

Unhealthy Science, Religion, and Humanities: The Deep Connection and what Bahá'u'lláh had to say about it*

Ron House

Abstract

Looking at the range of social, political, and environmental problems in the modern world, most Bahá'ís will have no difficulty giving due credence to Bahá'u'lláh's assessment: "Such shall be [the world's] plight that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. ... when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake." (GWB. LXI) Wise as Bahá'u'lláh's decision not to explain in plain language undoubtedly is, His writings do, however, appear to contain veiled references to a single crucial philosophical error that this writer has identified underlying many of the serious mis-steps in modern science, philosophy, religious understanding, and most disciplines in the humanities. This paper explains this error, traceable to Hume (although Hume himself repudiated it), and presents tantalising material by Bahá'u'lláh, which, though heavily disguised, points the finger at precisely the mistake that the world, unaware, has adopted in various forms as a central pillar of modern thought. The failure of the modern intellectual edifice would produce a profound crisis of faith in the world's scientific, rationalistic, non-theistic zeitgeist and, the author speculates, this could produce much greater long-term destruction to the world's fabric than any calamity of a purely material nature (short of actual extinction of human life).

Introduction

Today I want to discuss some matters connected with the state of affairs

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that Bahá'u'lláh predicted would precede the 'calamity', and to offer some thoughts about what that calamity might be. He wrote:

"The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake. Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody." (Gleanings LXI)

I believe it is now possible to discern some of the distinctive characteristics of the 'unbelief' that Bahá'u'lláh predicted would envelop the world, and I want to mention one today. It is a somewhat abstract philosophical notion, but one with surprising practical consequences. Let me start, though, by listing some of the things that I see as negative consequences of the principle I want to talk about. Some of the items I'll list here will probably surprise you, and there might not be much obvious connection amongst them, so please bear with me for the moment. Also, the argument I want to make is too big for a one-hour talk, so a lot of what I'll say I won't have time to justify.

With that proviso, let's take a look at some examples from various fields where I believe serious mis-steps are being made:

- * In science, falsifiability; this is the notion that scientific theories can never be proved, only disproved (originally from Popper).
- * In the humanities, many examples:
 Science as a power struggle - for example, the claim that Newton's Principia might as well be called Newton's rape manual, also misuse of Kuhn's 'paradigm' theory to imply, for example, that voodoo and science are merely different ways of knowing, neither better than the other, with science having greater credence only because of power relations.
 Deconstruction, postmodernism, poststructuralism, etc. All these have in common a disbelief in any absolute claim to knowledge. Typical claims are (from deconstruction) "There is nothing but the text" - that is, denial of meaning; (and from postmodernism) the idea that a history book is no different from a novel - denying objective truth.
- * In religion, fundamentalism. Seemingly quite different from the preceding, I hope to show the family resemblance later.
- * In economics, free market philosophy and economic rationalism.

- * In law, the replacement of the principle of natural rights by ‘community standards’ etc.

It may seem surprising to lump all these in the same basket, as apparently they represent divergent world views, in some cases almost direct opposites. I hope to show how all of these apparently divergent examples have underlying common factors and represent a loss of belief that is worthy of Bahá’u’lláh’s description quoted above. We’ll start by taking a look at two different conceptions of how to gain knowledge, in the course of which I hope to convince you that one way is better than the other, and then examine the underlying philosophical error behind the less satisfactory way; then we’ll look at how the error has influenced some of the fields listed above.

Two Ways of Understanding

The first way is the well-known Cartesian program: start with indisputable premises and deduce, using correct logical procedures, further conclusions from the premises.

To see what is involved here, let us consider how fallible creatures obtain knowledge. Is it in fact true that we, in daily life, proceed by deduction from unassailable premises, the implication being that anything less than certainty is unacceptable? This is discussed by Prof. Frederick L. Will in his book, *Induction and Justification*. He remarks that “Of course instincts and the rest do fail, but they do not all fail simultaneously and completely, and the ideal of objectivity does not require that we treat them as if they had... A reason for doubting... whether A shot B, is not itself a reason for doubting the existence of firearms, explosives, or projectiles. It is in terms of a settled background of practice, belief, opinion, and presumption about such things that an investigation can be launched and conducted in such a way that partisans of different judgments on the matter can agree that the matter at issue was dealt with by a procedure that did not itself in any way favour or prejudice the rightness of the claims or counterclaims that were involved.”

What I believe is the issue here is this: that as fallible creatures in a universe in which nothing can be known in itself as an absolute certainty, we proceed by creating pictures of reality. The ‘homo erectus’ walking across the African plain had a picture of the herds of animals, the lions stalking them, the stripped bones of the animals after the various carnivores had finished with the kill, and, within the large bones, the nutritious marrow; so he acted in accordance with his understanding of reality and waited for the carnivores to leave the scene, then with a large rock brought there for the purpose, smashed the bones and obtained food. The process was not infallible: perhaps he believed that an appeal to a god or goddess would lead the herd in a certain direction, whereas the truth might be that his intuitions based on

observation led him to foresee the future movement of the herd.

Similarly, modern humans make pictures, both everyday and scientific. Thus the Newtonian worldview of physics made some things seem more likely than others. I believe Lord Kelvin once said that understanding something in physics was the same as knowing the mechanism by which it happened. Since the advent of quantum mechanics, however, such an understanding of explanation in physics has become untenable. We are led to see the point behind Kuhn's idea of paradigms; that one world view can be replaced by another when two things happen: the preponderance of evidence makes the old view untenable, and a new view exists to take its place. (But more about Kuhn later.)

Now let me return to the question of fundamentalism and deconstructionism. It seems to me that both these ideas are related to the flawed Cartesian program for obtaining knowledge - flawed because we can't have the certainty needed for the program to succeed.

The deconstructionist says "Because I can't be certain, because everything is embedded in some paradigm related to my society, therefore I cannot know anything; therefore there is no impartial truth, nothing is beyond the text, everything is political, everything is a power relation." And so on. Deconstructionism accepts that the Cartesian program fails, but incorrectly assumes that this program is the only one on offer.

Fundamentalism, on the other hand, is the persistent use of the failed paradigm. Whether because no new paradigm is discernable, or because the new paradigm is unacceptable, the fundamentalist continues the Cartesian program: a religious text is deemed to be the source of unimpeachable truth and the words of that text are examined minutely and conclusions deduced, without checking those conclusions against any wider view of the world or any considerations of rationality or ethics.

But Bahá'u'lláh teaches that truth is to be obtained also from sources other than scriptures. In the Four Valleys He says: "Hereafter We will show them our signs in the regions of the earth, and in themselves, until it become manifest unto them that it is the truth..." In this one passage He clearly alludes to both science and mysticism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also teaches that religion must be in conformity with science: "...religion must be in harmony with science and reason. If it does not conform to science and reconcile with reason it is superstition." (*Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 247)

The Cartesian program at the root of both the harmful humanist philosophies of today and also religious fundamentalism is clearly unable to reconcile the above quotations with Bahá'u'lláh's strong emphasis on the eternal verities He has revealed to mankind in this dispensation.

We might call the alternative to Cartesianism the "method of faith". Clearly faith is not about believing something for which there is no evidence; that is fundamentalism, not faith. A person of true faith accepts and trusts the method

that God has given us for learning truth in an uncertain universe: to compare what we see with our complete understanding of the world and ourselves, and trust that by following rational methods informed by our fullest sources of information, we can proceed successfully. God has not created a malicious universe. The fullest sources of information include, as well as practical facts about the universe, a knowledge of our own natures as sentient, feeling beings with the capacity for love, friendship, empathy, and so on - as well as our capacity for hate, vindictiveness, and other vices.

From time to time in history someone has produced a new paradigm, a new way of understanding our spiritual condition. Thus Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, an incisive understanding of our psychological and spiritual reality, along with techniques for bringing our spirits into accord with the laws of the universe. Similarly, Jesus taught the doctrine of love, and told us how we can find the Kingdom of Heaven through action: the practice of love and goodness in our real, present lives. Likewise Bahá'u'lláh taught that the love of Jesus must be extended to the whole world, not just to one's neighbour or family or nation.

Any of us can embrace these great truths as taught by these great souls and put them into practice in our own lives, but we should do so within the same framework that God in His goodness gave us as far back as our wanderings on the African plains: we must have faith that God has not made an incomprehensible, traitorous universe in which nothing can be known; we must continually bring our understanding into accord with a rational understanding of the world, and we must continually test our ideas against the great teachings of love from Buddha, Jesus, and Bahá'u'lláh.

Now let me address where I believe fundamentalism makes its error. Consider someone who has a large map printed on paper, and who must make some measurements from the map as accurately as possible. Suppose there is a drafting table available, with a sliding ruler such that positions and angles may be read off. Now we all know, from Euclidean geometry, that to unambiguously position a shape in two dimensions, all we need do is define two points. So let us hold the map on the table by putting a small piece of sticking tape on one corner. As the tape covers more than two points, by Euclidean geometry it has fixed the map precisely, and so we can proceed to take our highly accurate measurements. Or can we? The tape isn't perfectly inelastic, nor is the glue on the tape infinitely strong and rigid, neither is the paper perfectly flat and undeformable. In short, the rest of the paper, unfixed, will slip and slop this way and that and the measurements will be defective.

By contrast, the wise person in this situation will spread the map as carefully as possible and fix it at least at all four corners before taking measurements. In other words, irrespective of the 'proof' that follows from Euclidean principles about one piece of tape in one corner, the wise person secures the entire picture against errors. Even by doing so there is no guarantee

of perfection, but we do know that there are limits to how far the map can slip as we take our readings.

It is a philosophical version of this mistake that I think best describes the fundamentalist program. Whether the fundamentalist decrees Jesus or Muhammad or Bahá'u'lláh to be the infallible authority, they fix their teachings firmly to their map of reality in one corner and expect the whole map to give infallible readings, regardless of the fact that we know we are fallible beings in a universe in which there is 'many a slip between cup and lip'. Thus, a fundamentalist fixes his belief in a religious text and decrees the sheer logic of the text to be the total basis of his understanding. Anything whatever that can be deduced from the text is accepted, no matter how unreasonable or how contrary to the obvious spirit of the religion's teachings the deduction may be. It seems to me that there is an arrogance in this process, as the fundamentalist is effectively saying that he can vouch absolutely for the correctness of the original text, translate and interpret it perfectly, and infallibly deduce its consequences.

My point is this: the way we fallible creatures are meant to learn about reality is not by such deduction, but by employing everything we can learn and understand about the world, although with the proviso that occasionally we may have to revise our picture when a deficient understanding is validly replaced with a better one.

The fundamentalist reasoning method is such a deficient paradigm, and the better one, namely bringing all our actions and understandings into accord with the love of God at every moment, has been taught by the great souls whom God has sent to guide the world. 'Abdu'l-Bahá taught us not to follow authority blindly in this fashion. He writes:

"If you find harmful teachings are being set forth by some individual no matter who that individual be, even though he should be my own son, know verily that I am completely severed from him... If... you see anyone whose deeds and conduct are contrary to and not in conformity with the good-pleasure of the Blessed Perfection and against the spirit of the "Hidden Words", let that be your standard and criterion of judgment against him, for know that I am altogether severed from him no matter who he may be. This is the truth." (*Promulgation of Universal Peace pp452-453*)

We are here ordered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to check our actions against the standard of the spirit of the Hidden Words. This is a direct expression of the spirit of true faith which I have contrasted in this article with the deductive authoritarian spirit of fundamentalism.

The challenge for all members of all religions, therefore, is to bring one's practice and understanding into accord with the universal principles of love and free rational enquiry that God has granted to us. When we find fellow believers following fundamentalist principles and overlooking the principles

of love and justice, we should explain better ways of understanding that will permit them to let go of the fear that leads them to take refuge in fundamentalism.

The Philosophical Error

So on the one hand we have a view of gaining knowledge as logical deduction from inviolable first principles, and on the other, the way of faith whereby we adjust our understanding in accordance with the totality of the information available.

Before looking at the logical mistake that I believe underlies all the ideas I listed earlier, I must first stress that the issue I will examine here is not the only common factor; various political, emotional, and ideological commonalities exist also, as well as a common heritage that can be traced historically (with only religious fundamentalism having completely distinct historical origins). But the issue I am considering is clear and provable and throws a great deal of light on many things we think we know about the world.

The error originated, at least in one instance, with the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776). Hume writes: "Even after the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience." We have seen the sun come up every morning since time immemorial, but just maybe, so the argument goes, it won't come up tomorrow (and no amount of theorising tonight can rule out the possibility). It is easy to see from this how Popper can conclude that we can never confirm a scientific theory, only disprove one: no matter what the number of confirming instances for a theory, just maybe a disconfirming instance will pop up next time we do an experiment.

The Australian philosopher David Stove, in "Anything Goes; origins of the cult of scientific irrationalism" minutely dissects the logic of Hume's argument and discovers a flaw in it. Stove gives Hume's conclusion the title "scepticism about the unobserved" - that is there is no reason to believe any contingent proposition about the unobserved (such as that the sun will come up tomorrow). He shows that this depends on two other propositions: (a) empiricism - that any reason to believe a contingent proposition about the unobserved is a proposition about the observed (for example, evidence of how the earth turns on its axis), and (b) inductive scepticism - that no proposition about the observed is a reason to believe a contingent proposition about the unobserved (for example, our observations of the turning of the earth on its axis is no guarantee that it will turn at other times).

Tracing Hume's argument backwards, Stove discovers an unnoticed implicit assumption, and it is a big one: deductivism (in slightly simplified form, that something is a reason to believe another thing only if there is a logical

argument validly deducing the second from the first). The connection with the material in the previous part of this paper will now be immediately apparent. Popper's falsifiability criterion for science is a direct application of Hume. Humanist irrationalism about the merits of science versus, say, voodooism or folk tales depends upon Kuhn's paradigm theory, which implicitly assumed the main results of Popper. An examination of deconstructionist and postmodern writings easily uncovers evidence of scepticism regarding anything that cannot be logically proved (for example, "all facts are theory-laden"). Modern economic theory is a classic example of meticulous logical/ mathematical deduction from axioms - except that the axioms do not correspond with reality. The loss of principles of natural rights in law also derives from the logical impossibility of proving the existence of these rights. Only religious fundamentalism seems to have a different provenance, going back in one case, for example, to Luther's establishment of the principle of biblical infallibility.

But now that the hidden assumption behind Hume is clear, we also see the impossibility of giving any rational credence to his argument. (Indeed, Hume himself rejected inductive scepticism in his old age.) For it is a commonplace that we as human beings cannot live without assuming that good reasons exist apart from pure logical deductions. We wake in the morning and open our eyes; never do we keep them shut out of consideration that there is no logical reason whatever to believe that the sun has come up and we will be able to see the room around us, and we put our feet on the floor, which we assume will still hold our weight; and so on. Of course, in any of these steps we 'might' be wrong. But so what? We are not infallible and we must expect occasional mistakes.

As I was thinking about this, it occurred to me that the deductivist assumption isn't even consistent - and the reason is simple, for human beings cannot make a logical argument without relying on memory to go from one step to the next, and we only have the previous reliability of our memory to guarantee its future reliability. So every logical argument (for a human being in this universe) carries with it an implicit inductive argument!

Bahá'u'lláh's Prophecy

I promised you a prophecy. I believe there is a wonderful, if veiled, denunciation in Bahá'u'lláh's writings of the deconstructionist position. For those who haven't seen this stuff before, I shall give a small sample from Derrida, the father of the movement. This was posted on an email list in response to a request from me for a sample of the best Derrida could produce:

"Differance is a structure and a movement that cannot be conceived on the basis of the opposition presence/absence. Differance is the systematic play of differences, of traces of differences, of the spacing by which

elements relate to one another. This spacing is the production, simultaneously active and passive (the “a” of difference indicates the indecision as regards activity and passivity, that which cannot yet be governed and organized by that opposition) of intervals without which the “full” terms could not signify, could not function.”

Perhaps the best comment one could make about this and similar passages comes from Gilbert and Sullivan:

“If you’re anxious for to shine in the high aesthetic line As a man of culture rare, You must get up all the germs of the transcendental terms And plant them everywhere. You must lie upon the daisies and discourse in novel phrases Of your complicated state of mind, The meaning doesn’t matter if it’s only idle chatter Of a transcendental kind.”

(W.S. Gilbert: Bunthorne’s song from “Patience”, 1881)

My correspondent also gave me the following from a disciple of Derrida’s, Culler:

“The meaning of a word, it is plausible to claim, is what speakers mean by it. A word’s meaning within the system of a language, what we find when we look up a word in the dictionary, is a result of the meaning speakers have given it in past acts of communication. And what is true of a word is true of language in general: the structure of the language, its system of norms and regularities, is a product of events, the result of prior speech acts. However, when we take this argument seriously and begin to look at the events which are said to determine structures, we find that every event is itself already determined and made possible by prior structures. The possibility of meaning something by an utterance is already inscribed in the structure of the language. The structures themselves are always products, but however far back we try to push, even when we try to imagine the “birth” of language and describe an ordinary event that might have produced the first structure, we discover that we must assume prior organization, prior differentiation. As in the case of causality we find only nonoriginary origins. If a cave man is to successfully inaugurate language by making a special grunt signify “food,” we must suppose that the grunt is already distinguished from other grunts and that the world has already been divided into the categories of “food” and “nonfood” that allows food to be signified or the contrast between signifying elements that allows a sequence to function as a signifier.”

The inherent scepticism about knowledge that I have been discussing comes through loud and clear in this passage. The way of faith has no trouble with language: we know that we can speak with others, and we accept some possibility that we might be misunderstood, and we can take care to become

better and better judges of what will be easily understood and what will confuse others, and to use this knowledge to become better communicators. But at no point do we feel the need to trace our words back through prehistory to be sure that some homo heidelbergensis ancestor had a good logical or observational ground for uttering the first word. (And by the way, even a bacterium can distinguish between food and non-food: you'll find very often that the key objections to deconstruction are almost farcically obvious.) If ever there was a example of taking the Cartesian program to excess, this would have to be it.

What would Bahá'u'lláh say about all this? In the Four Valleys, He relates the following:

“The story is told of a mystic knower, who went on a journey with a learned grammarian as his companion. They came to the shore of the Sea of Grandeur. The knower straightway flung himself into the waves, but the grammarian stood lost in his reasonings, which were as words that are written on water. The knower called out to him, Why dost thou not follow? The grammarian answered, O Brother, I dare not advance. I must needs go back again. Then the knower cried, Forget what thou didst read in the books of Sibavayh and Qawlavayh, of Ibn-i-Hajib and Ibn-i-Malik, and cross the water.

“The death of self is needed here, not rhetoric: Be nothing, then, and walk upon the waves.”

The four writers Bahá'u'lláh mentions were the leading Arabic systematisers of the first four centuries of the Islamic era, and it is not hard to imagine that Bahá'u'lláh had in mind some such foggery as the example from Culler above. But God puts His Manifestation's Words to work in surprising ways, and as a denunciation of the Derridaean insecurities (“there is nothing but the text”, “death of the author”, etc.), it simply cannot be excelled. We find here a contradiction of every aspect of the deconstructionist program: the denial that study of grammar and rhetoric will lead to the really important insights; the absolute nature of the “Sea of Grandeur” and of “the knower”; and the spirit of faith in action without regard for rhetorical scepticism. And lastly, what better way to describe the words of one who believes that texts have no inherent meaning and that all there is is an endless play of word upon word as “words that are written on water”?

Where Do We Go from Here?

Anyone with familiarity with academe will be aware that (especially in America) the humanities nowadays operate virtually exclusively on a constellation of “academic left” presumptions including postmodernism and deconstruction. I don't want to go into the intricacies of all the various philosophies on offer, except to make this one point: almost everywhere there is

disregard, and often contempt, for the empirical gathering of evidence in general and for science in particular. The decay of civic society and the increase in every measure of social maladaptation (crime, homelessness, single motherhood, drug addiction, alcoholism, etc.) has tracked the adoption of this constellation of philosophies by society. Now I know that's a controversial statement and we don't have time to debate it here, as making this case involves challenging thirty years of intellectual edifice-building; but let's consider what is going to happen next.

There is one final preliminary before we can peer into our crystal ball at the future, and that is this observation: at the end of the nineteenth century, scientists thought that all that remained to be done in understanding the world was to put "a few more decimal points" on the measurements. Well, we know what happened: the notion of the ether was apparently torpedoed by the Michelson-Morley experiment and observations of the orbits of the moons of Jupiter - but fortuitously Einstein had developed a theory that handled these facts (special relativity); and observations of the atom led to the discovery of quantum mechanics, which, in the popular mind at least, dissolved the idea of a solid realistic universe. The modern twentieth century fascination with all forms of relativism is to a very large measure an outworking of that disappointment. In other words, the disastrous disbelief in "absolute reality" (to quote a phrase of Bahá'u'lláh's) that is poisoning our world originated in large measure in the failure of nineteenth century physics.

This point is important: in the popular mind (and that includes humanities academics) absolute truth has been displaced by the two relativity theories (special and general) and the objective world has been disproved by quantum mechanics. I don't have time to explain why, but all of these pop-scientific ideas are fallacious.

Something else happened early this century: observations of distant galaxies showed a consistent red-shift, which was interpreted as similar to a Doppler effect due to the galaxies receding from us. This in turn led to the idea of an expanding universe. A solution to Einstein's equations of general relativity by Friedmann in 1922 required that the universe either expand or contract (in the absence of a cosmological constant), and it seemed that all these ideas fitted together: special and general relativity, with the observation-based theory of the origin of the universe, the big bang.

What if all these theories (SR, GR and the BB) were proven false?

Two-thirds of modern physics would be disproved, along with the current origin myth of our civilisation.

If the present relativist doctrines of the humanities resulted from the relatively minor earthquake in physics at the end of the nineteenth century, one can only speculate on the effects of the collapse of most of modern physics.

In the session I shall distribute a photograph of a galaxy, Arp220, along with its near neighbours. The only problem is, whilst Arp220 has a low redshift,

those neighbours have high redshifts up to $z=0.5$, which is a recession velocity of half the speed of light! If you obtain the book "Seeing Red; redshifts, cosmology and academic science" by Halton Arp, you will find a wealth of evidence that redshifts are not in general due to recession velocity. The Big Bang is living on borrowed time, and when it goes, both general and special relativity will go (at least in their present form) with it.

I can't hope to prove in this talk what a catastrophic effect such a collapse of established certainties will have on western civilisation. I could talk about the exhalations of such irrationalists as the creationists and the deconstructionists, but the largest effects will be much more subtle and won't happen in a day. Suffice it to say that relativism in all forms (epistemological, moral, social) will sweep the field and leave anyone who believes in goodness or truth looking like a fool.

And which scientific theory will survive the catastrophe? Quantum mechanics! The one theory so badly misunderstood in the humanities already and that is widely believed to be non-realist.

In brief, I believe that the outcome of such influences will be a dark age, dominated by privatisation, intellectual obscurantism and soulless application of technology. (In fact we are already on a trajectory towards that outcome, even without these developments.) Like the previous dark age, the human race cannot hope to emerge within a thousand years - and that assumes that big business will not, with the assistance of foolish national governments, destroy the environment and cause an ecological collapse that kills most or all of the human race. See "The Future of Capitalism" by Lester Thurow for comparison of conditions now and at the end of the Roman Empire. All the following characteristics apply to both periods:

- * commenced with a period of uncertainty! - NOT with an external shock
- * technologies did not disappear, but conditions made it impossible to apply them.
- * real per capita incomes fell dramatically
- * the rate of invention was up, production was down
- * social disorganisation and disintegration
- * public systems were privatised
- * private police forces
- * loss of civic pride
- * growing resentment to paying taxes
- * sell-off of public assets, ceasing of public investments
- * drop in literacy
- * falling incomes at the bottom of the social ladder
- * rise in religious fundamentalism
- * no vision of how one made a better life

Baha'is can stop all this. I believe that Baha'is must go back to the teachings of Baha'u'llah Himself and notice some highly salient facts, chief of which is the complete absence of any non-realist teaching in the entire corpus of His writings. Baha'is must teach themselves the importance of science and empirical knowledge and open, tolerant societies, as Baha'u'llah recommended to Queen Victoria. Baha'is must free themselves both from the pernicious effects of both fundamentalism and the relativist doctrines taught

today throughout the humanities disciplines.

If Baha'is do this, then when the world loses its faith, Baha'is will not lose theirs. The Divine Standard will be unfurled and the Nightingale of Paradise will warble its melody.

“O people of Baha! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.”

(Tablets of Baha'u'llah, 72)

Postscript: Kuhn

Kuhn's theory of scientific paradigms is relevant to the material presented here. Simply, (perhaps too simply), it states that science falls into paradigms in which most scientists work and, from time to time, as a result of some kind of crisis, switches to a new, incommensurable paradigm. An example would be the change from Newtonian mechanics to relativity. Interpreted as a description of human psychology (namely that humans tend to follow a dominant idea until the idea becomes untenable and there is another idea available for adoption), the theory makes a lot of sense and explains neatly the reason why scientists are continuing to pursue the big bang theory. However, as a theory of truth or knowledge (that truth itself is not out there to be found and that there is nothing more than whatever the dominant paradigm stipulates and that different paradigms are simply incommensurable) it is in sharp disagreement with Baha'u'llah and, indeed, is incoherent for reasons that doom every relativist theory of knowledge. Briefly, all relativist theories make at least one absolute statement, and Kuhn's is no different. Kuhn's theory itself represents a paradigm shift, but if a paradigm is no better than the paradigm it replaces, and if paradigms do not represent an approach to the truth, then Kuhn's own paradigm cannot be objectively any better than the idea of progress that it replaced. Simply, the mere statement of any relativist theory is self-negating.

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