The Fragility of Goodness: Hexis and Práxis in the Historical Figure of `Abdu'l-Bahá

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This paper seeks to understand how internal goodness of character or soul may be preserved from interference from the world and how character (*hexis*) and activity (*práxis*) may survive the sobering perspective of immense moral failure on the part of a considerable portion of humankind and of its leadership. Such apparent betrayal or dismissal of poetic action as of any practical value is examined through literature and the lessons of `Abdu'l-Bahá' in His travels to the West. The conclusion drawn from these sources will attempt to show that good character engaged in social action is of sufficient serious practical importance so as to be able to withstand the strikes made at the root of goodness itself despite the fact that character and activity are intimately connected and therefore vulnerable.

Prelude

My generation, born in the 50s, is part of this very important centenary celebration. This century is part of us; we belong to this era as the era belongs to us. This is because our own lifetime coincides with half of the 100 years that have transpired since `Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the West and this, my fortuitous and convenient chronological insertion, thankfully, absolves me from pretending to be a scholar as I have accumulated views and prejudices of events as a contemporary rather than as a scholar and my information, understanding or even patent contradiction between personal experience and the facts of

this period may be considered what social anthropologists label as that of a 'participant observer'. I hope to communicate something of what I have learned from watching and listening but these thoughts, in the end, form the opinion of a mortal and the opinion of mortals, as the ancients would advise us, is not to be trusted.[1]

Shoghi Effendi referred to `Abdu'l-Bahá's travels to the West as "missionary journeys"[2] and this "triumphal progress through the chief cities of the United States" [3] brought unprecedented animus and combative urgency to our era and to America. Then, as indeed now, there exists the tension between two divergent conceptions of this nation: does America mean commitment to a national experiment or consecration of a national destiny. `Abdu'l-Bahá reinforced the latter. Even Crèvecoeur, the French correspondent, still astonishes by the contemporaneity of his eighteenth century answer to his own famous question: "What then is the American, this new man?"[4] Every epoch is "immediate to God" but the Founding Fathers were apprehensive as the history of antiquity had taught them that republics perish, that glory is transient, and just as man is vulnerable through his propensity to sin, republics are vulnerable through their propensity to corruption.

This warfare between realism and messianism[5], between experiment and destiny, continues to this day. As Bahá'ís in America, we form a new integration of the social body and a special pivot responsible for the movements of the historical evolution of this nation. Special because as Bahá'ís, we have a naturally acute sense of direction and this can be seen not just in getting the facts right, but in each of us having a clear judgment as to the ultimate nature of our long-term vision over the past and over the future.

This is not a responsibility to take lightly and is a telling engagement of the complexities we must deal with. But it is not just Bahá'ís who are history conscious. Our generation, and the one before, is history

conscious. "This age more than other age is that of a greater historical consciousness" to quote a notable British historian writing in the early 1960s.[6] This is important to mention because when conscious of our own situation, we are also more capable of transcending it and more capable of appreciating the essential nature of the differences between our own society and that we wish to usher in. "Man's capacity to rise above his social and historical situation seems to be conditioned by the sensitivity with which he recognizes the extent of his involvement in it."[7] The timing of the arrival of `Abdu'l-Bahá on American soil amid such a pregnant mood of soul searching was nothing short of providential and made his missionary journeys particularly revered as they mirrored the very components of creed and reality which represented the powerful motive in the American quest. But as auspicious as was the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá in America pre-wartime the circumstances surrounding His visit were anything but propitious. This was a period of history when the world was irreverently described by a contemporary of `Abdu'l-Bahá as "…a practical joke of God"[8], such the extent of disbelief and generalized meaninglessness of the age. Change was no longer viewed as achievement, as opportunity or progress but as an object of fear, displacement, inciting an acute sense of angst. How was one to stab away at the gelatinous mass of popular indifference, sentimentality, and complacency? To cut through the vast pervasive resistance of the psyche and of society to forsake manmade shibboleths in favor of the millennial expectation, "a new heaven and a new earth"? Hope was thin and the sleep of reason was producing monsters.[9] Such was the climate that greeted the Master as he sailed "on the steamship Cedric, on March 25, 1912, sailing via Naples direct to New York where He arrived on April 11"[10] a crusade made more difficult by the fact, as mentioned earlier, that American soil was fertile but with no corresponding drops of concession from the gathering clouds above. And yet, this historical figure, this 'Oriental' in "an outburst of activity", "brought the universal divine principles to bear on the exigencies of the age." This Hegelian notion that "The great man of his time is

he who expresses the will and the meaning of that time, and then brings it to completion; he acts according to the inner spirit and essence of his time, which he realizes."[11]—is one of the many factors which makes `Abdu'l-Bahá the historical figure He is, aside from the overarching, eugenic and superhuman factor of His lasting capacity to inspire and mobilize the masses. `Abdu'l-Bahá's profound love for humanity and his quintessential goodness made His leadership "a public transaction with history", exemplifying, in consummate fashion, the proposition that good individuals can and do make a positive difference to history which brings us more closely to the subject-matter of today.

Human Nature

Nothing is more fiercely contested than the topic of human nature, with man resting, on the one hand, on *"the apex of creation"* and yet, on the other, precariously lodged lower than angels—an innate, God-given bi-formity the characterization of which manifests itself as much for the good as for the bad, depending on which horse is commanding our chariot, the horse of spirit or appetite.[12] Goodness is fragile and, therefore, precious precisely because of the kind of creatures we human beings are and the fact does remain that we may be incapable of sympathy, unmoved by pain, uncaring of freedom, and—no less significant—unable to reason, argue, disagree or concur. This does not really help the cause of goodness in any way nor build a very strong case for the altruistic, selfless man. It also indicates our vulnerability in a life that is "nasty, brutish and short",[13] to cite the memorable observation of Hobbes in *The Leviathan*. Yet preferable it is to face this disturbing adversity ('The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart' Albert Camus from his short essay on The Myth of Sisyphus) [14] and contribute powerfully to understanding and responding to the challenge than escape to a life of isolation and eliminate the quality of human life

altogether. And yet skepticism about humanity is chillingly rooted and gives us enough reason to worry especially on occasions such as `Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the West at the turn of the 20th century where many appropriate moments such as civil unrest, poverty, genocide[15] and other atrocities gave us cause to engage in critical, not to say pessimistic, examinations of what was happening and what needed to be done.[16] Is it through the pursuit of reason, *ráhi `aql*, the way to preserve goodness? Can critical scrutiny and the determining influence of intellect rather than goodwill prevent catastrophes? Is a smarter person a better person? (Such a question ignores the serious possibility that some people are easily over-convinced by their own reasoning and ignore counter-arguments that may yield opposite conclusions). Or like Hume, take the emotions to be both important and influential and argue that our first perception of right and wrong cannot be the object of reason, but of immediate sense and feeling. Or be conciliatory in asserting that both reason and sentiment concur in almost all moral determinations and conclusions, such as the case of blatant injustice to the Bahá'ís in Iran, where we are drawn by both indignation and argument. Frustration and ire motivate us and yet ultimately we have to rely, for both public sympathy, assessment and effectiveness, on reasoned argument to obtain plausible and sustaining understanding of the underlying cause even though what feeds the injustice in Iran is implausible, voluble and crude. Or is not there the danger that centering discussion of moral rectitude on the dichotomy of thought versus feeling ignores the importance of social processes. We may do the right thing and yet we may not succeed or, conversely, a good result may come about not because we aimed at it, but for some other, perhaps even an accidental, reason and we were deceived into thinking that we were behaving correctly.[17] What, in the end, is the ultimate arbitrator of ethical beliefs? Is there, behind human practices, some higher tribunal to which we have recourse such as, say, shamefulness, learnt punitively by the rod of God's displeasure? But we are told by Bahá'u'lláh, in His last major work, that such a sense of shame, is not a universal human attribute. *"Indeed,*

there existeth in man a faculty which deterreth him from, and guardeth him against, whatever is unworthy and unseemly, and which is known as his sense of shame. This, however, is confined to but a few; all have not possessed, and do not possess, it."[18] Or then is it motivation? That we find meaning not in anything objective, but in something internal to ourselves, that it is our desires that determine whether what we do is worthwhile. Anything is meaningful if we want to do it, independently of whether it is reasonable or not to do so.

While such questions clearly illustrate the complexity and range of discussion regarding human nature and the difficulty in capturing it in precise axiomatic terms yet the need for explicitness, to the extent that can be achieved, even in looser terms, must have dialogic merit. We cannot seek the same answer to two rather different questions: what would be good or rational for a person to do? and what would the person actually do? Are we not asking too much from people who may fail to understand adequately the nature of the uncertainty that may be involved in deciding on what to expect in any specific case based on the evidence available? Are we not asking too much from people with 'weakness of will'[19] or with incorrigible and innate selfishness?

An impressive start to lifting this cloud of bewilderment may well be the remark of Augustine in his book *Of True Religion*: "Refuse to go outside…Return to yourself. Truth dwells within."[20] We shall look, then, deeper within ourselves, pause and think, and ask very quickly: is there a biological case for human selfishness? Humans, together with other apes and primates, are social mammals and among social mammals it is relatively easy to find examples of animal behavior that are anything but selfish.[21] Perhaps the most famous is the way in which dolphins help its injured members to survive. If a dolphin is so badly wounded that it cannot come to the surface of the water to breathe, other dolphins will group themselves around their wounded companion, pushing it upward to the air. Wolves and wild dogs bring meat back to members of the pack who were not in

on the kill. Chimpanzees lead each other to trees that have ripe fruit. When hawks fly overhead, blackbirds and thrushes give warning calls, helping other members of the flock to escape, but perhaps at some risk of attracting the hawk to themselves. And still many other examples. But we humans may also be proud to display even higher altruism than our furry friends, beginning with the family. The readiness of parents to put the interests of their children ahead of their own interests is a striking counter-example to the general thesis that people are selfish. John Stuart Mill described the family 'as a school of.... loving forgetfulness of self'.[22] The duties of benevolence to our kin—brothers, sisters and more distant relatives—is also widely accepted in every society and prominent not to mention caring for others.[23] In brief, human beings often are selfish—altruism it is said, is really self-interest on disguise—but our biology does not force us to be so. Recently, and ever-more increasingly, we come across research that is giving us a different side to the story. These tell us about sympathy, empathy, cooperation, and collaboration, written by scientists, evolutionary psychologists, neuroscientists and others. One such author argues that in pursuing our self-interested goals we often have an incentive to repay kindness with kindness so others will do the same when we are in need. We have an incentive to establish a reputation for niceness so that people would want to work with us. We have an incentive to work in teams because cohesive groups thrive and egocentrism does not. Cooperation is as central to evolution as mutation and selection.[24] In short, we must avoid a miniaturized view of human nature and not allow reasoned ground for behavior, alone, to be our focus. If we are to make properly considered ultimate choices, we must become aware of, and feel for, the ethical ramifications of the way we live. Only then is it possible to make human goodness a more conscious and coherent part of everyday life. Is there a model, a cosmos of human goodness, to which we may turn for absolute moral wisdom which allows our limited human intellect to frame a perfect ideal of rational conduct not foredoomed to inevitable failure or is every agent actuated only by self-interest, that

the contemporary human being is 'for the most part an impure egoist, a mixed utilitarian'? [25]

Images of Perfection

In the figure of `Abdu'l-Bahá we can look to the world outside and follow a living, historical, 'perfect Exemplar', this "…most perfect bounty… sent…down in the form of a human temple."[26] Images of perfection distilled in one man. We can observe and marvel at this *'Orb of the beauty of the great'*. `Abdu'l-Bahá embodied, in both content and style, a unique conception of human excellence. While not free from the vulnerability of human lives to fortune, while not protected from the mutability of circumstance, while never distant from the existence of opposition and conflict in His commitments, while consistently challenged by the complexity, the indeterminacy, the sheer difficulty of actual human deliberation, His was a human story which, while sufficiently distant from our experience, counts as a shared extension of all of humanity's experience. His life was rooted firmly in the divine, and as such God-loved, and thusly, immortal as ever a human being can be. We turn to the wise not in despair, grappling as we are with the widespread loss of religious faith, but to try and be as they were, to follow what they preached, to look to what they saw, and as such, gain insight into our own intuitions about living the life. `Abdu'l-Bahá led His life in a way for us to learn and study the morally salient, that hunting and trapping are inappropriate aims of a human life, that human excellence in its nature is other-related and social and that the true value of our rationality lies in openness, receptivity and wonder. As interpreters of His life, we must respond emotionally. He would like to see that our cognitive activity, as we explore the True Exemplar, centrally involves emotional response. That we discover what we think about Him partly by noticing how we feel about Him. In other words, `Abdu'l-Bahá is the compass which is to guide our personal

investigation into our own emotional geography as a major part of our search for self-knowledge. But His sympathy, generosity, and public spirit[27] did not inhibit `Abdu'l-Bahá from pressing for social improvement through systematic reasoning. His works continue to remain unexhausted, subject to perennial reassessment. His translucent art of writing was purified from non-intellectual appeals and His talks clear and recognizable with a philosophical style at once content-neutral, at once speculative, and mostly practical. He was uniquely able to display opposed conceptions of human reason, ranging from abstract contemplation to a versatile and resourceful type of intelligence that concerns itself with mutable objects in a world of concrete particulars.

`Abdu'l-Bahá is a meticulously crafted working-through of a unique human story, **'abundant,** spacious**,** and **immeasurable'**[28] designed to bring certain themes and questions to our attention. His story advances our conversation so we may complete those life projects necessary to complete His. He did not teach us to seek the solitary good life but the good life with friends, loved ones, and community. He did not teach us to consider the intellect as pure sunlight, but as flowing water, given and received. He did not teach us leadership as statecraft but as service; it is the servant leader, with his humility, that shows the way, sets the patterns and holds society together and when these patterns disappear so too does society, slowly. Progress stands or falls on the quality of servant leadership.[29] Without servant leadership movement in history is short-lived. Humility, the willingness to lead and encourage from behind, was what generated such strong emotions of respect and esteem for `Abdu'l-Bahá and which form part of Aristotlean *philia*, loving the whole of another person for that person's own sake. `Abdu'l-Bahá's humility and self-effacement generates a strong desire to be more like him. This principle works powerfully in society, where shared public models of excellence play an important motivating role, and *philia* has greater motivational power through emulation that cannot be replaced by

a more general social modeling. `Abdu'l-Bahá's example excels all other models of goodness precisely because of the strength of emulation and aspiration that is generated by the presence of this uniquely loved person who never failed to endorse the value of the virtue humility. *"…under no circumstances, whatsoever,'* He says *'should we assume any attitude except that of gentleness and humility."*[30]

We are giving this perception of `Abdu'l-Bahá, both cognitive and affective, to encourage a reflective look at this model of goodness and to enhance understanding of our own character and aspirations, improving self-criticism and sharpening judgment. We are not here endorsing Carlyle's 'Great Man Theory'[31] nor the cult of personality—a malady of modern times—but strongly believing, through the evidence of personal accounts, that `Abdu'l-Bahá, while never a political figure in the usual sense of the word, nor just an outstanding social and intellectual leader, was the perfect representative of a creator of social forces which change the shape of the world and the thoughts of men. This is the meaning of the being called genius, where both the intellectual and the generative component co-exist[32]. The notion of genius is best begun with St. Augustine's statement: "Quid est genius? [What is genius?] "Deus qui praepositus est ac vim habet omnium rerum gignendarum..."[God hath purposed it to be He who regenerates all things][33] This reminds us of Bahá'u'lláh's own words on the regenerating power of His Son: *"Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the most great Favour unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you; and through Him every mouldering bone is quickened. Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My Beauty, hath repudiated My Proof, and transgressed against Me. He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favoured servants . . . We have sent Him down in the form of a human temple. Blest and sanctified be God Who createth whatsoever He willeth through His inviolable His infallible decree. They who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch,*

are lost in the wilderness of error are consumed by the heat of worldly desires, and are of those who will assuredly perish."[34]

The Ultimate Criterion of Goodness

There is this common fault of minds for which the vision of life becomes an obsession to group things either into a larger mystery or into a larger library where everything is diligently, but separately, catalogued and labeled rather than brought into a unified whole. The historical figure of `Abdu'l-Bahá avoids either extreme because He is truth in the appearance—His perfection dismisses the objectionable dilemma of us having to adopt a standpoint of perfection which purports to survey all lives neutrally and coolly from a viewpoint outside our own particular life which will immediately stand accused of failure of reference, for in removing ourselves from all worldy experience we are also removing ourselves from the bases of discourse about the world. With `Abdu'l-Bahá we do not need to take up a stand outside of the conditions of our normal human life but base our judgment on His long and broad and deep experience of practical and spiritual wisdom. In this sense, our ultimate criterion of goodness cannot be theoretical but practical. But is it practical? This is a legitimate question if the life of `Abdu'l-Bahá is not attainable with our capabilities. The life of a divine being might be ever so admirable but the study of his life, insofar as it lies beyond our capabilities, is not pertinent to the practical claims of ethics. Our humble response is this: make goodness, at the very minimum, to be an acceptable life that we can live. Use the historical figure of `Abdu'l-Bahá both as a predictive device (trying to guess what He would likely do in a given situation) and as a criterion of goodness (assessing what norms must be followed for our choice to be seen as good). In brief, deliberately maximize behavior, that which you are trying to promote in terms of human excellence, and actually do it. As Aristotle would say: "Excellence is a state of character *(hexis)* concerned with choice…determined by a person of practical

wisdom."[35] In his view, the person of practical wisdom is a person of good character. There is a statement of `Abdu'l-Bahá akin to this. "*... the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems.*"[36]

But as mentioned earlier, rational choice of what to do is not a predictor of what is actually chosen. The faculty of will has to be considered. Free will makes moral responsibility possible and, consequently, makes it as important as the faculty of discrimination or perception, the most valuable manifestation of our practical rationality. We may be intellectually ready to follow `Abdu'l-Bahá but our will is not willing. Not just the going but the arriving also requires nothing other than the willingness to go. Our will cannot be split in two. What is necessary, paraphrasing Augustine, is willing strongly and wholly, not the turning and twisting one way and another of a will half-wounded, struggling with one part—the beast—rising up while the other part—the angel—falls down. The beast in this case being the rational appetite (*affectio commodi*) to will for one's own advantage and the angel in us, our inclination for justice (*affectio justitiae*). The first explains our inclination toward what is good for ourselves, that which most contributes to our own happiness; the second is to do good regardless of whether it has any connection to ourselves, the inclination for justice which resists pure self-interest. It is the latter that must be developed as it grounds our crucial capacity to love God and for His own sake rather for our own reward.

How is our will trained? Our will is shaped by habitual decisions. Acquiring the right sort of habit from an early age is very important, indeed all-important. All the human virtues, in the final analysis, are dispositions of the will so human goodness requires that the will be infused with virtue. A will that has been badly habituated from a

young age can find itself in the iron grip of necessity making it very difficult for us to transform on our own. The importance of habit may be summarized by Aristotle's expression of the point: "the Law has no power towards obedience but that of habit".[37] People have a natural capacity for good character, and this capacity is developed through practice. A capacity does not come first (*i.e.*, it does not precede an action)—it is developed through practice. Habits are developed through acting; a person's character is the structure of habits and is formed by what that person does. Once brought up in good habits, ethical values are in us: they form the internal structure of our nature, making us psychologically stable against any events that the world can devise. Thusly, human virtue becomes incorruptible. Taking action inconsistent with core values is irresponsible and undisciplined.

In the Bahá'í teachings, however, there is an added dimension to habit formation and that is the power of divine assistance and grace. "The labor is beyond me', Augustine cried, 'until you open the way."[38] This role of grace in perfecting virtue is central to Bahá'í teachings hence the importance of prayer and fasting, in particular, and our spiritualization in general. `Abdu'l-Bahá says *"that prayer is indispensable and obligatory, and man under no pretext whatever is excused therefrom unless he be mentally unsound or an insurmountable obstacle prevent him."*[39] As to observing the fast Bahá'u'lláh tells us that it purifies our souls and rids us of all attachment to anyone but God. This is supremely important if we wish to acquire divine grace. Consequently, we, as Bahá'ís, do not believe in failure of will but in a flawed disposition of will which makes it impossible for us to be efficacious as moral human beings. To live in a state of grace we need spiritual receptivity and volition. We have to be as talented in our spiritual architecture as engineers are clever in their design. The colossal gossamer tracery of iron called the Eiffel Tower, at the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Paris, the world's tallest structure at 1,050 feet, weighs at more than 10,000 tons and yet it exerts a pressure of only 57 pounds per square

inch upon the ground![40] A titanic grace amidst sinuating, intricate, testing and opposing metallic knots and bolts. Similarly the principles of magnetism, constructive interaction and testing are central to our process of spiritualization.[41] Action (práxis) carried out in a spirit of devotion and consecration attracts a great spiritual force just as in the mundane world certain arrangements of atoms attract the force of magnetism. "Today, as never before, the magnet which attracts blessings from on high is teaching the Faith of God."[42] In another place, the Guardian says, *"consecration to the glorious task of spreading the Faith and living the Bahá'í life ... creates the magnet for the Holy Spirit."*[43] Constructive interaction, the second principle, is persisting with the efforts despite the tidal wave of lethargy and apathy. One has only to begin. 'Abdu'l-Bahá reportedly said *"Make a start, make a beginning. You will attract spiritual powers. This will reinforce your endeavors. You will do even more, attract even greater spiritual powers..."*[44] By making an effort we attract even more power, which enables us to bear more weight and responsibility and so it builds up from there, to fight irrespective of the consequences:

"And do not think of the fruit of action.
Fare forward.
... *Not fare well,*
But fare forward, voyagers.

T.S. Eliot 'Four Quartets'—The Dry Salvages Part III.

The third principle is that of testing and this is inevitable. "We are tested to see if we really have the fortitude, the strength, the determination to persist in the face of adversity, in the face of distraction, in the face of ridicule, in the face of the desire to relax, to avoid the hardship and the effort that is involved."[45] To emerge from all this whole, good and strong willed requires the mind of an architect, the creativity of the engineer and the strength and perseverance of the construction worker.

Closing Remarks

The Bahá'í Faith spans just two lifetimes; it is too green a plant. It has yet to be nurtured, to grow, to mature, to become a "model for study". Can its destiny of ever flourishing to be the spiritual commonwealth of the globe be challenged at any time? Religion has bestowed human safety and human beneficence but it also has shocked for its repellant violence, crudity, dangerous lies and spectacle of decline. Religious decline is largely self-inflicted and the answer to the question of whether the Bahá'í Faith shall emerge as the global religion lies in us. Why else would the Báb mention in the Bayán "*…that every religion of the past was fit to become universal. The only reason why they failed to attain that mark was the incompetence of their followers.*"[46] Bad soil, receiving opportunities from God, may yield a good crop. Good soil, however, if it fails to get what it needs, will give a bad crop. We must tend to our garden and preserve internal goodness by pulling out the fleshly weeds. Religion depends on the nourishment of human goodness to thrive and on the incorruptibility of a noble character. And the greatest part of a noble character is guilelessness, openness, simplicity and with the departure of openness comes a loss of goodness. If I question everything and look for betrayal instead of consolation behind every expression of love, I am, quite simply, no longer a noble person, perhaps no longer a person at all. We need religion, its *'laws and immutable norms born in the airy heavens'* to effect a righting of the balance when a human requirement is violated from the interference of the world. But religion also needs us; it rests on the stability of good actions in times of adversity, strong enough to withstand the blast of chance events, impurity and betrayal, and we must defend it against the vulnerability to rottenness when trust or the covenant is violated, as vulnerable as a child's trusting simplicity. All of human life and its institutions stand in need of a proper rhythm and harmonious adjustment; the adjustment is not natural (it requires the intervention of habit, discipline and external assistance to reach its natural ends) but the need for it is. Moral training

promotes healthy and natural growth—it is the straightening of the tree with moral excellence the embodiment of its straightness. Be it action, rule or disposition, moral excellence remains the culmination of a conscious and comprehensive spiritual outcome where eye, mind and heart are not at 'mortal war' but conquering.[47] However good we make ourselves true goodness remains a free gift of God.

NOTES

1 "You will...also learn the opinion of mortals, in which there is no true confidence." Parmenides, quoted in Martha Nussbaum's *"The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy"*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, revised edition 2001, page 241

2 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979 second printing, p 282

3 Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá`u`lláh*, US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991 first pocket-size edition, page 85

4 Quoted in the Foreword of "*The Cycles of American History*", Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., page xii

5 The Calvinists in New England self-proclaimed their journey as the elect to salvation beyond history: "Without doubt, the Lord Jesus hath a peculiar respect unto this place, and for this people." Quoted in "*The Cycles of American History*", Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., page 13

6 Edward H. Carr, "*What is History*", Random House, 1961, Page 168

7 *Ibid*, page 54

8 Franz Kafka (1883–1924) see http://www.thefreedictionary.com/world

9 Even modern and contemporary art was producing ever eccentric styles. To illustrate the hypocrisy and double standards of society, Pablo Picasso painted the famous *The Red Armchair*, in 1931, where a face appears with its profile and front together for the first time. The oil and enamel painting is currently on display at the Institute of Arts of Chicago.

10 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979 second printing, p 281

11 From G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Law* in Jacob Loewenberg (ed.), *Hegel: Selections* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 461.

12 We are, of course, referring to Socrates' argument that a good person is one who has the parts of the soul in the proper relationship to each other. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato puts forward the same view by picturing reason as a charioteer, commanding the two horses of spirit and appetite. Socrates and Plato held that nobody does wrong willingly; people do wrong only if their reason is unable to control their spirit (emotions like anger or pride) or their appetite (for example greed or lust). The limitation of the rational actor was fiercely advocated by Aristotle as we shall see later.

13 Thomas Hobbes, The Leviathan, http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-contents.html, Chapter XIII

14 http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/00/pwillen1/lit/msysip.htm

15 In the time of `Abdu'l-Bahá's travels to the West, the only genocide in the modern sense of the word, (the term first appeared in 1941), would

be the colonial administration of King Leopold II of Belgium in his Congo Free State in the years 1895–1915 where the Congo population was decimated in the millions for slave labor. The first genocide of the 20th century began a few years after `Abdu'l-Bahá's travels to the West , in 1915, when there began the systematic persecution of Armenians in Turkey.

16 Although the lengths with which such pessimism perdures may be more wearing than worrying. W.B. Yeats wrote on the margin of his copy of Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*, "But why does Nietzsche think the night has no stars, nothing but bats and owls and the insane moon?" quoted in Amartya Sem's brilliant book *The Idea of Justice*, Harvard University Press, 2009, page 36. Yeats' poem *The Second Coming* is particularly auspicious written as it was soon after `Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to the West, in 1919, and used as an allegory to describe the atmosphere in post-war Europe. "Surely some revelation is at hand/ Surely the Second Coming is at hand/ The Second Coming..."

17 We may wish to refer to the existence of the 'stochastic' arts, e.g. medicine, navigation, where the outcomes of following known and perfected scientific techniques do not necessarily produce the desired outcome.

18 Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, page27.

19 The ancient Greeks called it *akrasia*, where ordinary deliberative rationality breaks down. This was Aristotle's chief criticism with the Socrates and Plato doctrine which said that to know what is good is already to seek to bring it about. For example, we eat a bagel before running knowing full well that it will give us a cramp. We are swayed by the appetitive desire the bagel arouses. In this role of the passions, knowing what is right is not sufficient for doing what is right.

20 Quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, Ed. A.S. McGrade, Cambridge University Press, 2003, page 208.

21 For a complete discussion on this subject, see Peter Singer, *How Are We To Live: Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest*, Prometheus Books, 1995, Chapter 5.

22 *Ibid*, page 107.

23 There is this extraordinary telling account of an Italian chemist, Primo Levi, sent to Auschwitz because he was Jewish and survived to write *If This is a Man*. As a slave on rations that were not sufficient to sustain life, he was saved from death by Lorenzo, a non-Jewish Italian who was working for the Germans as a civilian on an industrial project for which the labour of the prisoners was being used. Here is an extract: "In concrete terms it amounts to little: an Italian civilian worker brought me a piece of bread and the remainder of his ration every day for six months; he gave me a vest of his, full of patches; he wrote a postcard

on my behalf and brought me the reply. For all this he neither asked not accepted any reward , because he was good and simple and did not think that one did good for a reward...I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today; and not so much for his material AID, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage, extraneous to hatred and terror; something difficult to define, a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth surviving." Quoted in Peter Singer, *How Are We To Live: Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest*, Prometheus Books, 1995, Page 159.

24 Martin Novack, author of *SuperCooperators*, published in the Tuesday, May 17th, 2011 edition of the New York Times newspaper, page A25. The article, written by David Brooks, cites other works of a similar vein, recently being published.

25 The economist Francis Edgeworth, quoted in Amartya Sem, *The Idea of Justice*, Harvard University Press, 2009, page 184.

26 Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979 second printing, p 242.

27 It is interesting that Adam Smith, the father of modern economics, states these very reasons for going against the dictates of self-love. See his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Clarendon Press, 1976, Page 191.

28 Hasan Balyuzi, *`Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, Paperback, Oxford, UK, George Ronald, 2001, page 1.

29 The phrase "*Servant Leadership*" was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in *The Servant as Leader*, an essay that he first published in 1970. In that essay, he said:"The servant-leader *is* servant first… It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions…The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature." "The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?" Refer to the site www.greenleaf.org for articles and books on this very special subject of leadership.

30 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 128*. A world-wide IBM Survey in 2010 asked over 3,000 undergraduate and graduate students their view of future leaders and their qualities. Humility as a virtue of the CEO came last. See *"Capitalising on Complexity—Insights from the Global CEO Study"*, IBM Institute for Business Value, 2010.

31 Carlyle comments in his book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* that "The history of the world is but the biography of great men," reflecting his belief that heroes shape history through both their personal attributes and divine inspiration. This, however, must be viewed in the context that the natural social process of civilization brings forth new ideas in specific stages of history which cannot be explained simply in terms of the revolt of one or the other individual. The actions of heroes were not of individuals acting alone in a vacuum: they acted in the context and under the stimulus of a social past. The Great Man theory also reduces the quality of explaining how and why change actually occurs. The process of change is better described as a "clash of wills out of which there emerges something that no man probably ever willed". Carlyle slightly contradicts himself with this passage taken from his masterful *The French Revolution* published in 1837: *"Hunger and nakedness, and nightmare oppression lying heavy on twenty-five million hearts; this, not the wounded vanities or contradicted philosophies of philosophical Advocates, rich Shopkeepers, rural Noblesse, was the prime mover in the French Revolution."* Book 3 III Chapter 3.3.1 page 426.

32 The original Greek of the term genius does indeed mean the 'to be born' or 'to come into being'. See Henry Hitchings, *The Secret Life of Words*, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, New York, 2008, Chapter 6, Page 110.

33 Quoted in C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, Oxford University Press, 1968, Appendix I, Page 361.

34 Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi in The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 135

35 Quoted in Martha Nussbaum's *"The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy"*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, revised edition 2001, pages 298–299. By practical wisdom is meant to structure our lives and commitments so that in the ordinary course of events we will be able to stay clear of serious conflict.

36 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1970, pages 23–24.

37 http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.2.two.html, Part VIII

38 Augustine's *Confessions* [XI 22] quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, Ed. A.S. McGrade, Cambridge University Press, 2003, page 222.

39 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1953, page 368.

40 Mentioned in a magnificent photographic publication "*Spectacular Paris*", Universe Publishing, New York, 2008, page 12.

41 These ideas are taken exactly as presented in a talk by Peter Khan entitled *The Nature and Challenge of Tests*, at the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, September 23rd, 1995. The talk may be accessed by visiting the site

42 From a letter 28 March 1953 on behalf Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, cited in *Compiation of Compilations vol II*, p. 223

43 From a letter dated 18 December 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, cited in *High Endeavours: Messages to Alaska* p. 55)

44 From a tallk by Peter Khan entitled *The Nature and Challenge of Tests*, at the Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, September 23rd, 1995

45 *ibid*

46 From a letter dated 20 February 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, cited in the *Compilation on Living the Life*, Paragraph # 1275.

47 A scholar at Stanford University, ironically, the same University which `Abdu'l-Bahá famously visited some 100 years earlier (more precisely, October 8th, 1912), wrote in a recent feature of *The Economist* : *"... though hundreds of new religions appear and disappear every year, it has been centuries since a truly new great religion has appeared on this planet. We are overdue for a new god."* (Paul Saffo *"The World in 2011"*, The Economist, page 112). The opacity of this unfortunate remark, this splendid exaggeration of omission of the Faith Bahá'í, we may dismiss as the rash sally of a careless writer but for the spot from which this statement was made, our disappointment becomes more evident. A blow to scholarship it is but of greater damage is this indictment of `Abdu'l-Bahá: *"It is the light of the intellect which gives us knowledge and understanding, and without this light the physical eyes would be useless* [Paris Talks - `Abdu'l-Bahá]. Nietzsche may be excused for his premature exaltation: *"Almost 2,000 years and no new God"* [The Anti-Christ Page 19] born as he was in the very year in which the Bahá'í Era began and dying only a few years after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, but our Stanford professor writing in late November of last year [2010] had only to use readily accessible sources to discover that the Bahá'í religion was listed in *The Britannica Book of the Year* (1992) as the second most widespread of the world's independent religions in terms of the number of countries represented.