century/AF7D40B152C4CBEDB310EC5F40866A59>

¹⁵⁸ Cooney, Steve. *World Order, Evolution Towards*. Notes on recent secondary literature, compilation, and two memoranda from the Bahá'í World Centre https://bahai-library.com/cooney_world_order_literature. Accessed 2 May 2022.

there. Graham Hassalls's¹⁵⁹ recent works at the juncture between global studies and Bahá'í studies are also worth consulting (also because of his South Pacific perspective), and I am curious about Paul Vreeland's essay in *The Bahá'í World (2001-2002)* entitled "World Order and Global Governance. A Bahá'í Perspective." I would also rely on the edited books of Charles Lerche - particularly the more recent *Healing the Body Politics*¹⁶⁰ (2004), *Processes of Lesser Peace* (2002) edited by Babak Bahador and Nazila Ghanea, and the series edited by Anthony A. Lee, especially *Circle of Unity: Bahá'í Approaches to Current Social Issues* (1986). To the names of these authors, however, I feel important to counterpose for myself the name of Alina Sajed¹⁶¹, a scholar in Third Worldism, anticolonial thought and practice, and globalization¹⁶² who I once knew as a Bahá'í during my junior-youth.

An important work that comes from the literary field (this is much needed) and must be included here is Jack McLean's 2012 book *A Celestial Burning*, an in-depth study of Shoghi Effendi's writings that is now available online.¹⁶³

4. The fourth name on my list is Bonnie J. Taylor. All her four compilations are relevant to the theme of the oneness of humankind. Any work I do in relation to the notion of the

¹⁵⁹ Hassall, Graham. 'Governance - Chapter in "The World of the Bahai Faith" (Routledge). *The World of the Bahai Faith*, Jan. 2022. www.academia.edu,

https://www.academia.edu/59950730/Governance_chapter_in_The_World_of_the_Bahai_Faith_Routledge . Hassall, Graham. 'Reviewing Principles of Governance: Branches of Government at the Global Level'. *Policy Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2017. www.academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/31889944/Reviewing_Principles_of_Governance_Branches_of_government_at_the_global_level_pdf. See also forthcoming paper on "Global Constitutionalism."

¹⁶⁰ Lerche, Charles. 'Healing the Body Politic - Baha'i Perspectives On Peace And Conflict Resolution'. *George Ronald Publisher*, https://www.grbooks.com/products/healing-the-body-politic_lerche. 2004. Accessed 2 May 2022.

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Sajed, Alina. *Postcolonial Encounters in International Relations: The Politics of Transgression in the Maghreb*. Routledge, 2013, and Sajed, Alina. 'From the Third World to the Global South'. *E-International Relations*, Jan. 2020. www.academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/43730815/From_the_Third_World_to_the_Global_South.

¹⁶² Sajed, Alina. *Fifty Key Thinkers on Globalization - 1st Edition - William Coleman* -. <https://www.routledge.com/Fifty-Key-Thinkers-on-Globalization/Coleman-Sajed/p/book/9780415559324>. Accessed 1 May 2022.

¹⁶³ McLean, Jack. 2012. *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi* (An Interdisciplinary Theological and Literary Critical Study). Baha'i Publishing Trust of India, 606 pages.

oneness of humankind starts from her compilation *The Power of Unity: Beyond Prejudice and Racism*. This is such a key text that it should be translated, in my view, in all the languages of countries where there are Bahá'ís. In 2016, with the beginning of the rise of Trump I emailed the NSA of the United States to ask for its republication and that it would be made available online worldwide. I saw it as the most important resource for educating Bahá'ís and others on issues of race in a quick and accessible way (outside of 'The Advent of Divine Justice'). Her other compilation, *The Pupil of the Eye: African Americans in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* is now honoured by the growing use of the concept of 'the pupil of the eye' in Bahá'í work on anti-racism. Here, Derek Smith's "Centering the 'Pupil of the Eye': Blackness, Modernity, and the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh"¹⁶⁴, dedicated also to Bonnie Taylor, is a wonderful resource for understanding Bahá'u'lláh's engagement with the ideology and discourses of anti-blackness and His intervention in the racial discourse of that era so as to produce an "epistemological rupture." (p.20) To those of Bonnie Taylor, I must add another compilation necessary to the study of the principle of the oneness of humankind: "Peace – More than an End to War" edited by Terrill G Hayes et al, 1986.¹⁶⁵

5. The fifth name on my list is Gayle Morrison. With its balance, honesty, and multi-layered analysis of the racial dynamics within the American Bahá'í community and society between 1874-1951 (as an expression of attempts to engage with the principle of the oneness of humankind) "To Move the World" remains the standard text for Bahá'í history in the West. Like Roshan Danesh later in 'Re-telling Reconciliation', Gayle Morrison recovers a tradition of anti-racism and of working with the principle of the oneness of humankind to produce

¹⁶⁴ Smith, Derek. *Centering the 'Pupil of the Eye'*. https://bahai-library.com/smith_centering_pupil_eye. Accessed 1 May 2022.

¹⁶⁵ Hayes, Terrill G., et al., editors. *Peace--More than an End to War: Selections from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice*. Bahá'í Pub. Trust, 1986. I thank Kambeze Etemad for this suggestion.

social change that we have become forgetful of and disconnected from. Gayle Morrison's "Education for Worldmindedness", published in *World Order Magazine*, Summer 1972, is a very interesting read that again confirms her commitment to the oneness of humankind. The same commitment is on display in her foundational article "A Look at Antifeminist Literature" featured in *World Order Magazine*, Spring 1975¹⁶⁶, a perspective I greatly identify with. Her work is complemented nowadays by Janet Ruhe-Schoen's *Champions of Oneness: Louis Gregory and His Shining Circle*, a beautiful exploration of world citizenship as spiritual brotherhood in service of the cause of oneness, and Louis Venters's (2015) *No Jim Crow Church: The Origins of South Carolina's Bahá'í Community*.¹⁶⁷

6. My sixth listing is a category of authors that have played a key role in highlighting the global challenges or crises of our age. This list starts with two lines of inquiry, one associated with Alessandro Bausani's 1968 essay "The Religious Crisis of the Modern World"¹⁶⁸ and the other with Charles Lerche's 1985 book chapter entitled "The Global Agenda"¹⁶⁹ (both extremely relevant today).

Bausani's line of thought is continued in much more complex forms today by Ben Schewel's interest in post-secularism.¹⁷⁰ Lerche's line of thought is continued today by Paul Hanley's

¹⁶⁶ Morrison, Gayle. *A Look at Antifeminist Literature*. *World Order/Series2/Volume 9/Issue 3* - Bahaiworks, a Library of Works about the Bahá'í Faith. https://bahai.works/World_Order/Series2/Volume_9/Issue_3. Accessed 6 May 2022.

¹⁶⁷ Venters, Louis. *No Jim Crow Church: The Origins of South Carolina's Bahá'í Community*. University Press of Florida, 2015. *University Press Scholarship*, <https://doi.org/10.5744/florida/9780813061078.001.0001>.

¹⁶⁸ Alessandro Bausani's "The Religious Crisis of the Modern World," in *World Order*, 2.3 (Spring 1968) https://bahai.works/World_Order/Series2/Volume_2/Issue_3

¹⁶⁹ Lerche, Charles. "The Global Agenda" in Lee, Anthony A., editor. *Circle of Peace: Reflections on the Bahá'í Teachings*. 1st ed, Kalimát Press, 1985.

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, Schewel, Benjamin. "What Is "Postsecular" About Global Political Discourse?" *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 12, no. 4, Oct. 2014, pp. 49–61. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2014.976088> and Schewel, Benjamin. "Post-Secularism in a World-Historical Light: The Axial Age Thesis as an Alternative to Secularization". *Religions*, vol. 9, no. 5, 5, May 2018, p. 139. www.mdpi.com, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9050139>.

book *Eleven*, by the book¹⁷¹ of Augusto Lopez-Claros, Arthur L. Dahl and Maja Groff¹⁷² (the first chapter is entitled “The Challenges of the 21st century”), by the presentations of Augusto Claro-Lopez (of which, I would highlight the one given to the Global Governance Forum¹⁷³) and Arthur L. Dahl¹⁷⁴, and by the works of W. Andy Knight and the book edited by Hoda Mahmoudi, Michael Allen and Kate Seaman, *Fundamental Challenges to Global Peace and Security*.¹⁷⁵ Somewhere, in between these two perspectives falls Paul Lample’s article “Reflections on the Challenge of Our Age.”¹⁷⁶

7. My seventh category includes those thinkers that approach the principle of the oneness of humankind from the perspective of political philosophy (themes such as ‘cosmopolitanism’ or ‘universalism’ reflect such an approach). Natalie Mooten’s 2005 PhD dissertation¹⁷⁷ on “The Bahá’í Approach to Cosmopolitan Ideas in International Relations” is, as far as I am aware, the most important written contribution on this topic so far. Interestingly Mooten has produced two versions of this paper that differ substantially, a shorter one¹⁷⁸ presented in the University of Haifa ‘Lectures in Bahá’í Studies’ series, on 14 November 2006, and a longer one¹⁷⁹, published as a journal article in 2007. Shahrzad Sabet has delivered an ABS

¹⁷¹ Lopez-Claros, Augusto, et al. *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108569293>.

¹⁷² Lopez-Claros, Augusto, et al. *Global Governance and the Emergence of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108569293>.

¹⁷³ Augusto Lopez-Claros. *Global Governance and the Emergence of of Global Institutions for the 21st Century*. 2021. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5T0H6-YYYY>.

¹⁷⁴ Dahl, Arthur L. *Climate Change - Navigating the Urgent Transition Toward Sustainability | Arthur Dahl*. 2022. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzAF9LpEYnA>.

¹⁷⁵ Mahmoudi, Hoda, et al. *Fundamental Challenges to Global Peace and Security*. link.springer.com, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-79072-1>. 2022

¹⁷⁶ Lample, Paul. ‘Reflections on the Challenge of Our Age’. *The Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1–2, 2021, pp. 11–44. journal.bahaistudies.ca, [https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-31.1-2.398\(2021\)](https://doi.org/10.31581/jbs-31.1-2.398(2021)).

¹⁷⁷ Mooten, Natalie. *PhD Dissertation: The Bahá’í Approach to Cosmopolitan Ideas in International Relations*. https://bahai-library.com/mooten_ideas_cosmopolitan_relations. 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Mooten, Natalie. *The Bahá’í Approach to Cosmopolitan Ideas in International Relations*. 2006, https://bahai-library.com/mooten_cosmopolitan_ideas.

¹⁷⁹ Mooten, Natalie. *The Bahá’í Contribution to Cosmopolitan International Relations Theory*. 2007, https://bahai-library.com/mooten_cosmopolitan_international_relations.

presentation on cosmopolitanism entitled “Social Identity and the Oneness of Humankind”¹⁸⁰ in 2018, and is currently working on a book about “how a reimagined cosmopolitanism can resolve the social and philosophical tensions around collective identity.”¹⁸¹ What this book might look like we can get a taste of by reading her exquisite article in the Hedgehog Review: “Toward a New Universalism.”¹⁸² The most significant contributions in this area of inquiry have been made in recent times by the Center on Modernity in Transition (COMIT). Under the direction of Ben Schewel and Shahrzad Sabet, COMIT has organized two series of recorded seminars of great relevance to philosophical explorations of the principle of the oneness of humankind: *The Liberal Imaginary and Beyond*¹⁸³ in 2020-2021, and *Identity and Belonging in the Global Age*¹⁸⁴ in 2021-2022. Another interesting contribution in this area has been the 2020 article by Zhaoyuan Wan and David Palmer on “The Cosmopolitan Moment in Colonial Modernity: The Bahá’í Faith, Spiritual Networks, and Universalist Movements in Early Twentieth-Century China.”¹⁸⁵

8. My eighth category is concerned with Bahá’í intellectuals who operate with the concept of ‘world civilization’, that is, who see all aspects of reality as issues of world civilization. This is an area I have not explored before so my selection will be very limited. Douglas Martin is the first name on my list here (with the already mentioned Glenford Mitchell). His series of

¹⁸⁰ Sabet, Shahrzad. *ABS 2018 - Shahrzad Sabet: Social Identity and the Oneness of Humankind*. 2018. Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/292630238>.

¹⁸¹ Cohn, Jonathan. ‘Shahrzad Sabet | Author Bio’. *Great Transition Initiative*, 27 July 2021, <https://greattransition.org/contributor/shahrzad-sabet>.

¹⁸² Sabet, Shahrzad. ‘Toward a New Universalism’. *THR Web Features*, 29 Dec. 2020, <https://hedgehogreview.com/web-features/thr/posts/toward-a-new-universalism>.

¹⁸³ COMIT. *The Liberal Imaginary and Beyond* | COMIT | Center on Modernity in Transition. 2021 2020, <https://comitresearch.org/speaker-series/liberal-imaginary-beyond/>.

¹⁸⁴ COMIT. *Identity and Belonging in a Global Age* | COMIT | Center on Modernity in Transition. 2022 2021, <https://comitresearch.org/speaker-series/identity-belonging-global-age/>.

¹⁸⁵ Wan, Zhaoyuan, and David A. Palmer. ‘The Cosmopolitan Moment in Colonial Modernity: The Bahá’í Faith, Spiritual Networks, and Universalist Movements in Early Twentieth-Century China’. *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 6, Nov. 2020, pp. 1787–827. Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X19000210>.

talks on historical consciousness¹⁸⁶ explains this choice. “The Century of Light”, a publication prepared under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice while Douglas Martin was a member, casts a Bahá’í perspective on world history. Behrooz Sabet is another consistent example, as his work on education¹⁸⁷, his recent presentation on the theme of world civilization¹⁸⁸, and his paper on “Modernity in the Perspective of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” show. I find Steven Phelps’s *Verge of the New* series of talks a much needed and refreshing perspective on this theme.¹⁸⁹ Nader Saiedi’s *Logos and Civilization* and his analysis of *The Secret of Divine Civilization*¹⁹⁰ also belong here, as do Roshan Danesh’s *Dimensions of Bahá’i Law* and Moojan Momen’s *The Phenomenon of Religion*.¹⁹¹ With his profound research interest in the lessons of the Axial Age for today, Benjamin Schewel must also be included here. Mikhail Sergeev also belongs here due to his interest in modernity and his *Theory of Religious Cycles*¹⁹². Boris Handal’s paper on “The Philosophy of Bahá’í Education”¹⁹³ is a must read because it integrates philosophical themes with a historical account of the practical guidance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for Bahá’í schools in Iran. On the other hand, *Creating a New Mind* and *Revelation and Social Reality* by Paul Lample link the notion of the advancement of civilization with the current direction and functioning of the

¹⁸⁶ ‘Historical Consciousness and the Divine Plan: A Series of 8 Talks by Mr. Douglas Martin - Baha’i Blog’. *Arts, Podcasts, Videos and Articles*, 11 Mar. 2018, <https://www.bahaiblog.net/2018/03/historical-consciousness-divine-plan-series-8-talks-mr-douglas-martin/>.

¹⁸⁷ Sabet, Behrooz. “Bahá’í Education: A Conceptual Perspective.” 2002.

Sabet, Behrooz. “An Integrative Approach to Knowledge and Action: A Bahá’í Perspective” *Converging Realities. A Journal of Art, Science and Religion*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2000, https://bahai-library.com/sabet_integrative_approach.

¹⁸⁸ Sabet, Behrooz. *What a World Civilization Looks Like from a Bahá’i Perspective*. 2021. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vrwzOUXDxc>. See also, forthcoming paper entitled “Modernity in the perspective of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.’”

¹⁸⁹ Phelps, Steven. ‘The Verge of the New - A Series of Talks by Steven Phelps - Baha’i Blog’. *Arts, Podcasts, Videos and Articles*, 18 Sept. 2017, <https://www.bahaiblog.net/2017/09/verge-new-series-talks-steven-phelps/>.

¹⁹⁰ Saiedi, Nader. *Introduction to Abdu’l-Baha’s The Secret of Divine Civilization*, An. https://bahai-library.com/saiedi_introduction_sdc. Accessed 2 May 2022.

¹⁹¹ Momen, Moojan. *The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach*. Oneworld, 1999.

¹⁹² Sergeev, Mikhail. *Theory of Religious Cycles: Tradition Modernity, and the Bahá’i Faith*. Brill Rodopi, 2015.

¹⁹³ Handal, Boris. *The Philosophy of Bahá’i Education*. https://bahai-library.com/handal_philosophy_bahai_education. 2007. Accessed 7 May 2022.

Bahá'í community. Arthur L. Dahl's *The Eco Principle* and Mark Perry's¹⁹⁴ books (*Convergence*, and *Last War*) which I have not yet read, would seem to fit this theme well. Finally, Ludwig Tuman's *Mirror of the Divine. Art in the Bahá'í World Community*¹⁹⁵ (with a very interesting chapter on 'Unity in Diversity') and Rhett Diessner's "The Psychology of Beauty as a Foundation of Moral Education"¹⁹⁶ also fall in this area, as do the COMIT online speaker series *On the Spiritual in Contemporary Architecture*¹⁹⁷ and Julie Badiee's *An Earthly Paradise: Bahá'í Houses of Worship Around the World*.

It is impossible not to mention here the thinker who has shaped more than any other the main concepts, conceptual framework, and global community-building of the Bahá'í Faith and of Bahá'í scholarship during the last 30 years and into the foreseeable future. Historians from the future will wonder how this could be so and they will know to fundamentally draw on key texts of Farzam Arbab such as "Promoting a Discourse on Science, Religion and Development" from *The Lab, the Temple and the Market* (2000) in order to understand the dynamics of the development of the Bahá'í community between the mid-1990s and the 2030s. That Arbab thought of development in civilizational terms is evident (although a key subpoint here was the need for development agencies to focus on institutional development in rural areas and in urban regions experiencing marginalization): "The creation of the institutions of a global society, a web of interconnected structures that hold society together at all levels, from local to international – institutions that gradually become the patrimony of all the inhabitants of the planet – is for me one of the major challenges of development

¹⁹⁴ Perry, Mark. 'Convergence - Cities, Spirituality And The Future Of Civilization'. *George Ronald Publisher*, <https://www.grbooks.com/products/convergence-cities-spirituality-and-the-future-of-civilization> and Perry, Mark. 'Last War - Racism, Spirituality and the Future of Civilization'. *George Ronald Publisher*, https://www.grbooks.com/products/last-war_perry.

¹⁹⁵ Tuman, Ludwig. *Mirror of the Divine: Art in the Bahá'í World Community*. G. Ronald, 1993.

¹⁹⁶ Diessner, Rhett. "The Psychology of Beauty as a Foundation of Moral Education". Chapter 8 in *Psyche and Eros: Bahá'í Studies in a Spiritual Psychology*. G. Ronald, 2007.

¹⁹⁷ COMIT. *On the Spiritual in Contemporary Architecture | COMIT | Center on Modernity in Transition*. <https://comitresearch.org/speaker-series/spiritual-contemporary-architecture/>. Accessed 2 May 2022.

planning and strategy. Without it, I fear, globalization will be synonymous with the marginalization of the masses.”¹⁹⁸ (p.161)

Finally, creating a world civilization is impossible without appropriate knowledge infrastructures. Graham Hassall has recently initiated a series of talks relating to this topic entitled *The Reference Desk*. Amongst many other things, this series highlights how difficult it has been to advance in this area and how this area has suffered from not being granted adequate levels of priority over decades. It is my experience that Bahá’í scholarship would not be possible without the <https://bahai-library.com/> resource, the history and workings of which have been recently delineated by Jonah Winters.¹⁹⁹ The same can be said about the *Afnan Library*, a subject recently covered by Moojan Momen²⁰⁰, and about *Bahai.media*²⁰¹, *Bahaipedia*, *Bahaiworks*, *Baha’i Blog*²⁰², and Steven Phelps’s *Loom of Reality*²⁰³ etc. That a project like the Afnan Library required 30 years (1982 to 2012) to get going after the passing of Hasan M. Balyuzi in 1980 should offer some food for thought in terms of what institutions tend to prioritize.

9. I return, in my ninth category, to a single author, and in fact, to a single book that I have just started reading: *The Garden of Reality*, by Roland Faber. This is a book that sets up for

¹⁹⁸ Arbab, Farzam. “Promoting a Discourse on Science, Religion and Development” in Harper, Sharon (Editor). *The Lab, the Temple, and the Market Reflections at the Intersection of Science, Religion, and Development*. International Development Research Centre, 2008. *Open WorldCat*, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10119732>.

¹⁹⁹ Graham Hassall. *Jonah Winters - Bahai-Library.Com*. 2022. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBe6jiRaJRU>.

²⁰⁰ Graham Hassall. *Moojan Momen - The Afnan Library*. 2022. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2thDobrArzE>.

²⁰¹ Graham Hassall. *Dan Jones - Bahai.Media*. 2022. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXWPn-7xNGI>.

²⁰² ‘Baha’i Blog - Community Arts, Stories, Reflections and Media’. *Arts, Podcasts, Videos and Articles*, <https://www.bahaiblog.net/>. Accessed 15 May 2022.

²⁰³ Graham Hassall. *Steven Phelps - Cataloguing and Subject Indexing at Loom.Loomofreality.Org*. 2022. *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53ZvwpLnMv8>.

itself a very difficult task, and it remains to be seen if it can deliver on its promise. Stephen Lambden²⁰⁴ thinks it does: “*The Garden of Reality* is without doubt the most important western language contribution to the emergent field of Bahá’í philosophical and religious thought. Its novel ideas should be digested and appreciated as they provide a vision for a humanity seeking the genuine oneness of humankind through a befitting unity in diversity.”²⁰⁵ The questions *The Garden of Reality* asks are fundamental and the reason why this book will constitute my next area of exploration regarding the principle of the oneness of humankind:

“Yet, beneath the endeavor to articulate transreligious relativity as a unifying factor, for a future humanity at peace lurks also an objection to my proposal of a different kind and from a different direction: not from the faction that wants to save unity from relativistic multiplicity, which seems to roam outside of its control, but from the faction that assumes that any claim of unity comes already too late. Don’t we live in times of a thoroughly postmodern condition, a globalized society not only of capitalist commodification of all spheres of life, of meaningless nihilism without anchors of meaning, and beyond any overarching narrative or integrating forms of universal identification, but also the hopeless and irreversible fragmentarization of all attempts to social, spiritual, or conceptual unity? Can we really hope to recapitulate the factual multiplicity (of religions, or any phenomenon) and the acknowledged plurality of cultures, in light of the plight of oppressed minorities, the excluded, and the marginalized, and of the limiting and diverging factors of languages, cultural habits, and systems of meaning, whether religious or not, in any meaningful form? Given the postmodern sensibilities to complexity, non-linearity, diversification, so keenly observed and critically

²⁰⁴ Closer To Truth. Stephen Lambden | *The Global Philosophy of Religion Project* | Baha’i Philosophy. 2021. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ5Q4DBWDlw>.

²⁰⁵ ‘New Book by Roland Faber’. *The Center for Process Studies*, 3 Aug. 2018, <https://ctr4process.org/new-book-by-roland-faber/>.

propagated by poststructuralist, deconstructionist, postcolonial, and liberationist discourses, as they react to this postmodern social and spiritual condition—can we even fathom any claim of unification, even if it is one of relativity and multiplicity, without seemingly falling back onto pre-modernist paradigms of authoritarian and patriarchal integralism? It will be one of the challenges that the coming considerations must address. But they will do so in light of the serious awareness that, even besides the transreligious peace, the common pressing predicaments of humanity today will not be able to be answered without assuming the ecological interwovenness of humanity with the Earth and the necessity of overcoming the domination of binaries of race, gender, culture, and worldview, if humanity not only wants to survive but survive as humanity.”²⁰⁶ (pp.4-5)

Many other categories and names remain unadded, but I must end this list here. I hope this subjective account of bibliographic sources (even if heavily biased in favour of a male and Western perspective) can provide a useful introduction of sorts and that others can make improvements to it. The point I was trying to convey is that many different perspectives and the many distinct bibliographies supporting them are needed in order to engage the principle of the oneness of humankind. Ultimately, this should be a collective effort expressive of unity in diversity.

“Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self.”²⁰⁷

Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p.94

²⁰⁶ Faber, Roland. *The Garden of Reality: Transreligious Relativity in a World of Becoming*. Lexington Books, 2018.

²⁰⁷ Bahá'u'lláh. *Bahá'i Reference Library - Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Pages 92-98*. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/b/GWB/gwb-43.html>. Accessed 2 May 2022. p.94