

The Relationship Between Body and Soul in the Epistemology of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Dialogues with Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Whitehead, and Mulla Sadra¹

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Introduction

The relationship between body and soul has remained one of the central questions of philosophy, theology, and religion throughout human history. It lies at the heart of fundamental inquiries concerning the nature of human identity, consciousness, free will, moral responsibility, life after death, and the purpose of human existence. While different philosophical and religious traditions have offered diverse—and often conflicting—interpretations of this relationship, the writings of Abdu'l-Baha present a distinctive perspective that integrates metaphysical, developmental, and spiritual dimensions into a coherent framework. Abdul-Baha's exploration of the soul or spirit can be understood as an examination of its role within the broader context of existence, particularly in its journey toward perfection. This perspective emphasizes the dynamic and transformative nature of the spirit, which emanates from God, is progressively manifested through embodied existence, and contributes to the ongoing process of spiritual evolution and growth. This paper first examines Abdu'l-Baha's understanding of the relationship between body and soul and then places it in dialogue with the philosophical perspectives of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Whitehead, and Mulla Sadra through a brief comparative analysis. Understanding this relationship not only provides insight into the nature of the human person but also establishes a conceptual foundation for the Bahá'í understanding of human development, the harmony of science and religion, and the advancement of civilization.

This paper is not intended as an exhaustive historical survey. Rather, it is an exploratory and constructive philosophical essay that reconstructs and develops a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between body and soul in the writings of Abdu'l-Baha. By

¹ This paper presents an expanded section of an article on Baha'i Epistemology from the Perspective of Abdul-Baha. https://www.academia.edu/107925541/Bahai_Epistemology_from_the_Perspective_of_Abdul_Baha

distinguishing the soul's ontological origin, existential embodiment, and progressive manifestation, it seeks to resolve a seeming tension within His writings while presenting a coherent metaphysical model. The paper then places this model in dialogue with both classical substance metaphysics and modern process philosophy, opening new avenues for comparative philosophical inquiry.

The Ontological Independence of the Soul

Abdul-Baha's exploration of the soul or spirit² can be seen as an examination of its role in the broader context of existence, particularly in its journey toward perfection. This perspective underscores the dynamic and transformative nature of the spirit, which is not a product of material evolution but exists as an independent spiritual reality whose latent capacities are progressively manifested through the evolutionary process.

The distinction between the soul's ontological independence and the evolutionary process through which its capacities are manifested is fundamental to the philosophical framework developed in this paper. It shifts the central philosophical question from whether the soul is produced by evolution to how an independently existing spiritual reality becomes progressively disclosed through the evolutionary process. In this way, evolution is understood not as the source of the soul but as the arena in which its inherent capacities are successively actualized.

Accordingly, the soul cannot be reduced to a mere byproduct or epiphenomenon of the natural world. Rather, it exists as an independent spiritual reality whose ontological status is determined by its relation to God rather than by its relation to matter. Consequently, it transcends the physical categories of generation, entry, exit, and dissolution that characterize material existence.

Abdul-Baha states,

² The human spirit, which distinguishes man from the animal, is the rational soul, and these two terms—the human spirit and the rational soul—designate one and the same thing.“ Some Answered Questions, Baha’i Reference Library.

<https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/some-answered-questions/>

The spirits of men proceed from God by emanation, in the same way as the discourse proceeds from the speaker and the writing from the writer; that is, the speaker himself does not become the speech, any more than the writer becomes the writing: The connection is rather one of emanational procession. For the speaker remains in an absolute state of ability and power, as the discourse emanates from him, even as the action emanates from its author. The true Speaker, the divine Essence, ever remains in the same condition and experiences no change or alteration, no transformation or vicissitude. It has neither beginning nor end. The procession of human spirits from God is therefore an emanational procession. When it is said in the Torah that God breathed His spirit into man, this spirit is even as speech that has emanated from the true Speaker and taken effect in the reality of man.³

The distinction between emanation and manifestation provides one of the conceptual keys to this study. Emanation explains the soul's ontological dependence upon God without implying identity with the Divine Essence, whereas manifestation describes the progressive disclosure of the soul's capacities within embodied existence. Confusing these two relationships has often obscured the philosophical coherence of Abdu'l-Baha's account of the soul.

The Manifestation of the Soul Through the Body

Although the spirit possesses an independent and immaterial reality, its powers become manifest through the human body. Abdul-Baha explains that the physical composition and intricate organization of the human body play a role akin to that of a magnet for the spirit. In this view, the spirit is drawn toward the physical vessel of the body, much like sunlight reflected upon a mirror. This magnetic attraction enables the spirit to manifest its latent faculties and potentials, bringing them into active expression within the material world.

Abdul-Baha states:

³ All quotations from 'Abdu'l-Bahá are taken from the online edition of *Some Answered Questions* published in the Bahá'í Reference Library.

That is, when these physical elements are gathered and combined together, according to the natural order and with the utmost perfection, they become a magnet for the spirit, and the spirit will manifest itself therein with all its perfections.

This principle assumes great significance in Bahá'í epistemology because it bestows a unique centrality upon material composition within the hierarchy of existence. While the spirit possesses an immaterial and indivisible essence, its point of manifestation begins within the material realm. Since human beings are born into the earthly world, their spiritual development and ultimate fulfillment depend upon the manner in which they respond to the opportunities and conditions of material existence.

When Abdul-Baha discusses the relationship between God and the soul, he employs the concept of emanation. When he discusses the relationship between the soul and the body, however, he increasingly uses language resembling manifestation. Taken together, these passages suggest a threefold philosophical framework for understanding the relationship among God, the soul, and the body. Rather than treating origin, embodiment, and development as different descriptions of the same phenomenon, this framework distinguishes three fundamentally different philosophical questions. Many of the apparent tensions in interpreting 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings arise from conflating these distinct philosophical questions. Once they are distinguished, the coherence of His account becomes considerably clearer.

Ontological Origin

The first concerns the origin of the soul. On this point, Abdu'l-Baha is unequivocal. The soul proceeds from God through an emanational procession. It is an emanated spiritual reality and not a product of matter. Although it derives its existence from God, it is not a part of the Divine Essence. This distinction establishes the metaphysical identity of the soul prior to any consideration of its embodiment or development. In other words, the soul's mode of existence is determined by its relation to God rather than by its relation to matter.

Existential Embodiment

The second concerns the relationship between the soul and the body. Whereas the relationship between God and the soul is one of emanational procession, the relationship between the soul and the body is more appropriately understood in terms of manifestation. The soul does not divide itself into the body or become transformed into matter. Rather, its powers, qualities, and capacities become progressively manifest through the body.

At first glance, however, certain passages in Abdu'l-Baha's writings appear to present a difficulty. He repeatedly describes the soul as independent of matter and as an immaterial spiritual reality. Yet elsewhere He states that when the elemental composition reaches a certain degree of organization, the human spirit appears or comes into existence through the composition of the elements. These statements seem contradictory only if the origin of the soul and its embodiment are regarded as the same event.

The apparent tension is resolved by distinguishing between the soul's ontological origin and its existential embodiment. The organized body does not create the soul. Rather, when the elemental composition reaches the requisite degree of organization, it provides the conditions under which an individual soul becomes associated with a particular human organism. In other words, embodied human existence presupposes both divine causation and appropriate material organization.

Existential embodiment therefore concerns neither the creation of the soul nor merely its interaction with the body. Rather, it identifies the point at which an independently existing spiritual reality becomes associated with an appropriately organized material organism. This distinction preserves both the ontological independence of the soul and the indispensable role of material organization in human existence.

This understanding differs fundamentally from emergent materialism. The elemental composition does not generate the soul in an efficient-causal sense. Rather, it provides the ontological conditions through which an already existing spiritual reality becomes embodied within the created order.

The body is therefore neither the efficient cause of the soul nor an accidental instrument external to it. Instead, it constitutes the indispensable condition through which the soul becomes embodied and capable of expressing its latent powers within the material world.

Progressive Manifestation

Once associated with the body, the soul progressively unfolds its latent capacities through the brain, the nervous system, experience, education, and moral development. Manifestation should therefore not be understood as the coming into existence of the soul but as the gradual disclosure of what already exists potentially within it. Development concerns not the origin of the soul but the increasing realization of its inherent capacities. Its powers are disclosed gradually rather than instantaneously, reaching ever higher levels of intellectual, moral, and spiritual expression.

The foregoing analysis points to a metaphysical model that differs from both classical Cartesian dualism and contemporary physicalism. Cartesian dualism portrays the relationship as one in which an immaterial soul simply inhabits a material body, almost like a pilot entering a ship. Nor, however, does Abdu'l-Baha adopt the position of emergent materialism, according to which the soul is generated by matter.

Instead, His writings point to a distinct metaphysical model that differentiates three conceptually distinct yet complementary dimensions: the soul's origin through emanation, its embodiment through appropriate material organization, and its progressive manifestation through lived existence. Each answers a different philosophical question, and together they constitute a unified metaphysical account of the human person.

Accordingly, the elemental composition does not generate the soul in an efficient-causal sense. Rather, it provides the ontological conditions under which the divine bestowal of an individual human soul becomes actualized within the created order. This understanding differs fundamentally from the concept of emergence in contemporary physicalism, where higher realities are regarded as products of material complexity.

More broadly, this discussion points to a philosophical principle that extends beyond the relationship between body and soul. Throughout His writings, Abdu'l-Baha consistently avoids

two opposite extremes: *reductionism*, which explains higher realities solely as products of lower ones, and *separationism*, which treats higher realities as existing independently of any meaningful relation to lower levels of existence. Instead, He presents a layered ontology in which higher realities are ontologically grounded in God while becoming progressively manifest through increasingly complex levels of creation. The same conceptual pattern may be expressed more generally as the distinction between ontological grounding and developmental manifestation. Higher realities derive their existence from God, yet become progressively disclosed through increasingly complex levels of creation. Consequently, ontological dependence should not be confused with developmental dependence. A reality may depend ontologically upon God for its existence while depending developmentally upon material conditions for the progressive manifestation of its capacities. This allows continuity throughout nature without reducing higher realities to lower ones and preserves transcendence without severing the relation between spirit and the material world.

Development from Potentiality to Actuality

The manifestation of the soul is developmental rather than instantaneous. Abdu'l-Baha describes the spirit as possessing latent capacities that unfold progressively through the stages of existence.

He states:

Although in infancy the signs of the mind and the spirit are already present in man, they do not appear in a state of perfection, and remain incomplete. But when man attains maturity, the mind and the spirit manifest themselves in the utmost perfection.

Likewise,

At the beginning of his formation in the matrix of the world, man was like an embryo. He then gradually progressed by degrees and grew and developed until he reached the stage of maturity, when the mind and the spirit manifested themselves in the utmost perfection. From the beginning of his formation, the mind and the spirit existed, but they were hidden and appeared only later. In the world of the womb, too, the mind and the spirit exist in the embryo but are concealed and

appear only afterwards. It is even as the seed: The tree exists within it but is hidden and concealed; when the seed grows and develops, the tree appears in its fullness.

Material combinations and organizations progressively reveal their distinct properties, with increasingly complex manifestations emerging, including thought and will. The soul, while transcending material conditions, serves as the wellspring of the relationships that arise within increasingly complex existential combinations. Through hierarchical progression, it gradually unfolds its latent capacities until they reach their fullest realization.

The soul thus undergoes a continuous process of development, progressing from potentiality to actuality. Beginning in intimate association with the material body, it advances through successive stages of intellectual and spiritual realization. This journey transforms the individual from a primarily material orientation toward the acquisition of knowledge, the cultivation of virtues, and ultimately the attainment of closeness to the divine.

The same developmental principle extends throughout nature. The invisible spiritual force that underlies existence manifests itself through material reality with increasing degrees of complexity. The manifestation of spirit is less evident in an atom than in a living cell and reaches its highest expression in the human being. Accordingly, all creation—from inanimate objects to human beings—participates, in varying degrees, in life, soul, and consciousness, even though these manifestations are not equally apparent. In this sense, Abdul-Baha regards nature itself as a rational reality.

Mind, Brain, and Soul

Within this framework, it is important to distinguish among the soul, the mind, and the brain. Intelligence and thinking are closely associated with the brain and nervous system and represent highly sophisticated functions of the human organism. Nevertheless, they cannot be reduced to physics and chemistry alone, because they ultimately depend upon the causal agency of the soul. While thinking and the physiological functions of the brain are distinct, they remain mutually interdependent.

The foregoing distinction also clarifies why injury to the brain may impair cognition without implying that consciousness itself is reducible to neural activity. Damage to the brain affects the manifestation of the soul's cognitive powers rather than the ontological reality of the soul itself. Just as damage to a musical instrument impairs the expression of music without explaining the origin of the music itself, impairment of the brain affects the expression of consciousness without demonstrating that consciousness is produced by neural processes.

An analogy may help clarify this relationship. A computer requires physical hardware before it can execute logical computations. Its hardware is designed according to mathematical and logical principles, yet the hardware itself is not identical with reasoning or understanding. Likewise, the human brain provides the physical conditions necessary for thought, but it should not be equated with the mind or the soul. There remains an essential distinction between the mechanical processes of the brain and the cognitive and spiritual capacities of the human person.

Toward an Integrated Bahá'í Model

The foregoing discussion suggests that the relationship between soul and body should be understood through two complementary dimensions rather than two competing theories.

The first emphasizes the ontological distinction between soul and body. The soul is immaterial, non-physical, and enduring, whereas the body is composed of material elements and is therefore subject to change, decomposition, and death. This understanding closely resembles traditional religious and philosophical conceptions in which the soul acts through the body without being reducible to it.

The second emphasizes the developmental manifestation of the soul through increasingly complex material organization. According to this perspective, the faculties of the soul emerge progressively as existential combinations become more complex, revealing higher levels of consciousness, intelligence, and will.

A careful examination of Abdul-Baha's writings suggests that these two perspectives are not contradictory but complementary. The soul and the body are neither entirely separate nor reducible to one another. Rather, they exist in a dynamic relationship in which the body serves as

the material condition for the manifestation of the soul, while the soul remains an independent spiritual reality that progressively unfolds its latent capacities through embodied existence.

These two perspectives, therefore, form a coherent and integrated framework. They preserve the hierarchical order of creation while affirming the unity and continuity of development throughout existence. Biological life transcends matter and cannot be reduced to it, yet matter remains the indispensable foundation through which life's higher capacities become manifest. This synthesis combines ontological distinction with functional interdependence and developmental actualization, providing the conceptual basis for the comparative philosophical analysis that follows.

A Comparative Analysis⁴

The Bahá'í concept of the relationship between the body and soul, and particularly the epistemological perspective advanced in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, can be better understood through a comparative analysis of several major philosophies. In my view, a better understanding of the Bahá'í perspective requires a review of the following: Cartesian dualism, Plato's model, Aristotelian dualism, Alfred North Whitehead's Process Philosophy, and Mulla Sadra, the Iranian philosopher and theologian, arguably one of the most important and influential Islamic philosophers in history.

Obviously, this is only a basic introductory attempt to establish such a comparative review. Two things are worth mentioning. First, the Bahá'í philosophical tradition is still in its infancy. Second, there are many other philosophical perspectives and theoretical assumptions regarding the body and mind that should also be considered in future reviews and studies.

Cartesian Dualism

Cartesian dualism, as explained by René Descartes, argues that the mind (nonphysical) and body (physical) are two completely separate substances that interact. He claimed that they are united in the human brain via the pineal gland. The Bahá'í view differs from Cartesian dualism in several respects:

Descartes defined the soul/mind primarily as a thinking substance, whereas the Bahá'í perspective defines the spirit as a metaphysical reality, with mind and understanding understood as powers or faculties of the human soul rather than the soul itself. The soul or spirit cannot be limited or reduced to mind, intellect, or rationality. Descartes also defined the body in a

⁴ As an exploratory philosophical study, this article prioritizes broad conceptual synthesis over exhaustive textual analysis. Because foundational concepts such as Cartesian dualism, Platonic Forms, and Aristotelian hylomorphism are standard within introductory philosophy, citations of their basic definitions have been kept to a minimum. The emphasis instead is on broad metaphysical frameworks rather than detailed historical exegesis. This selective style reflects the article's purpose of presenting a preliminary conceptual framework rather than a comprehensive historical or textual study. More specialized research will require fuller engagement with primary sources and the relevant scholarly literature.

mechanical sense, operated by an independent soul. This, too, differs from the Bahá'í view, which regards the body as an instrument of the soul.

According to the Bahá'í teachings, the human soul becomes associated with the developing body, beginning with embryonic and biological life. From that point onward, through consciousness, intellect, moral development, and spiritual growth, the soul progressively manifests its inherently immaterial capacities.

Plato's model

There are strong similarities between Plato's model and Cartesian dualism. Plato's philosophy is often regarded as a precursor to Cartesian dualism. Both views argue that the soul and the physical body are fundamentally different kinds of existence and that the soul can survive independently of the body. Furthermore, both philosophies maintain that the physical senses are not fully reliable and that true knowledge is ultimately attained through reason. It is also important to note that Plato's dualism is fundamentally metaphysical and moral, whereas Descartes' dualism is a form of substance dualism.

While both Plato and René Descartes believed in dualism and argued that the mind and body are distinct entities, they differed in their understanding of the physical body and its relationship to the mind. Plato viewed the body through a moral and spiritual lens, defining it as a corrupting "prison" that actively hinders the immortal soul from acquiring and recollecting higher truths. Descartes, however, influenced by 17th-century physics and mechanics, discarded this metaphysical view and treated the body as a mindless, automatic machine or clockwork apparatus. Furthermore, while Plato used metaphors to show reason mastering physical desires, Descartes sought a physical explanation for their interaction, proposing that the immaterial mind and mechanical body communicate through the brain's pineal gland.

There are similarities between the Bahá'í Faith and Platonic philosophy, as with many religions that were influenced by Plato. For example, Christianity, through Saint Augustine, integrated Plato (via Neoplatonism) into Christian theology. Likewise, in Islam, Platonic philosophy, in the form of Islamic Neoplatonism, emerged and appeared in Sufi mysticism and the philosophy of Al-Farabi.

Both the Bahá'í Faith and Platonic philosophy affirm that the soul is immortal and survives bodily death. Both maintain that the mind should govern bodily desires rather than the reverse. They also view earthly life as preparation for a higher, spiritual existence. Both emphasize the cultivation of virtues over the pursuit of physical pleasure.

The principal difference lies in the role of the body. Plato viewed the body largely as a limitation that hinders the soul's pursuit of truth, whereas the Bahá'í teachings regard it as an indispensable instrument through which the soul develops its spiritual capacities. Likewise, Plato understood the rational mind as the highest aspect of the soul itself, while the Bahá'í writings describe the mind as a faculty or power of the soul, not the soul itself. Finally, Plato taught the pre-existence of the soul, whereas the Bahá'í Faith teaches that the soul begins its association with the body at the commencement of earthly life. Thus, while both affirm the immortality of the soul, Plato emphasizes transcending the body, whereas the Bahá'í teachings emphasize developing through the body.

Aristotelian Hylomorphism

Aristotelian hylomorphism argues that living beings are composites of form (the soul) and matter (the body). Matter constitutes the physical material, and form is the organizing principle that gives matter its identity and function. In Aristotle's view, the soul is the active life-principle of the biological body, meaning that a living being is fundamentally one substance, not two.

The Bahá'í understanding of the relationship between soul and body is closer to Aristotelian and Thomistic thought than to Cartesian dualism, particularly in emphasizing the unity and interdependence of soul and body during earthly life, while differing in placing greater emphasis on the soul's eternal, independent existence and continued spiritual progress after bodily death.

Alfred North Whitehead's Process Philosophy

English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead pioneered the concept of Process Philosophy (Philosophy of Organism). He argued that reality is not made of static things but of dynamic, interconnected events and processes. He rejected René Descartes' philosophy as a major fallacy of modern Western philosophy, calling it the "bifurcation of nature," by which he

referred to the artificial tendency to split reality into the objective material universe and subjective human experience.

Unlike Descartes' claim that mind and matter are independent substances that can exist without each other, Whitehead argued that everything in the universe is deeply relational; nothing exists in isolation. Furthermore, he rejected the Cartesian view of physical matter as completely mechanical, arguing that even the most elementary constituents of reality possess a primitive form of "experience" or internal relatedness.

Whitehead's philosophy shared some similarities with the Aristotelian view. Just as Aristotle argued that body and soul are inseparable, Whitehead contended that every actual occasion possesses both physical and mental aspects, rather than treating mind and body as separate substances. In addition, he supported Aristotle's view that the form of a living thing is its active functioning and purpose, and expanded on that idea by arguing that solid matter is actually a pattern of energy and activity repeating itself through time.

Whitehead moved beyond Aristotle by arguing that process, rather than substance, is the fundamental reality. Whereas Aristotle held that substances undergo change through the actualization of potentiality, Whitehead maintained that becoming itself is primary. An electron, a tree, or a human being is not ultimately a permanent thing but a continuous succession of interrelated events that inherit characteristics from the past and advance creatively into the future.

There are significant similarities between the Bahá'í teachings and Alfred North Whitehead regarding the relationship between the body and the mind/soul. Both reject a radical separation of mind and body. They both view human development as a process. Both see consciousness as developmental. Whitehead speaks of increasingly complex forms of experience, while the Bahá'í writings describe the gradual manifestation of the soul's intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities. Finally, both reject reductionism, and neither reduces human consciousness to mere brain chemistry or physical matter.

There are three major differences. First, Whitehead generally understands mentality as a universal feature of reality that becomes increasingly complex throughout nature. The Bahá'í

teachings do not attribute mind or soul to all matter. The human rational soul is unique and possesses spiritual capacities that distinguish it from the rest of creation.

Second, Whitehead's philosophy does not clearly affirm an immortal individual soul comparable to that of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í teachings explicitly affirm that the human soul survives bodily death and continues to progress eternally.

Third, Whitehead does not sharply distinguish "mind" from "soul." However, the Bahá'í writings make a clearer distinction: the soul is an eternal spiritual reality; the mind is one of the soul's highest faculties or powers; and the brain is the physical organ through which the mind operates in this world.

Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy

Mulla Sadra rejected Cartesian dualism. He began with the Aristotelian perspective, arguing that at the beginning of human life, the soul is the form or organizing principle of the material body. He also believed that the soul does not exist prior to the body. Rather, it emerges with and through the material body, progressively becoming an enduring spiritual being.

Mulla Sadra then moved beyond the Aristotelian framework and introduced the concept of Substantial Motion, arguing that the physical universe is in a constant state of dynamic change. Everything, including the material world and the human soul, is in a state of continuous existential evolution, moving from potentiality to higher states of actuality.

The Bahá'í teachings and Mulla Sadra's philosophy share significant common ground in their rejection of Cartesian dualism and their understanding of reality as dynamic rather than static. Both affirm that existence unfolds through a process of continuous development and that the human soul progresses from lower to higher stages of being. They view the body not as a prison or an obstacle to the soul, but as an essential stage in the soul's development. Both also exhibit strong affinities with the concepts of gradational existence and substantial motion, affirm the immortality of the soul, regard evil as the absence or deficiency of good rather than an independent force, and emphasize moral responsibility grounded in free will. Furthermore, both

understand spiritual growth as a process of existential transformation leading toward greater perfection and closeness to God.

Despite these profound similarities, important differences remain. Mulla Sadra's philosophy is primarily a metaphysical and mystical system centered on the evolution of being, whereas the Bahá'í teachings integrate metaphysics with the doctrine of Progressive Revelation, providing a historical, moral, social, and legal framework for humanity's continuing development. While Mulla Sadra explains how reality evolves through substantial motion, the Bahá'í writings argue that continuous divine revelation is necessary to guide that evolution and to provide renewed ethical and social principles for each stage of civilization. In this sense, from a Bahá'í perspective, Mulla Sadra's ontology can be extended by linking the dynamic evolution of existence with the progressive unfolding of divine guidance, thereby connecting metaphysical development with moral judgment, social justice, and the advancement of human civilization.⁵

Conclusion

The Bahá'í understanding of body and soul has significant points of reference in both ancient and modern, as well as Eastern and Western, philosophical traditions. It attempts to preserve the strengths of several major philosophical perspectives while avoiding many of their limitations.

In one sense, however, the central argument is not merely about the relationship between body and soul. Rather, it concerns the broader philosophical transition from substance metaphysics to developmental metaphysics. One of the most significant developments in the history of philosophy has been the gradual movement from viewing reality primarily in terms of enduring substances to understanding it as a process of continuous development. Classical philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes generally understood reality in terms of enduring substances or fixed essences that undergo change while remaining fundamentally the same. By contrast, later thinkers such as Whitehead and Mulla Sadra increasingly viewed reality as

⁵ This subject is explored in further details in https://www.academia.edu/128165778/Unfolding_Reality_Hegel_Mulla_Sadra_and_the_Progressive_Revelation_of_Truth_A_Brief_Reflection

dynamic, emphasizing process, becoming, and continual transformation. The Bahá'í perspective shares this dynamic outlook, presenting existence as an ongoing process of spiritual and material development in which the human soul progressively unfolds its latent capacities through embodied life and beyond. This represents a broader philosophical contribution than merely explaining what the Bahá'í writings say about the soul.

The essential argument of this paper is also that Bahá'í philosophy scholarship is still in the process of development and maturation. Consequently, the analyses presented here should be regarded as exploratory and provisional, with the recognition that much further philosophical and scholarly work remains to be done.

Another important consideration is that any comparative analysis must recognize that the Bahá'í Faith is primarily a religious and theological perspective. Therefore, comparisons with philosophical schools of thought should be undertaken carefully so as to preserve the distinct methodologies and assumptions of both theology and philosophy.

The comparative analysis suggests that the Bahá'í perspective rejects materialism by affirming the irreducible reality of the soul. It also rejects Cartesian dualism by denying a complete separation between body and soul. Like Aristotle, it recognizes the intimate unity of body and soul during earthly life. Similar to Whitehead and Mulla Sadra, it emphasizes development, process, and becoming. Unlike all of these philosophical traditions, however, it integrates metaphysics with the doctrine of Progressive Revelation, thereby giving spiritual, ethical, historical, and social meaning to human development. In the Bahá'í perspective, therefore, the relationship between body and soul is more than a philosophical discussion; it serves as a foundation for the construction of a new civilization. The Bahá'í understanding of body and soul also benefits from the insights of the modern empirical sciences in exploring the complexities of this relationship. At the same time, this relationship is fundamental to the Bahá'í principle of the harmony of science and religion, which are described in the Bahá'í writings as the two essential systems of knowledge required for the advancement of civilization.

The Bahá'í perspective thus presents a distinctive synthesis in which the soul possesses an independent spiritual reality while progressively manifesting its capacities through embodied

existence. In this light, the Bahá'í understanding of mind and body points toward the reconciliation of science and religion, the rejection of reductionism, a dynamic rather than static ontology, the integration of metaphysics with ethics, and a conception of philosophy that ultimately serves the advancement of civilization.