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EDITORIAL REMARKS

THE SIXTH WAVE

Depending upon their epistemological foundations philosophical systems can be divided into five types: empiricist (Locke), rationalist (Descartes), intuitivist (Bergson), traditionalist (Confucius), and scriptural (Aquinas). Hindu thinkers should be credited with the invention of scriptural kind of philosophy.

The beginning of Hindu religious philosophy could be traced back to the seventh century before Christ – to Kapila (c. 700), a legendary founder of Samkhya school of Hindu thought. Sāmkhya was one of the six traditional schools of Hindu religious philosophy. Tradition considers Kapila to be the originator of the school and attributes to him the authorship of The Sāmkhya-pravacana Sūtra. The essence of the Sāmkhya system consisted in reducing the variety of objects in the universe to two basic elements – spirit and matter – different combinations of which produce the world's colorful multiplicity.

The purpose of Hindu philosophy was to defend the validity and truth of Hindu scriptural texts by means of rational arguments. That was, for example, the task of Jaimini (c. 400 B.C.) – the author of Mīmānsā Sutra, which belonged to Pūrvā-Mīmānsā school of Hinduism. One of the six traditional schools of Hindu philosophy, Pūrvā-Mīmānsā was preoccupied with religious obligations, as they have been outlined in the Vedas and other scriptural texts. Philosophical arguments of the mīmānsikas reflected their pragmatic concerns and focused on the proofs of the validity of scriptures.

In Western philosophical tradition Philo (Judaeus) of Alexandria (b. c. 20) is considered the first scriptural philosopher**.** An Orthodox Jewish thinker, Philo was strongly influenced by the ancient Greek intellectual tradition. These dual loyalties determined the peculiar character of Philo's thought that can be described as "scriptural philosophy." Philo interpreted Hebrew Scriptures allegorically in his effort to synthesize Jewish wisdom and Hellenistic thought. More specifically, he tried to support the revelation of Moses by the philosophical arguments of Plato and the Stoics. Philo taught, for instance, that God first created man in His own mind (Logos) and only then as a person possessing body and soul. The highest human aspiration, according to Philo, consists in overcoming physical limitations and returning to divine origins by means of intellectual contemplation.

In the history of philosophy there were five major waves of scriptural reasoning – Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. In this con-

text Bahá'í philosophy represents the sixth wave, and it finds itself in a fruitful dialogue not only with the traditional forms of religious philosophy but also with modern Western thought which is based solely on reason and empirical observation.

In this issue the reader will find four articles on various aspects of Bahá'í philosophy that reflect both tendencies. For a comparison between traditionalist and Bahá'í philosophies we publish an article by the University of the Arts professor Benjamin Olshin who discusses the parallels between Confucianist and Bahá'í teachings. He writes:

Both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith represent complex and multifaceted systems of philosophy, practice, and belief. My paper focuses on particular aspects of each system that resonate strongly with each other. Confucian ethical principles and those of the Bahá'í Faith are sophisticated attempts to bring rational and — in the case of the Bahá'í Faith — spiritual teachings to bear in organizing human behavior. The ultimate goal of both systems is for human beings to live in a society characterized by harmony, a goal achieved by the unity of a shared ethical practice.

The articles by two contemporary Bahá'í philosophers Jean-Marc Lepain and Julio Savi continue a dialogue between Bahá'í and modern thought. Lepain in his article on the issues of ontology discusses the concept of nature in Bahá'í philosophy. Julio Savi in his article focuses on the questions of epistemology, more specifically, on inspiration or intuition. He writes:

'Abdu'l-Bahá specifies four criteria of human knowledge: sense perception, intellect, tradition or Scripture and inspiration. My paper examines inspiration in its merits and faults. 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests a fifth criterion of knowledge: the inmost heart that opens the way to unveiling and contemplation. This criterion is perfect in the Manifestations of God, that is, the Founders of such revealed religions as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, the Bahá'í Faith. Human beings may gradually acquire the capacity of judging reality through that criterion as they progress on the path of spirituality and this enables them to correct the faults of the other four criteria.

In this issue of the journal we also introduce a new rubric – "Conference Reports" – in which we publish a report by Ian Kluge on the conference proceedings of the Special Interest Group in Philosophy of the Association for Bahá'í Studies (North America) that took place during the annual meeting of the Association in Toronto, Canada, in August 2014.

Mikhail Sergeev

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ONTOLOGY

JEAN-MARC LEPAIN (Vientane, Laos)

THE CONCEPT OF NATURE IN BAHÁ'Í PHILOSOPHY[1]

Jean-Marc Lepain is an economist who, in a parallel life, pursues a second career in philosophy and Persian studies. He has studies Persian and Arabic at the Institute of Oriental Languages of Paris and at Teheran University just before the Islamic Revolution. He also studied general philosophy at Sorbonne and Islamic philosophy under Henri Corbin, the famous French iranologist. He has written several books and papers in French and prepared a new translation in French of *Some Answered Questions*. His major themes are individualism, rationality, philosophy of science, neuroscience and neurophilosophy, and spirituality. He lives in Laos with his wife and two children.

Bahá'í philosophy, also named Divine Philosophy by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is called to fulfill an essential role in the intellectual development of the Bahá'í Faith similar to theology in Christianity and Islamic philosophy in Islam. Within Bahá'í philosophy, philosophy of nature occupies a prominent place, as it combines metaphysics with philosophy of science and provides the foundations on which all other branches of Bahá'í philosophy will develop. After defining what philosophy of nature is in relation to philosophy of science and metaphysics, we will show that definitions and functions of nature that can be identified in the Bahá'í writings cannot be understood without reference to what we call the metaphysical framework of Bahá'í philosophy and its accompanying implicit ontology.

1. Philosophy of Nature within the Framework of Bahá'í Philosophy

We have suggested in some other works that Bahá'í philosophy can be divided into three main branches: (a) the philosophy of the human person (covering topics such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, political science, etc. as well as the principles of our spiritual development); (b) the philosophy of nature (describing both the way in which the cosmos works and its finality and meaning); and (c) the philosophy of divine rev-

1. This paper is made of some extracts of a much longer paper entitled "Bahá'í Philosophy of Nature and its Metaphysical Framework."

elation (expressing how God communicates with humankind and how to interpret the Holy Writings).[2] As a consequence, philosophy of nature should be seen as a fundamental constituent of Bahá'í philosophy.

Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Science

Philosophy of nature plays the same role in Bahá'í philosophy as philosophy of science in the contemporary western philosophic tradition. It is therefore important to understand the differences between the two approaches. Most philosophers of science view their principal activity as the analysis of the method of enquiry used in the various sciences. They assume that science exists as a unified human activity based on a common purpose and an objective method with the aim of providing a comprehensive description of nature. However, they consider the question of why nature operates the way it does as totally irrelevant and unscientific and as having no meaningful answer. This refusal to consider the why-question is what leads to what we call ontological confusion. The why-question can only be answered if we know 'how' things exist. This is what defined modern ontology when applied to philosophy of science or nature. While classical ontology was primarily concerned with the identification of primitive entities in the universe (entities whose existence cannot be explained by other entities), modern ontology considers that all natural objects have ontological dimensions because they have a mode of existence that can be distinct from other objects, as we see in quantum mechanics. This is the reason for which we believe that each field of science must have a distinct ontology, even if these different ontologies ought to be reconciled in a broader metaphysical framework. However, many scientists think that science should only be concerned with a precise description of natural objects and of their properties and eschew the how and why questions. For them, science advances our understanding of nature by formulating theories based on observation and tested through experiment. As a consequence, defining scientific methodology is of paramount importance to philosophers of science as it provides the criteria for distinguishing science from non-science and good science from bad science. Philosophy of science rests on the assumption that science can be unified under one single methodology and that objective criteria capable of defining that methodology exist. The metaphysical assumption that underpins that view is that nature is continuous and homogeneous and that objects that are investigated by the different fields of science are relatively similar. Additionally, most philosophers of science operate within a larger philosophical framework, namely the naturalist framework. Natu-

2. Lepain, *Tractatus: A Logical Introduction to Bahá'í Philosophy*, 2011, p. 6, last revised version (2014) to be soon published at www.scribd.com/JeanMarcLepain/.

ralism says that nothing exists outside of nature, with the consequence that all explanations of nature must be sought within nature itself and its various physical constituents. They consequently see no role for metaphysics in scientific investigation.

By contrast, Bahá'í philosophy of nature, while recognizing philosophy of science as a legitimate and imminently useful activity, considers the fact that science alone cannot tell us everything about reality in general and nature in particular. It makes a sharp distinction between '*reality*' and *'nature'*, seeing the latter only as an aspect of the former. Logical positivism's objective of banning metaphysics from philosophy of science is seen as illusory. During the past two decades, there has been a growing consensus that metaphysical issues could not be ignored. John Dupré writes: "It is now widely understood that science itself cannot progress without powerful assumptions about the world it is trying to investigate that is to say a prior metaphysics."[3] Ian Thompson similarly advocates a return to philosophy of nature and ontology. He writes: "The problem, in modern times, is precisely that our maps are fragmented, confused and often appear in contradiction to each other",[4] while Anjan Chakravartty claims that metaphysics should be regarded as "a precursor to its epistemology."[5] Miguel Espinoza considers physics and metaphysics to be part of the same process of understanding nature and that there cannot be any strict separation between the two.[6]

Metaphysical confusion leads to epistemological confusion. Understanding the reasons for this confusion might help us understand the role that a Bahá'í philosophy of nature could play. Many examples can be found in physics, biology and other sciences. Ian Thompson, for example, identifies six interpretations of quantum mechanics based on different ontologies. First, comes the so-called textbook interpretation based on **wave-particle complementarity ontology** of Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, also called the Copenhagen interpretation. **Particle ontology** believes that quantum objects are corpuscles but with counterintuitive behaviors that must be accepted as facts of nature. The **wave ontology** of Schrödinger reverses the previous interpretation and considers that quantum objects are instead waves, with behaviours that make them appear like particles under certain circumstances. The **process ontology** of

3. Duprès, John, *The Disorder of Things; Metaphysical Foundation of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), p. 1.

4.. Thompson, Ian J., *Philosophy of Nature and Quantum Reality* (Pleasanton, CA: Eagle Pearl Press, 2010), p. 3.

5. Chakravarty, Anjan, *Metaphysics for Scientific Realism: Knowing the Unobservable* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), p. 26.

6. Espinoza, Miguel, *Philosophie de la nature* (Paris: Ellipses, 2000), p. 7.

Whitehead and Russell declares that there is no constituting substance in nature and that what appear to us as waves or particles are in reality processes. The **ontology of propensity** builds potentialities and/or dispositions into the very nature of substance itself to explain quantum physics paradoxes. Finally, Born's **statistical interpretation** eliminates all ontology of particulars and says that quantum theory only describes general phenomena and cannot apply to individual systems.[7] With new theories such as the different forms of quantum gravity there are accordingly more than six different ontologies in fundamental physics. It looks like any new theory requires a new ontology.

It is not only quantum mechanics that is affected by ontological confusion. The mathematical formalism of physics manipulates abstract entities whose existence and nature remain highly speculative. Physicists consider that as long as these abstract entities are quantified, there is no problem. However, physics is unable to tell what energy, forces, fields, and the like really are.

Other examples of metaphysical confusion can be found in biology, with for example difficulty of defining the concepts of life, gene and genome, among others. Ten years after the completion of the Human Genome Project, it appears that a wrong ontology of genetics, more based on naturalist ideology than scientific observation, has been responsible for the project's inability to deliver promised curative therapies. This is because a wrong ontology of genes led to wrong assumptions regarding the relationship between genes and disease. Since then, it has becomes increasingly difficult to think of a gene as a function unit. We see diverging interpretations between the structural and functional understanding of the gene because structural understanding does not depend so much on molecular structure of the gene but rather, on the type of relationship that a particular gene establishes with other genes or with introns (non-protein coding segments of an open reading frame in DNA) and how the gene expresses itself within a certain environment. In turn, this crisis of genetics ontology threatens the neo-Darwinian synthesis that for decades had offered an apparently stable model for understanding evolution. It has, however, become difficult to believe in a direct causal relation between molecular variations in a specific sequence of DNA and a phenotype trait. Putting in doubt this causal relation has devastating consequences for theories like evolutionary psychology that considers human nature and behaviors to be the product of evolution and of our genetic make-up.[8]

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7. Thompson, *Philosophy of Nature and Quantum Reality*, pp. 39-44.

8. See John Tooby and Lea Comides, "The Psychological Foundations of Culture in Jerome Barkow, Lea Comides and John Tooby," *The Adapted Mind; Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), pp.

Morange believes that there is no universally-valid definition of a gene.[9] It has been shown that Mendelian genetics, molecular biology, genetic explanations of ontogeny processes and population genetics use all different concepts of genes based on different ontologies.[10] Ontogeny and phylogeny lead to different classifications of genes. There is the perception among biologists that attempting to formulate a clear definition of genes might be a fruitless enterprise. Some have instead chosen to substitute for genes the concept of the genome – the totality of DNA molecules transmitted from generation to generation – as the most fundamental entity of molecular biology. This makes a lot of sense, as contrary to what Dawkins and most of our non-biologist contemporaries believe,[11] there is growing evidence that in most cases, natural selection does not select genes, but rather, individuals and, therefore, genomes.[12] What is transmitted from generation to generation is the genome, not the genes. However, substituting the genome for the genes can leave philosophers of science dissatisfied. The genome definition is purely descriptive and has no ex-

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20-136; Eliot Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998); De Waal, *Our Inner Ape* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005); Mark Hauser, *Moral Mind: How Nature Designed our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong* (New York: Harper and Collins, 2006); De Wall, Wright, Korsgaard, Kitcher and Singer, *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), and, of course, many others.

9. Morange, Michel, *The Misunderstood Gene* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), p. 27.

10. Duprès, *The Disorder of Things*, pp. 121-23.

11. See Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989).

12. There is no consensus on this point among scientists. The debate concerning the level at which natural selection operates is far from being closed. A sympathetic view of the thesis that selection operates primary on genes can be found in Rosemberg and McShea, *Philosophy of Biology: A contemporary Introduction* (2008), pp. 158-169. Carmen Sapienza presents a defense of that view in her paper "Selection Does Operate Primarily on Genes," *In Defense of the Gene as the Unit of Selection* (New York and London: Ayala and Arp Routledge, 2010), pp. 127-40, while Richard Burian presents the opposite position in his paper "Selection Does not Operate Primarily on Genes" in the same book. The confrontation between the two papers shows that since the 1980s there has been a considerable evolution that brings the two positions much closer. Additional literature on the subject includes R. Brandon and R. Burian, *Genes, Organism, Population: Controversies over the Units of Selection* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1984); R. Burian's 2005 paper "Too Many Kinds of Genes? Some Problems Posed by Discontinuities in Gene Concepts and the Continuity of the Genetic Material" (available at www.phil.vt.edu/ Burian/GeneKindsCVP.pdf); S. Okasha's 2006 paper "The Level of Selection Debate: Philosophical issues" (available at www.blackwellpublishing.com/pdf/compass/ PHCO_001.pdf); and various others.

planatory value because the molecular structure of the genome is too complex to be readily used. It is impossible to define what a genome mutation could be because mutations take place at the gene level, leaving again the neo-Darwinian Synthesis in disarray.

The problem of gene definition cannot be solved by science without resorting to ontological considerations simply because there can be many different ways of slicing reality. Two things must be taken into consideration. First, the genome cannot be isolated from its environment and, second, several levels of organization exist in the genome. Most attempts at defining the gene start from the assumption that the gene is either a 'primitive' object or that the gene organizational level is the most primitive level. These questions are questions more for philosophy of science and show that science, either theoretical or experimental, cannot be isolated from philosophy of science which is often introduced covertly. As we will see later, the notion of 'primitive object' is not part of Bahá'í philosophy of nature which is based on necessary relationships. In that case, it could be that relations between genes are a more fundamental level of explanation than the gene itself.

Many scientists acknowledge the existence of metaphysical or ontological issues in their disciplines but consider that these issues are no obstacle to scientific progress. This is because their understanding of science is inspired by instrumentalism and phenomenalism, which assigns to science the limited role of formulating theories enabling correct predictions or merely producing descriptions of experimental results and observations. From a Bahá'í perspective, the objective of science is not only to produce knowledge that will generate technologies capable of improving our life but also to bring about a closer understanding of our place within nature and its implication for our spiritual development.

A Holistic Approach to Reality

Another fundamental difference between philosophy of science and philosophy of nature is that the later takes a holistic approach to reality. Science is analytical in the sense that it understands a system by the working of its parts. This is a powerful method that has brought great success. However, under such an approach nature appears as highly fragmented. The result is not a unified model of nature but an entanglement of maps established at different scales and using different measurement units, different concepts and different methodologies and often at conflict with each others. By contrast, without neglecting the discontinuous aspect of nature, philosophy of nature looks more at the continuous aspects and at the interconnections between the different fields of knowledge.

This holistic approach to reality cannot be achieved by connecting together the various maps of nature's sub-systems produced by science. The heterogeneity of these maps is irreducible and any attempt to reduce them to the same language would deprive them of any useful meaning. This is the reason for which philosophy of nature cannot replace the various philosophies of science such as the philosophy of physics or philosophy of biology.

Our holistic approach cannot either be reached by ontology, because ontology operates in a way that is very similar to science by trying to identify the smallest logical constituent of reality and suggest reduction to a unique scale or dimension of reality. Rather this holistic approach is based on identifying the logical structure of reality that can produce concepts independent from any scale of reality or from any field of science. We will see that in this approach the concept of necessary / non-necessary relationship, developed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, plays an eminent role. This holistic approach leads to a complementary view of reality, also called in the past *conjunctio oppositorum*, in which a representation of reality is reached from the superposition of different perspectives, which helps to solve apparent contradictions between various aspects of reality.

Philosophy of Nature and Subjectivity

While philosophy of science pretends to be anthropologically neutral, philosophy of nature considers that the existence of conscious beings is central to any explanation of nature. The first mystery of nature is the existence of something rather than nothing. The second mystery is our own existence which, as Brandon Carter demonstrated through his anthropic principle, constrains the conditions prevailing at the time of the Big Bang and the selection of laws of nature and universal constants.[13] The fact that we live in the only universe compatible with our existence is something hard to deny. We will see that Bahá'í metaphysics considers consciousness as an emergent property that owes its existence to specific characteristics of the universe we are living in. This means that our existence as conscious beings cannot be dissociated from the structure of nature and therefore nature is conveying to us meaningful message about who we are and how to understand our place in the natural order.

Philosophy of Nature and the Theory of Intelligibility

In the same way that philosophy of science requires an epistemology, a philosophy of nature requires a theory of intelligibility. We cannot make significant progress in our understanding of the metaphysical framework

13. Barrow and Tipler, *The Anthropic Principle* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998).

of Bahá'í philosophy of nature unless we address the issue of intelligibility.

There is a major difference between a theory of intelligibility and epistemology. While epistemology answers the question: "How do we know what is in the world?" intelligibility answers the question "What is there in the world that we can know?" Whereas epistemology is limited in scope by its naturalist paradigm, a theory of intelligibility must be grounded in ontology and metaphysics. Such a theory must address the following key questions: (i) what is the relationship between reality and the human mind; (ii) what is human capability to understand reality and what could be the limit of that capability if any; (iii) what makes nature intelligible and what are the conditions of that intelligibility, (iv) what is the relationship between intelligibility and spirituality, or between rationality, intuition and other forms of knowledge.

When discussing the question of intelligibility, the Bahá'í writings raise different issues. The first issue, related principally to epistemology, is the absence of a sure foundation for human knowledge. A second issue is the limits of intelligibility. A third issue is the relationship between rationality, language and intelligibility. A fourth issue is the relationship between an individual's knowledge and their spiritual development.

In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that there are four sources of knowledge: sensory data, rational reasoning, the authority of tradition and of Holy Scriptures, and intuition.[14] He demonstrates that none of these sources can lead to any certainty: "They are all faulty and unreliable."[15] The only hope of achieving an understanding of reality is by combining these four sources of knowledge. This is what I call the *epistemological agreement* that represents the ideal of Bahá'í philosophy. Sensory data is notably unreliable. Philosophers who follow the path of reason can scarcely agree on anything. Even supposedly well-established scientific theories can be rapidly displaced by a competing theory, and each theory is subject to various interpretations. The history of philosophy shows that theologians who view themselves as the guardians of exegesis have greatly erred through the centuries. As for inspiration, it is difficult to distinguish genuine spiritual inspiration from the prompting of the Self. It is only by combining these four sources of knowledge that we can hope reaching a better understanding of reality. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá warns us that reaching an agreement between the four sources of knowledge cannot be a purely intellectual process because human intel-

14. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (latter abbreviated as SAQ) (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1981), pp. 297-98.

15. *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (latter abbreviated as PUP) (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 22, 255.

lect is faulty: ". . . there is no standard in the hand of people upon which we can rely." By his own effort no human being can reach true understanding of reality. Such an understanding can only be reached through the assistance of the Holy Spirit: "But the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives us the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained."[16] Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says "How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself. Through it the human mind is quickened and fortified into true conclusion and perfect knowledge."[17] The process of obtaining the assistance of the Holy Spirit requires some form of "openness" which is directly linked with personal and collective spiritual development. Clearly no sure method exists to reach this epistemological agreement, if by method we intend a purely intellectual process. Accepting this position means that intellectual and scientific knowledge is limited and cannot give us a full understanding of reality. From a scientific perspective human knowledge must therefore remain without firm foundation.

The second issue we have to deal with is the intelligibility of nature. The basic idea behind Bahá'í philosophy of nature is that nature is the manifestation of a more fundamental reality. Nature by itself is intelligible in most of its manifestations, but a deeper analysis of nature requires not just science but ontology and intuition in order to include our subjectivity and the fact that we are ourselves part of nature.

The human existential *situs* limits our perception to a certain ontological horizon. What is behind that horizon can only be guessed. This situation creates the illusion of duality between a spiritual and a material world while, in fact, there is only one world. The spiritual world has an influence on the material world that cannot be explained in scientific terms. Man is caught in a *hermeneutical circle*: to know himself, he needs to know God and the world; to know the world, he needs to know himself and God; and, of course, he cannot know God unless he understands himself and the world. The circularity of human knowledge is another reason for the limits of intelligibility and for the absence of a sure foundation of human knowledge. Knowledge can never be fully objective. The reason that there is so much disagreement in contemporary metaphysics is that all systems have hidden assumptions about our place in the universe and its meaning. As long as we do not have a consensus on this question, it is difficult to reach a consensus on anything else.

16. SAQ, p. 299.
17. PUP, p. 22.

A comprehensive theory of intelligibility cannot be developed in isolation but instead requires linkage with a theory of rationality and a theory of language. In the Bahá'í writings, rationality includes spirituality because rationality is the capacity to see beyond appearance. Rationality is a manifestation of the Logos, the Word of God, and we can expect that everything created follows the same rationality, even if this rationality might not be fully intelligible to us. Language is what links us to the universal rationality and makes it intelligible to us. Language is the incarnation of rationality and the instrument of spirituality. We are rational beings, and, therefore, spiritual beings too, because we are beings endowed with linguistic capability.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says that man can understand the abstract only through the concrete.[18] Lakoff and Johnson demonstrated that all abstract ideas, but not only abstract ideas, are metaphors or metaphors of metaphors. "Time passes" or "flows", "problems are burden", "we grasp an issue", "life is a journey", "affection is warmth", "prices rise" and "markets plummet" are all metaphors which have been developed using rules that have shaped our mental life. All expansion of our knowledge and experience requires the spinning of new metaphors.[19] Metaphors not only shape our ordinary language, but as Theodor Brown has shown, metaphorical thinking has also produced some of the best science.[20] Metaphors reveal the underlying common rationality of all phenomena. Metaphors generate meaning, and meaning is what links rationality to spirituality. But the Bahá'í writings go one step further: metaphors are part of nature. Not only are metaphors part of nature but we can see God's creation as a nexus of metaphors.[21] If nature uses fractal geometry like a "copy and paste" function (another metaphor), there is no surprise that it could use also

18. "Tablet to Professor Forel" also quoted in *Bahá'í World Faith,* 6th printing of the 1956 edition (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 336: "The mind comprehendeth the abstract by the help of the concrete, but the soul has limitless manifestation." A revised translation can be found in *The Baha'i World*, vol. XV (1968-1973) (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1976), pp. 37-43 or at http://www.gutember.org/files/19292/19292-h/19292-h.html. In the online version the quotation appears on pp. 6-10, paragraph 6.

19. See Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), and *Philosophy in the Flesh: The embodied Mind and its Challenge to the Western Thought* (New York: Basic Book, 1999).

20. Brown, Theodore, *Truth Making: Metaphors in Science* (Champaign IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2008).

21. Lepain, Jean-Marc, *Archéologie du Royaume de Dieu; Ontologie des Mondes Divins dans les Ecrits de Baha'u'llah* (Paris: Librairie Baha'ie, 1993), pp. 64-5; *Le Principe Anthropique; Le Problème de l'Intelligibilité et de la Rationalité du Monde dans la Pensée de Baha'u'llah* (Paris: Librairie Baha'ie, 1995), p. 52, available at www.bahai-biblio.org.

transposition of one principle from one domain to another domain, from one level of reality to another level. Laws of nature could be the manifestations of such a process. This is the reason that nature in particular and God's creation in general are endowed with meaning for humans. Metaphors reveal the common rational structure that links all the different ontological levels of the universe.[22]

Last but not least, even if science can readily understand natural phenomena, it cannot grasp the universe in its totality and it cannot understand its relationship with what Bahá'u'lláh describes as other "worlds." However, it appears clear that these worlds interact with each other and that certain fundamental aspects of our universe depend on these interactions. For that reason, some natural phenomena will always appear mysterious. This is the case concerning the origin of the universe itself, but also regarding the appearance of life, the existence of consciousness, free will and the nature of the human soul, all of which cannot be explained in purely naturalistic terms. Some aspects of God's creation are fully intelligible and accessible to human rationality, while other aspects are mysterious. There are countless passages in the Bahá'í writings about the mysterious aspects of the world we live in. Here are some similarities with the position of a group of philosophers called the Mysterians. Collin McGinn, who coined the expression 'transcendental Naturalism' to describe this position, writes: . . . we are programmed to employ concepts that are mysteries to us at a logical level. We can solve problems by using these concepts, but we cannot solve the problems they themselves raise. . . .[23]

This situation is due to the cognitive architecture of our mind: "Philosophy is an attempt to get outside the constructive structure of our mind. Reality itself is everywhere flatly natural, but because of our cognitive limits we are unable to make good on this general ontological principle. Our epistemic architecture obstructs knowledge of the real nature of the objective world."[24] Consequently, "we are trying to force our cognitive faculties to deliver knowledge of phenomena whose nature those faculties are not cut out to comprehend."[25] While McGinn thinks that the reasons for human cognitive limitation are essentially biological, the Bahá'í writings give a more metaphysical interpretation. Those limitations are due to our position in the chain of being and to discontinuous aspects of reality. John Carroll holds similar views, but instead of concluding that philosophy is doomed, he concludes that science will remain always incom-

22. *Ibid.*

23. McGinn, Collin, *Problems in Philosophy: The Limits of Enquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 21.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 2

25. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

plete.[26] This incompleteness is the result of the nature of the "*inanimate*" world. After reviewing the relationship between necessity, the laws of nature and causation, Carroll concludes: "The various examples discussed . . . show that we may not be intelligent enough to discover every fact, that we may not have the requisite sensory ability to discover every fact, and that events in the external world may occur in such a way as to prevent us from discovering every fact."[27] This thesis of the incompleteness of philosophy and science is fully supported by the Bahá'í writings.

Metaphysics and Philosophy of Nature

Bahá'í metaphysics is premised on the notion that the physical reality is not the entire reality of the existing universe. It might even be difficult to distinguish clearly between a so called physical reality and a broader understanding of reality that includes non-physical elements. The universe is made not only of physical elements but possesses an ontological structure that is distinct from its physical structure. This ontological structure is believed to have causal powers that put constraints on the manner in which the physical reality unfolds.

To understand the place of metaphysics in Bahá'í philosophy generally, and in Bahá'í philosophy of nature in particular, it is necessary (i) to understand the relationship between metaphysics and the Bahá'í theory of intelligibility; (ii) to define the metaphysical framework existing in the Bahá'í writings and its implications for the ontological structure of reality, and finally (iii) to understand the relationship between metaphysics, science and other fields of knowledge such as sensory experience, intuition, faith and the like.

The place occupied by metaphysics in Bahá'í philosophy flows directly from the theory of intelligibility. Metaphysics cannot rely only on the use of logic as a methodology. It must be part of *the epistemological agreement* described earlier. In the nineteenth century, metaphysics came to be criticised as being purely speculative. Bahá'u'lláh also strongly condemns scholastic or speculative metaphysics, which he describes as "sciences that begin with words and end with words."[28] Metaphysics, like science and religion, is a means of investigating reality. It can start only from the observation of nature and for this reason, ontology should be considered as part of the philosophy of nature. Ontology tells us what exists, and this question is one of the most fundamental questions of science

26. Carrol, John W., *Laws of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), p. 153.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

28. Baha'u'llah, 'Tajallîyyât (3rd)," in *Writings of Baha'u'llah*, 3rd expanded ed. (New Delhi, India: BPT, 2006).

and of philosophy of nature. Indeed, it is precisely where science and metaphysics meet. Metaphysics itself should not be seen as a distinct branch of philosophy of nature but rather as a component of all the main three branches of Bahá'í philosophy.

Bahá'í philosophy must of course remain based on the Bahá'í writings, which contain a significant amount of material about the nature of reality. This is what I call *the metaphysical framework* of Bahá'í philosophy – elements of which will be described in the next section of this paper. Because there is no definite foundation of human knowledge and because not everything is knowable or can be described in scientific terms, there are in all philosophies a number of propositions that are called primitive (in the sense that they cannot be demonstrated). The existence or non-existence of God and the naturalistic assertion that nothing exists outside of nature are typical examples of primitive propositions. Following these primitive propositions, there are a number of other propositions that are not primitive but which cannot be demonstrated without recourse to primitive propositions. We also find in the Bahá'í writings other statements about the nature of reality that may be viewed as 'metaphysical' but which are strongly correlated to scientific propositions (in the sense that a scientific interpretation of these statements might be possible). The discontinuity of reality and the organization of nature within hierarchical levels of complexity is a good example of a thesis found in the Bahá'í writings, which is susceptible to scientific refutation or justification. In so doing, we must remember that the Bahá'í writings are not considered authoritative with regards to scientific questions and when statements about the nature of physical reality are found they should be interpreted in the light of the best science available, knowing that our knowledge is not definitive. The purpose of the Bahá'í writings is not to inform us about the nature of the physical reality but to provide guidance for our spiritual development. In similar terms, although ontology should be seen as part of the philosophy of nature, the primary purpose of metaphysics is not to inform us about the nature of reality but to inform us about human nature. However, we cannot understand the concept of human nature unless we understand our relationship to the universe and our relationship to God. This is what I called in a previous work *the hermeneutic circle*.[29]

This naturally raises the question of the relationship between science and metaphysics. When the aim of eradicating entirely metaphysics from philosophy was proved illusory, analytical philosophers like Quine have proclaimed that metaphysics is '*continuous to science'*. Since then, we have seen the flourishing of various proposals for the complete 'naturali-

29. Lepain, *Archéologie du Royaume de Dieu*, pp. 220-21.

zation' of metaphysics – i.e., the idea that metaphysics does not need metaphysical concepts but can be developed using only concepts of physics, or proposals for the reduction of metaphysics to scientific realism or the idea that the role of metaphysics can be reduced to providing science with criteria allowing it to distinguish between real physical objects from intellectual devices created by the mathematical formalism of physics. It is not difficult to refute such theories for many reasons; one of them being that they imply a reduction of all sciences to physics; something that only die-hard naturalists are ready to believe, and other reason being, as we have seen, that there is no epistemological agreements among physicists about the exact meaning of the physical concepts they use. Last but not least, such explanations invariably lead one to posit some kind of physical entities as 'primitive' and beyond any explanation. For example, Tim Maudlin writes: "The laws of nature stand in no need of 'philosophical analysis'; they ought to be posited as ontological bedrock."[30] He also takes space-time as being primitive. Such attempts at the naturalization of metaphysics always end up in constricting dramatically the field of metaphysics and putting a number of disturbing questions 'off limits'. Although these theories might appeal to some physicists, they are not widely supported by most biologists and scientists from other branches of science. All ontological questions are not amenable to the methods of empirical science. Physics remains an incomplete science, and an incomplete science cannot provide ontology capable of explaining all natural phenomena as well as the logical structure of reality. We still do not know if the ultimate building blocks of physical reality are strings, branes or something else. We cannot explain the expansion of the universe unless we assume the existence of very mysterious entities such as a cosmological constant, singularities, dark matter and dark energy. The fact that 96 percent of the universe's mass remains undetected is not very reassuring as to the completeness of our physical theories. We do not know how general relativity applies at a low-energy limit. We do not know what happens under the Planck length (10^{-33} cm). We are unable to choose between string theories and quantum gravity theories, which in turn exist in multiple variants. Considering physics' lack of knowledge about the most fundamental layer of reality, one can doubt that metaphysics can be naturalized or that physics can sort out the true nature of physical entities using its mathematical formalism. On the other hand, metaphysics can pro-

30. Maudlin, *The Metaphysics within Physics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), p 1. See also John Carroll, *Laws of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), who follows the same path. John Lowe, *A Survey of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), has presented a number of important arguments against the naturalization of metaphysics.

vide critical tools for resolving some of physics' ontological issues. Obviously there are some elements of continuity between science and metaphysics as there are elements of continuity between metaphysics and theology, hermeneutics, philology, linguistics and almost any form of human knowledge. But to say that metaphysics *must be* 'continuous' to or coextensive with science is certainly wrong. Even a logical positivist like Russell opposed that view.[31] Bahá'í philosophy does not see metaphysics as continuous to science but as the result of an epistemological agreement between all sources of knowledge. This means that metaphysics (or religion as often mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá) should not enter into contradiction with science. As a consequence, one of the responsibilities of Bahá'í metaphysics is proposed interpretation of Bahá'í writings regarding the nature of reality in the light of the latest progress in science. In this task, two levels must be considered. The first level considers our understanding of the world. While science is more concerned with the explanation of discrete phenomena, metaphysics is more concerned with our understanding of the universe as a whole through the development of macro-concepts such as interconnectedness, continuity and discontinuity, complexity, order, laws of nature, causality, evolution, diversity, adaptation, entropy, chance, stochasticity and determinism. A second level of metaphysics considers what sort of ontology can explain the macro-concepts developed at the first level.

Science, Philosophy and Religion

We have already asserted the view that the Bahá'í Faith sees philosophy as the interface or the mediator between science and religion. As a religion, the Bahá'í Faith is unique in the fact that it places as much authority in science as in its own writings, to the point of making the agreement between science and religion mandatory: "Religion and science must conform and agree. If a question of religion violates reason and does not agree with science, it is imagination and not worthy of credence."[32]

If much has been written on the ways and means of reaching that agreement, very little attention has been given to the metaphysical principles that render this agreement necessary. This can be summarized as follows: science and religion, and by extension philosophy, have the same purpose – namely the understanding of reality. However, they operate on different levels of that reality. For that reason their views are complementary, and conflict between the two should be impossible in principle, although there are a few areas where science and religion tend to overlap

31. Glock, Hans-Johan, *What is Analytical Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), p. 135.

32. PRP, p. 169.

such as in the discussion concerning Darwinian evolution. If conflicts occur it is because there has been some confusion between the two levels of intelligibility.

'Abdu'l-Bahá appears to accord science, nature and religion identical definitions. In *Some Answered Questions* he writes: "Religion, then, is the **necessary connection** which emanates from the reality of things."[33] In the "Tablet to August Forel," he gives a similar definition of nature: "By nature is meant those **inherent properties and necessary relations** derived from the realities of things."[34] As science is also the study of '*necessary relations*' existing between things, the consequence is that "Religion and science are the same; they cannot be separated from each other"[35] because "The basis of religion is reality itself."[36] Soon we will see that this '*necessary connection'* is a key concept underpinning the Bahá'í philosophy of nature and its ontology.

However, if science and religion have the same purpose (namely the study of necessary relations existing between things), they do not operate on the same level of reality and do not have the *same modus operandi*. While science deals with the physical world, religion is primarily concerned with the spiritual development of humankind. This spiritual development can be understood in terms of '*necessary relations*' existing between the body and the soul on one hand and the soul and the spiritual worlds on the other. Physical reality is viewed as an instrument of spiritual development. Religion is interested in science because we need a better understanding of how physical reality can contribute to our spiritual development, because science can contribute to the well-being of humanity and to the advancement of civilization, and because understanding the mysteries of the universe helps us understand ourselves and our relationship to God's creation.

2. The Bahá'í Concept of Nature

33. SAQ, p. 159

34. "Tablet to Professor Forel" (later abbreviated as Forel), revised translation published in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. XV (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1976), p. 38 and can be found at http://www.gutemberg.org/files/19292/192902-h/19292-h.html. The quotation can be found on pp. 11-20, paragraph 4 and remains unchanged from previous translation.

35. From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in a memorandum of Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated 14 January 1991.

36. *'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy* (latter abbreviated as ADP), Compiled by Elisatheth Frazer Chamberlain (Boston, MA: Tudor Press, 1918), p. 186, on line at www.bahai-library.com/abdulbaha_divine_philosophy.

It seems possible to identify in the Bahá'í writings five different views of nature, which can be seen as complementary: (i) nature is the expression of God's will; (ii) nature is a modality of reality; (iii) nature is an intelligible reality, (iv) nature is the expression of the necessary relations existing between the realities of things, and (v) nature is a unifying agency. Once these perspectives are woven together, a compelling and deeply philosophical representation of nature emerges.

Nature as the will of God

Bahá'u'lláh defines nature as the expression of God's Will in his creation:

> Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by various causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's will and its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. Were anyone to affirm that it is the Will of God as manifested in the world of being, no one should question this assertion. It is endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp.[37]

There are a number of important ideas expressed in this quotation. Nature is the instrument of God and manifests His purpose. Nature has a spiritual dimension, and humanity can learn important lessons from it. From a spiritual perspective, understanding nature is tantamount to understanding the purpose of God in creating the physical reality. Laws of nature express the will of God and as a consequence, God does not need to interfere with the working of nature. Experience shows that the laws of nature are sufficient to accomplish God's purpose: there is no need for divine intervention in nature, and science need not be concerned by questions such as the existence of God.

Nature as a Modality of Reality and as an Intelligible Reality

'Abdu'l-Bahá's book *Some Answered Questions* opens with a chapter on nature. The first paragraph of that chapter provides a sort of definition of nature which is neither easy to translate nor to understand. The first sentence is very elliptical and may be translated literally as follows: "Nature (*tabíyyat*) is a modality (*kayfíyyat-i*) or a reality (*haqíqat-i*)." There is no doubt that much ink will be spent in attempting to explain this first

37. Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Wisdom,* in WOB, p. 447.

sentence. I believe that it could be paraphrased as: "Nature is a modality of existing things that is an intelligible reality".

K*ayfíyyat* is a word that translates Aristotle's category of '*modality*' or '*quality*'. The word comes from the Arabic '*kayf*' (how) and in response to the question of 'How is that thing?' It denotes a mode of being. It stands in contrast to the question 'What is that thing?' which instead denotes its quiddity. The origin of the term dates back to Aristotle's *Categories*, which enumerates all possible kinds of thing that can be the subject or the predicate of a proposition. The third category is 'Quality' (*poion)* which characterizes the nature of an object by identifying its essential properties. In Islamic philosophy, the term came to denote the mode of existence of an essence. There might be two ways to translate the word *kayfíyyat* within this context. The first is to consider the sentence "*tabíyyat kayfíyyat-í'st*" to mean "Nature is a set of properties or qualities". In this sense, this definition of nature is indistinguishable from the definition of nature as a set of necessary relations between things. However, a second interpretation is possible as the word *Kayfíyyat-î* is used with the definite article, and hence the sentence can also be paraphrased as "*Nature is one of the modalities of reality among other modalities*." This means that nature is one aspect among many aspects of reality. In my view, both meanings are intended. It follows that nature, when considered as a set of properties (as it is considered by science) is only one modality through which reality, including the physical universe, is perceived by us. Other modalities, or other ways to consider the universe, exist. When we see reality as nature, we do not see reality in all its aspects. Put another way, there is more to reality than simply nature. This definition of nature carries significant philosophical implications.

The second term of the definition, *haqíqat*, is usually translated as 'reality'. 'Reality' is a vague term that can mean either 'essence' or an 'intelligible reality'; an entity that exists on a metaphysical level, an abstraction, but an abstraction existing independently from the human mind. In the same book, 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds this comment: "In the same way, nature, also, in its essence, is an intellectual (intelligible) reality and is not sensible. . . ."[38] It clearly follows that nature is not something that can be perceived through the senses but only through the intellect. Nature is, therefore, defined as a metaphysical category. When read together, the two elements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definitions mean that nature should not be seen as an assembly of things but as an organic whole whose existence transcends the existence of its components.

38. SAQ, p. 83.

Nature as Necessary Relations between the Realities of Things and as Unifying Agency

As we have already seen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the "Tablet to Professor August Forel" provides another definition of nature:

> By nature is meant those inherent properties and necessary relations derived from the realities (essence) of things. And these realities of things, though in the utmost diversity, are yet intimately connected one with the other.[39]

From a metaphysical vantage-point, this definition, which does not contradict the one given in *Some Answered Questions*, is highly important, as it introduces the concepts of "inherent properties", "necessary relations" and "essence" which are, we believe, the key elements of Bahá'í ontology. We will consider them in greater detail in the last section of this paper. The general idea is that nature is a nexus of necessary relations existing between things. Through them everything is linked to everything. The universe is made of things, but nature is made of processes and necessary relations stemming from their inherent properties manifested by things according to their essence. These processes and necessary relations constitute this modality of reality that we have just discussed.

Because nature is a nexus of processes and necessary relations, it is more than the sum of its parts. Although nature might appear to be discontinuous and made not only of objects but of different subsystems, it contains properties and potentialities which are not possessed by its components. Through the universality of a natural order, and as a manifestation of a more fundamental law, it forms one single body endowed with an existence of its own. This is probably what 'Abdu'l-Bahá means when he calls nature a unifying agency, as is shown in this quotation:

> For these diverse realities an all-unifying agency is needed that shall link them all one to the other. For instance, the various organs and members, the parts and elements, that constitute the body of man, though at variance, are yet all connected one with the other through that all-unifying agency known as the human soul that causeth them to function in perfect harmony and with absolute regularity. . . .[40]

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39. "Tablet to Professor Forel," pp. 11-20, paragraph 4 at http://www.gutember.org/files/19292/19292-h/19292-h.html.

40. Tablet to Professor Forel, *ibid.*, pp. 11-20, paragraph 4.

Nature is, therefore, not merely the collection of all existing things. It is a repository of information, including properties and relations. Nature is more than the sum of all the particulars and relations that constitute it.[41] It has properties and dispositions of its own which cannot be found in the particulars.

Continuity and Discontinuity in Nature

The Bahá'í writings appear to uphold two contradictory views: the first is the unity of the world of existence, the second the discontinuity of reality. These conflicting views of reality are due to our limited cognitive capacity, as explained in the theory of intelligibility. What we perceive is discontinuity, while what actually exists is continuity. However, discontinuity is not a mere illusion: it is just that we do not have the cognitive tools to reconcile and articulate logically the two aspects of reality. Science will be more concerned by discontinuity while metaphysics will be more concerned with establishing the principles of continuity. However, neither can ignore these two complementary aspects of reality. Continuity and discontinuity in nature are the two faces of the same coin.

'Abdu'l-Bahá writes: "Reality is one; it does not admit plurality."[42] This means that the distinction that we make between a spiritual world and a material world is not real. This distinction appears to us only because of our cognitive limitations. Fundamentally, there is only one reality and that reality has spiritual and material manifestations. Because the material world exists inside the spiritual world, physical realities also have a spiritual dimension. In this regard, a sharp distinction between the material and the spiritual is sometimes difficult. Because the two worlds are not separated, they interact with each other. Some necessary relations

41. It might be useful at this stage to clarify the concept of 'particular'. Based on standard definitions found in various dictionaries of philosophy, a particular is member of a class as opposed to the property which defines that class or a particular can be an individual as opposed to a universal. Particulars are often opposed to universals because universals need particulars to be exemplified; but particulars can be different from individuals and can be changing (Abelard gives the example of a flame as a changing particular; Strawson gives the example of mental states). Particulars can also be abstract. They include not only physical objects, but concepts, consciousness, mental states or events. Particulars do not need to have individuality but they need a quiddity and here we are on solid ground because 'Abdu'l-Bahá attributes quiddity to the constituents of nature. As the concept of particular has a very broad meaning, I will use it every time that the nature of objects cannot be specified or to reflect the heterogeneity of natural objects. While rocks and birds are tangible realities, this is not the case of elementary particles that do not have locality and do not seem to have independent individuality either.

42. PRP, p. 297; Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá published by Faraju'lláh Zakí al-Kurdí, Cairo, 1921, Vol. I, p. 341 available on line at www.h-net.org/~bahai/abtext.htm.

operate across the two worlds and bind spiritual and material things together.

On the other hand, the way we perceive reality is discontinuous. Nature is made of subsystems organized hierarchically and operating through different sets of principles. The most obvious discontinuity in reality is the distinction we made between minerals, plants and animals, but we can also find elements of discontinuity inside each kingdom and even between closely related species. Based on Aristotle, 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses a classification that divides reality into five kingdoms: the mineral kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, the animal kingdom, the human kingdom and the spiritual kingdom. It would be mistaken to give biological taxonomic value to such classification which is not concerned with biological taxonomy but with metaphysical relations. Its only purpose is to establish that the human soul does not originate from nature but rather from the spiritual world. However, it clearly demonstrates the principle of the discontinuity of reality. The same principle exists in Bahá'u'lláh's writings where he distinguishes various worlds, designated by Aramaic names such as *Násút* (the human world), *Malakút* (the spiritual world), *Jabarút* (the world of the divine will), *Láhút* (the world of the divinity) and *Háhút* (the world of the unmanifested).[43] However, he uses many other phrases such as 'the world of the divine essence', 'the world of existence', 'the world of being',[44] 'the world of the visible and invisible',[45] 'the world of contingency',[46] 'the world of the divine command',[47] "the realm of revelation and creation",[48] and 'the kingdom of names'.[49] I have already demonstrated elsewhere that the notions of 'world' or 'kingdom' repre-

43. For a more detailed analysis see my article "The Tablet of All Food: The Hierarchy of the Spiritual World and the Metaphoric Nature of Reality," in *Baha'i Study Review*, 16, 2010: 43-60, and my book *Archéologie du Royaume de Dieu*, www.bahai-biblio.org/ centre-doc/ouvrage/archeologie-royaume-dieu/, ch 1, 2, and 5.

44. The '*world of existence'* and the '*world of being'* are two different translations of the same Persian expression ('*âlam-i-wujûd*). Examples of the use of this expression can be found in "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf" in *Writings of Baha'u'llah*, 3rd expanded ed. (New Delhi, India: BTP, 2006), hereafter abbreviated in WoB pp. 594 and 597.

45. See *Prayers and Meditations by Baha'u'llah*, XIII, in WoB p.799, XXXI, p. XLIV, p. 821, LXXII, CLXXVIII, or *Munajât* (*Prayers and Meditations* in Arabic), n° 38 (Rio de Janero: Editora Baha'i-Brazil, 1981), p. 41 for an example in Arabic.

46. See, for example, SAQ, Ch. 38, p. 152, and ch. 80, p. 281.

47. In Persian '*âlam-i-Amr*. Shoghi Effendi often translates this expression by *Kingdom of thy Cause*. See "Gleanings of Baha'u'llah," CLV, in WoB p. 777. See also *Munajât*, n° 75 (Rio de Janero: Editora Baha'i-Brazil, 1981), p. 86, and n° 80, p. 92.

48. See *Prayers and Meditation by Baha'u'llah*, XXXI, in WoB p. 808

49. See *Prayers and Meditations*, LVI, in WoB p. 830, and *Munajât*, p. 83.

sent hermeneutical or epistemological concepts rather than ontological domains. A world is a category of intelligibility. On one hand, reality is discontinuous because each world, or kingdom, requires a separate mode of intelligibility and, therefore, different ontology. On the other hand, not every world is part of a hierarchical order. Many names of worlds simply try to capture various aspects of reality. A better understanding of reality requires a juxtaposition of different perspectives, different hermeneutic categories. This idea of discontinuity of reality, or of nature, has far-reaching consequences. It explains why unity of science is impossible. Each natural kingdom, having a different ontology, requires a different scientific methodology. Reduction of one level of nature to another is impossible and, as a consequence, so too is the completeness of science. Although biology includes physics and chemistry, it cannot be reduced to physics or chemistry and chemistry cannot be reduced to physics.[50] Another idea is that discontinuity of nature is possible only under a common source of order. Order and complexity are linked to discontinuity. Last but not least, nature, as we have seen is a unifying agency. Discontinuity does not mean separateness. The complementarity and harmony that we see in nature shows that there must be some unifying principles and those unifying principles are metaphysical principles. This view of nature is fundamentally opposed to the Humean view of nature as a mosaic of discrete phenomena or logical atoms that, since Russell, has become one of the fundamental tenets of many contemporary philosophers.

The conclusion of this section should be that nature remains a mysterious reality that cannot be fully grasped by the human mind. To combine the five aspects or functions of nature identified in the Bahá'í writings and to understand their implications is already a significant challenge. However, even if we were to succeed in this task, something would remain elusive. There are two reasons for that. The first reason is that nature cannot be defined as an objective reality because we are part of it. As a part of nature we can see easily its objective manifestations, but other aspects can only be grasped through our subjectivity and our intuition. The second reason is that because nature is not just a physical reality but also an intelligible concept, the very idea of nature is deeply metaphysical, and relates directly to human spirituality. Because nature has meaning for us it has also a spiritual dimension. The understanding of this spiritual dimension depends deeply on the spiritual progress of humankind and, therefore, is likely to change with time. Nature cannot be captured by

50. On the debate about the question of a possible reduction of biology to physics, see Rosemberg and McShea, *Philosophy of Biology: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 96-126.

any definition. As Bahá'u'lláh said: "It is endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp."[51]

3. Elements of the Bahá'í Metaphysics of Nature

Metaphysics of nature operates at two levels. On one level, we find the general principles of Bahá'í metaphysics and how they relate or apply to metaphysics of nature. On another level, we find concepts that apply specifically to the metaphysics of nature such as interconnectedness, continuity and discontinuity, complexity, order, laws of nature, evolution, emergence, diversity, adaptation, entropy, chance, stochasticity or determinism. In the present section, after reviewing some of the key principles, we will deal mostly with interconnectedness, emergence and change.[52]

Origin of the Universe

In the history of Western intellectual tradition, the question of the origin of our universe has been an important point of contention and a source of conflict between science and religion. The Bahá'í understanding of the origin of the universe is fundamentally different from Christian and Islamic theology. Four points deserve attention. Firstly, the Bahá'í writings draw a sharp distinction between the origin of our universe, which might have a beginning in time, and God's creation, which is eternal. Secondly, God is considered as creator, but as his creation is eternal, the existence of God cannot be separated from the existence of his creation. Thirdly, God's act of creation is indirect as he uses the Spirit as his creative agent. Fourthly, our physical universe is an emanation from the spiritual world and, therefore, direct intervention of God in the genesis of our universe is not necessary.

The Bahá'í writings give two different accounts of the origin of the universe: one in which the universe has an origin in time and one in which it is eternal. Bahá'u'lláh says explicitly that both accounts are true and should be considered as complementary views of reality under the theory of intelligibility that we have already presented. The first account is purely naturalistic and fits well with the Big-bang scenario. In "The Tablet of Wisdom," Bahá'u'lláh writes:

> The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient.[53]

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51. TOB, p. 141.

52. Evolution is discussed in the longer version of this paper.

53. "Tablet of Wisdom," in *Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 139. In my view, the translation of this passage, allows for various interpretations. Baha'u'llah may have meant

In other words, a force has interacted with itself to create the energy[54] that set everything into motion. In that account, the universe has a beginning. However, even if our universe has a beginning, the process of creation is eternal. In the same tablet Bahá'u'lláh writes:

> As regard thine assertions about the beginning of creation, this is a matter on which conceptions vary by reason of divergences in men's thoughts and opinions. Wert thou to assert that it has ever existed, and shall continue to exist, it would be true; or wert thou to affirm the same concept as is mentioned in the sacred Scripture, no doubt would there be about it, for it hath been revealed by God, the Lord of the worlds.[55]

This was clarified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá when he said:

> The universe never had a beginning. From the point of view of essence it transforms itself.[56] God is eternal in essence and in time. He is his own existence and cause. This is why the material world is eternal in essence, for the power of God is eternal.[57]

The question of creation having a beginning or no beginning is treated by Bahá'u'lláh as two complementary views in an example typical of the theory of intelligibility, which says that the apprehension of reality requires the juxtaposition of different complementary views. Another important point is that the material world, but not necessarily this universe, is also eternal like the spiritual world. Materiality and spirituality are associated in eternity. Matter is an attribute of creation without which creation would not be complete and would not be able to attain its fundamental purpose. This makes the question of *ex nihilo* creation irrelevant.[58] This also has profound consequences for the concept of God as creator. God is a not the great architect who has pondered on the blueprint of His creation and reviewed minute details before launching the project. Crea-

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here that the universe has been created by one single force that has interacted with itself.

54. In the nineteenth century, the Arabic word for "heat" had a very broad meaning that covers the modern concept of "force" or "energy."

55. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

56. It is interesting to note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines the universe as an eternal self-transforming essence.

57. ADP, p. 106.

58. See Gerhard May (translated by A. S. Worrall), *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought* (London: T&T Clark International, 1994).

tion is a manifestation of God in which nature is a very small component of a much larger structure. Although this small component throws some light on the larger structure, it does not allow us to grasp its scale and finality. God is creator in the sense of being ontologically anterior to the creation and non-contingent, whereas creation is contingent and dependent on a first cause. Once again, God is not the creator in the sense that one day He commenced the process of matter and space-time generation. He is the creator in the sense that we can say that we are the creators of our mind and of our thoughts. As we all know, we cannot stop thinking, and our thoughts tell us something about ourselves, but our thoughts are not us and are contingent in relation to us. The rationality that we see in the universe is a reflection of God's rationality. Science tells us how to read the mind of God.

The Agency of the Spirit

The distance that the Bahá'í writings put between God and His creation is reinforced by the fact that God is only indirectly the creator, as He acts through an agent: the Spirit. The Spirit is described in the Bahá'í writings as the *First Emanation*, the *Primal Will*, the *Word of God* or Logos or simply Love. The Spirit links God to His creation like the rays of the sun emanate from the sun and can be reflected into a mirror. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

> Thus does the Great Announcement[59] inform thee about this glorious structure.[60] Such as communicate the generating influence[61] and such as receive its impact are indeed created through the irresistible Word of God which is the Cause of the entire creation, while all else besides His Word are but the creatures and the effects thereof.[62]

And 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments:

> The first emanation from God is the bounty[63] of the Kingdom, which emanates and is reflected in the reality of the creatures, like the light which emanates from the sun and is resplendent in creatures; and this bounty [emanation] which is the light, is re-

59. By "Great Announcement" we understand Bahá'u'lláh himself.

60. By "glorious structure" we understand the universe.

61. "Generating influence" refers to the active force mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh.

62. TOB, p. 140.

63. The Arabic word *'fadl'* can be translated alternatively by "bounty", "grace" or "emanation".

> flected in infinite forms in the reality of all things, and specifies and individualizes itself according to the capacity, the worthiness, and the intrinsic value of things. . . .[64]

But even if the Spirit is the agent of creation, God remains the creator: "It is He Who hath called into being the whole of creation, Who hath caused every created thing to spring forth at his behest."[65]

The nature of the Spirit is of course something that is as mysterious as the nature of God. This cannot be explained in philosophical language but only in metaphorical terms. However, if the nature of the Spirit cannot be comprehended by the human mind, its manifestation can be and the Bahá'í writings teach that the manifestations of Spirit are as diverse as the various domains of God's creation and are responsible for the unity/discontinuity dialectic that we see in reality.

The Two Processes of Emanation and Manifestation

This agency of the Spirit cannot be understood without introducing two fundamental concepts of Bahá'í metaphysics: the concepts of emanation and manifestation. Whereas emanation has been used a great deal in Christian and Islamic philosophy (inspired by Neo-Platonism), the Bahá'í writings hold that the process of emanation alone cannot explain the relationship between God and His creation and must be completed by the process of manifestation. Emanation is what confers existence upon things. The physical world is an emanation of the spiritual world.[66] Essences are created by emanation. However, everything that exists manifests the Spirit. While emanation is a one-to-one relationship, manifestation can be a one-to-many relationship.[67] One property or entity can be manifested in many things, i.e., in contemporary philosophical parlance, we can have many instantiations of the same universal and these instantiations can have diverse forms, depending on the *locus* of manifestation. Without this process of manifestation, creation would be stillborn due to the impossibility of change or evolution. Things are endowed with potentialities and manifestation is the process by which these potentialities can be expressed.

Many allusions in the Bahá'í writings suggest that the processes of emanation and manifestation are two complementary aspects of reality which, due to the cognitive limitations of the human mind, cannot be per-

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64 SAQ, p. 295.

65. *Gleaning from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 193

66. SAQ, p. 202.

67. SAQ, p. 295.

ceived in their unicity. The process of emanation is responsible for the continuity aspect of reality, while manifestation is responsible for its discontinuity aspect.

Manifestations of the Spirit and Discontinuity in Reality

Everything that exists is a mirror capable of reflecting the Spirit according to the capacity of its own essence. In each natural kingdom, the Spirit has its own manifestations according to the capacity and potentialities of that kingdom. This is the reason that 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of a mineral spirit, a vegetable spirit or an animal spirit. They are different manifestations of the same Spirit: the universal spirit, the Logos or Word of God.

Each manifestation of the spirit is responsible for the fundamental properties of that kingdom. For example, the mineral spirit is responsible for the force of cohesion that exists in matter and holds it together: the electro-magnetic force, the strong atomic force, the weak atomic force and gravity in modern parlance. Or rather, we can say that these four forces of the universe are the manifestation of a more fundamental spiritual force that embraces all aspects of God's creation and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls Love, i.e., the force that binds everything together, including God to His creation. In the vegetable kingdom, the Spirit manifests itself through the vegetable spirit, which confers biological life and vegetative functions, including the capacity of growth. Then, comes the animal spirit, which brings to life different potentialities, including powers of sensory perception. The human spirit confers to humanity rational and spiritual powers that allow individuals to free themselves from the prison of phenomenal appearances. 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks even of a Spirit of Faith that allows humans to bind with their creator.

It is clear that when 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes these distinctions between the four kingdoms and the five sorts of spirit, his aim is not to give a taxonomic description of nature but rather to identify spiritual principles that will help us to understand human nature and our relationship with the spiritual dimension of reality. As usual, in order to understand the spiritual realm, he starts from observation of nature, and because the observation of natural realities helps us to understand spiritual realities, it cannot be completely dismissed as scientifically irrelevant. However, what is important here is the metaphysics beyond the science. It does not matter if there are four, five or six natural kingdoms. What is important is the type of relationships that exists between these different domains of reality. For example, a higher kingdom remains always dependent on a lower kingdom for its existence, or a higher kingdom always exemplifies a higher

degree of cooperation between its various components.[68] The metaphysical connotation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's typology has also been remarked by Kitzing who writes:

> In modern biology the kingdoms, originally introduced by Aristotle, are today used in a taxonomic sense; they designate distinct classes of organisms. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is obviously not concerned with a taxonomic distinction of biological classes, but with a hierarchy of increasingly complex faculties. . . . Thus in this context, the "kingdoms" do not designate taxonomically distinct classes but hierarchical levels.[69]

This does not mean that a theory of discontinuity of nature cannot be developed on these bases. However, such a theory would probably need more than four levels or kingdoms. A distinction would have to be made between the molecular level and the atomic level and below the atomic level it is not yet clear how many additional levels would be required. Each level would require a distinct and specific ontology to be harmonized and reconciled into a more general ontological framework. Each level would also require a specific form of scientific and metaphysical realism to understand its relational structure and its interconnection with the whole reality of the universe.

Interconnectedness

Although nature manifests itself in a discontinuous manner, we have seen also that nature is a unifying agency. The principle of oneness of reality already mentioned cannot by itself explain the unifying role of nature. That requires principles that transcend the different sets of laws of nature operating at different levels of reality. The unifying role of nature is possible because everything in the universe, material and spiritual, is interconnected through a web of necessary relationships that play a major role in the working of reality. In fact, nature is made of two things: particulars or things in themselves and relationships that link particulars through their properties. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

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68. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Compilation on Huqúqu'lláh, in *Compilation of Compilations,* vol. 1, No 1159 (Mariborough, Victoria: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), p. 504: "The higher a kingdom of creation on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that cooperation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order."

69. Kitzing in *Brown Evolution and Bahá'í Belief* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2001), pp. 198-9.

> Reflect upon the inner realities of the universe, the secret wisdom involved, the enigmas, the inter-relationships, the rules that govern all. For every part is interconnected with every part by ties that are powerful and admit no imbalance, nor any slackening whatever.[70]

Everything in this universe is interconnected, and everything in the spiritual world is also interconnected. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

> All phenomena are involved in all phenomena. Consider what a transcendent unity exists, that, from this standpoint, every monad is the expression of the whole creation; this is the law and order of the world of existence.[71]

Explaining the interconnectedness of things in nature is another important task of the Bahá'í philosophy of nature. The affirmation of the interconnectedness of everything in the universe has far-reaching metaphysical and ontological implications. It is incompatible with a Humean view of the world in which the universe is made of discrete self-contained events and passive particulars and in which regularities are the expression of contingent laws. Interconnectedness implies a world in which connections play a prominent role. This sort of connectedness implies that properties have active powers that bond particulars together in a non-contingent manner. This implies also a holistic view of nature: a view that sees nature as a web of necessary relations which has a natural as well as a metaphysical dimension (in opposition to a worldview of discrete events and a metaphysics of discreta). It implies a world, as Munford writes that "comes with a whole, connected system of properties."[72] In such a system the understanding of relations is what gives us an understanding of the world. Particulars cannot be understood in abstraction from the web of relations in which they exist.

Emergence

If we look carefully at what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls 'spirits', he is describing a set of properties that are specific to an ontological domain that he calls 'kingdom.' He explains that these properties cannot be the result of properties and laws existing at a lower level of reality; in other words, they are non-reducible. The vegetable kingdom is identified by a form of

70. *Selection from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, (Haifa: Baha'i World Center, 1978), p. 157.

71. PRP, p. 168.

72. Stephen Munford, *Laws in Nature* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 182.

life that includes a metabolism, the capacity for growth and a form of reproduction. All these properties of the vegetable kingdom are absent from the mineral kingdom. Each level of nature is characterized by new properties: the cohesion of matter, vegetative life, faculties of perception, reflexive consciousness, and the like. This is exactly the concept of emergence that is now assuming paramount importance within our modern understanding of complex systems.

At the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Persian or Arabic did not have a word for '*emergence*', but as we have seen, it does not mean that the idea did not exist. In fact, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá use another word; a word so obvious and so ubiquitous that its fundamental meaning escapes most readers. That word is '*manifestation*'. It is true that the word '*manifestation*' has broader scope than *'emergence'*. *'Manifestation'* can apply to God Himself, or to His representative on earth, or to the human soul. However, when '*manifestation*' applies to natural phenomena, it describes exactly what modern science and philosophy call '*emergence*'. Another good example of this can be found in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings, when he says that '*intelligence*' (meaning the mind) is "manifested" gradually in the body and that the body must grow to a certain level of complexity and maturity to manifest fully the potential of intelligence, as we can see with young children who grow in intelligence when they are bodily developed and mature.[73] The important point is that both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá link the concept of emergence with the idea of complexity. When a threshold of complexity is passed, new properties naturally emerge, not as the result of the interaction of particulars but because they already exist potentially in the universe. Other examples of other forms of emergence can be found in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings when he says:

> . . . for example the seed, which is a single thing possessing the vegetative perfection, which it manifests in infinite forms, resolving itself into branches, leaves, flowers and fruits: this is called appearance in manifestation. . . .[74]

In fact, a careful examination of the Bahá'í writings shows that they refer to two types of emergence: (a) emergence that occurs between different levels of reality (kingdoms) such as, for example, the emergence of life out of the mineral kingdom; and (b) emergence between different levels of complexity within the same level of organization of nature, as we

73. *Selection from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978), p. 285.

74. SAQ, p. 295.

have seen with the example of the branches and leaves manifested out of the seed. I will call the first type of emergence *ontological emergence* and the second type *systemic emergence*. The difference between ontological and systemic emergence is that while each level of ontological emergence requires new sets of laws of nature in addition to the existing ones, systemic emergence operates under the same set of laws.

Since the late 1960s and 1970s, various new mathematical theories permit the study of nonlinear systems as well as the understanding of their evolution and of the conditions of their dynamic stability. These new investigative techniques include chaos theories, catastrophe theory, genetic algorithms, cellular automata, and others. They show that, as the Bahá'í writings predicted, complexity is not something added to our universe but something inbuilt in it from its very beginning and one of its key characteristics. Understanding how complexity and order appear in a chaotic system involves almost immediately the idea of emergence. Significant progress has been made in understanding systemic emergence but little in understanding ontological emergence. The emergence of life and of consciousness remains a mystery despite all the research in artificial life and artificial intelligence based on computational emergence.

There is a growing consensus among theoreticians of emergence that for an emergent phenomenon to be recognized as such, it must at least display five characteristics: complexity, irreducibility, unpredictability, conceptual novelty and holism. Complexity means that emergence occurs only in systems having a certain degree of complexity and that emergence is directional, always going from one level of complexity to a higher degree of complexity. Irreducibility and unpredictability mean that new emergent properties cannot be explained by the properties of the level from which they emerge and that their appearance cannot be predicted by the properties of that level. Novelty means that new emerging structures display new features and properties that bear limited resemblance with lower structures and that require different conceptual tools for their analysis (conceptual novelty). Holism means that properties are the properties of the system, not properties of its components. Natural structures are not determined by the structure of the system components but by their level of complexity which implies new information not existing at a lower level. This means that nature (if we consider the universe as a system) has properties distinct from its components or subsystems.

This does not mean that every scientist or philosopher is ready to embrace emergentism. The concept of emergence is still so much in need of clarification that its epistemological status remains in question. Once again we believe that this lack of clarity is due to the lack of a supportive ontology that is integrated with the metaphysical framework of philoso-

phy of nature. A first conceptual difficulty is to find a definition of emergence. This task has proved incredibly difficult. Workable definitions of emergence are rare phenomena, whilst weak definitions are ubiquitous. Then, there comes the difficulty of defining the different organizational levels of nature. Life seems easy to distinguish from nonorganic matter, but what about viruses and prions? Do prokaryotes and eukaryotes represent different levels of organization of life? Do fungi and plants belong to the same level of complexity? How does scale in nature relate to complexity? Sub-atomic physics is different from atomic physics such as chemistry partially because they operate on different scales.

Here we should remember that we are looking for a metaphysical theory of emergence and metaphysics cannot solve scientific problems; it can only provide a better ontology that will bring greater clarity to the interpretation of scientific theories. But it cannot remedy the deficiency of such theories. Finding valid examples of emergence in natural processes that can be analysed in a scientific manner is the task of science, but the validity of a metaphysical theory would not rest on such examples. A metaphysical theory would be only remotely concerned by the problem of emergence of new properties between different levels of complexity within the same system of nature. A metaphysical theory is more about emergence of a higher ontological level out of a lower ontological level. Although many scientists entertain the hope, or the fancy, that one day they will be able to explain the emergence of life or consciousness in purely naturalist terms, we think that this is impossible. Only ontological emergence is of significance for Bahá'í metaphysics; systemic emergence does not play any role.

Properties and Necessary Relations

Finally, one of the most important concepts of Bahá'í metaphysics is the concept of necessary relation. Besides the fact that essences are vehicles for fundamental properties of things and, therefore, determine the logical and intelligible structure of reality, little can be known about essences. We know about essences through the properties of things. From a philosophical viewpoint, the study of these properties and the necessary relations that they determine are far more important than knowing what essences in themselves are. As already said, necessary relations should be viewed as the central concept of Bahá'í ontology.

Natural objects have properties and dispositions that determine what they are and what sort of bounds or relations, under the universal law of attraction and affinity, they can forge with other natural objects. It means that there can be two complementary views of nature. The first one is a description of nature as a structure made of natural objects in which each

object is described precisely in terms of properties and behaviours. This view of nature is very powerful as long as natural objects are discrete, relatively simple and interacting with a limited number of other objects as it is the case in fundamental physics. This is the view of nature that we find in Western science. The second complementary view of nature is a view that takes a holistic approach and sees nature as a web of necessary and accidental relations between natural objects. This view is very powerful when applied to complex systems of natural objects such as the weather or an ecological system. This is the view that Bahá'í philosophy should try to promote while recognizing that the first view is complementary and should not be neglected.

The important point to grasp is that relations are relatively independent in their expression and causal powers from the properties that generate them. A natural object A has a property (a) and a natural object B has a property (b). The properties (a) and (b) determine a necessary relation 'x' between A and B. However, in many cases 'x' can be explained neither by (a) nor (b). The relation that binds things together is made of information different in nature from the information carried by the properties of A and B. In other words, relations cannot be reduced to properties. They are distinct from the causing power of any of the two natural objects because the causality that results from the relation is distinct from the causal powers of (a) and (b). Necessary relations must be studied for their own sake because they play a crucial role in the architecture of the system of nature and are the unifying agency of reality, as discussed earlier.

One of the great advantages of the concept of necessary relations is that it is a universal concept that applies to all fields of human knowledge and cognition. Necessary relations not only apply to all natural objects existing in the universe but encompass all metaphysical and spiritual worlds. They apply to inanimate objects as well as to living beings. While science is not a unified activity because the ontological discontinuity of nature prevents the existence of a single scientific methodology, on a philosophical level, necessary relations provide a unifying concept that can give a unifying view of all scientific activities and knowledge. It also helps to understand the origin of order in the universe and to understand that laws of nature are simply the mathematical formulation of some of these necessary relations. As a consequence necessary relations also explain complexity. Physics and chemistry can be based on a relatively limited number of 'laws' because the relations existing between physical objects are relatively few. On the other hand, it is far more difficult to formulate biological laws because biological phenomena are far more complex than physical or chemical phenomena. When we come to the study of animals, this study must be put in the perspective of the vast web of re-

lations that link and interconnect all living beings in a community that itself extends not only to plants but also to geological and meteorological systems that form the biosphere.

Because necessary relations are not limited to the physical world, they also apply to human activities. Human societies are based on necessary relations that we try to formulate through psychology, anthropology, sociology and political science. Economics, with its theory of markets and price formation, is a good example of necessary relations applied to human activities. Ethics itself could not exist without the deep belief in the existence of a number of fundamental relations in human society determined by human nature. Because human nature is not just physical but also spiritual, human 'properties', or rather attributes, are not just biological but also spiritual. Spiritual laws that govern our spiritual existence are born from the necessary relations existing between this universe and the spiritual world. Finally, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to show, the concept of necessary relations is what unifies science, philosophy and religion.

Necessary relations are not only a universal concept that integrates all areas of human knowledge and cognition, but is also a concept that provides a tool that can help formulating in a coherent manner philosophical or ontological theories, addressing some of the mysteries of our universe. For example, the origin of numbers can be explained in terms of relations between sets. The existence of physical constants in the universe can also be explained the same way. This is also true for the existence of the forces of physics or non-local connectedness as demonstrated in Aspect's experiment. The space-time continuum can be seen as being generated by necessary relationships existing between natural objects or simply as the sum of all these relations. Necessary relations probably play a great role in all emergent phenomena. They explain why the different kingdoms of nature seem to unfold with a ready-made architecture that makes everything fit in its place. Necessary relations certainly play a role in the explanation of biological evolution, and particularly in the explanation of biological convergence between species. The dolphin, a mammal that shares the same environment as fishes, and looks like a fish, is a good example. We are discovering that forms in nature play a great role also in evolution.[75] Nature knows how to design complex geometrical forms such as Fibonacci spirals, Bénard cells, spiral wave patterns and uses re-

75. On the role of forms in biology see D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson and John Tyler Bonner *On Growth and Forms* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994 (originally published in 1917 by Cambridge Univ. Press); Philip Ball, *The Self-Made Tapestry: Pattern Formation in Nature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001); Yves Bouligand, ed., *Les Sciences de la Forme Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Seuil, 1994); and Paul Bourgine and Annick Lesne, *Morphogénèse: L'Origine des Formes* (Paris: Belin, 2006).

petitive fractal geometry in very effective ways. Forms play a great role in determining the properties of molecules, and they probably play an important role in determining the evolutionary path of living beings. The emergence of regular and repetitive patterns seems to be a fundamental characteristic of nature and can be explained by the concept of necessary relations.

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EPISTEMOLOGY

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THE CRITERIA OF KNOWLEDGE: BEYOND INSPIRATION

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'Abdu'l-Bahá specifies four criteria of human knowledge: sense perception, intellect, tradition or Scripture and inspiration.[1]. He explained this concept in two of the talks he delivered in the United States, specifically in Hotel Ansonia on 17 April 1912[2] and at the Green Acre Bahá'í School on 16 August 1912,[3] as well as in a talk he delivered on the occasion of his second visit to Europe, in 1913.[4] He also explained the same concept in one of his table-talks with Mrs. Laura Clifford Barney[5] (1879-1974), an early American Bahá'í. He said in this talk:

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1. See "Tablet to Dr Auguste Henri Forel," in *The Bahá'í World*, vol.15, 1968–1973 (Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1976) 37-43; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. Laura Clifford-Barney (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1957), pp. 297-99, sec. 83; Persian edition: *An Núr al-Abhá fi Mufávaḍát-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Table Talks*, collected by Laura Clifford Barney (New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 207-08, hereafter *Mufávaḍát*; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace. Talks delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, comp. Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 20-22, 253-55, 355-57, hereafter Promulgation; *'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy* (Boston: Tudor Press, 1918), pp. 88-90 (hereafter *Divine Philosophy*). See also Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture. An Introduction. Volume 1. Doctrinal Fundamentals*, trans. from the German by Dr. Geraldine Schuckelt (Oxford: George Ronald, 2007), p. 273, Julio Savi, "Methods and Qualities of the Seeker of Reality," *Lights of 'Irfán*, vol. 10 (Papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars. Evanston, IL: Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, 2009), pp. 311-25, hereafter "Methods," and Peter Terry, "Bahá'í Epistemology," (http://bahai-library.com/pdf/t/terry_abdulbaha_epistemology.pdf, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013).

2. *Promulgation*, pp. 20-22.

3. *Ibid*., pp. 252-55.

4. *Divine Philosophy* 88-90.

5. She is also known as Laura Dreyfus Barney.

> There are only four accepted methods (*mízán*) of comprehension – that is to say, the realities of things are understood by these four methods.[6]

Similar words are written in one of his Arabic Tablets,[7] sometimes entitled Lawḥ-i-Fu'ad (Tablet of the Inmost Heart), provisionally translated into English by Steven Phelps and William McCants in March 2000: ". . . know that all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities, the significances, and the divine questions."[8]

This list of criteria of knowledge is reminiscent of the following words ascribed to the Greek philosopher Plotinus (203-269/270 CE), the founder of Neoplatonism, by Robert Alfred Vaughan (1823-1857), Protestant minister and writer, in his book *Hours with the mystics; a contribution to the history of religious opinion* published in 1860[9]: "Knowledge has three degrees: opinion, science, illumination. The means or instrument of the first is sense; of the second dialectic; of the third, intuition."[10]

'Abdu'l-Bahá examines each of these four criteria and concludes that all of them are limited in their possibilities and fallible in their results. For example, he said: "Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable."[11]

The same concept is explained in his Tablet of the Inmost Heart:

> . . . know that all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities, the significances, and the divine questions. All of them are imperfect, unable to quench the burning thirst or heal the sick. We shall therefore make mention of each one and demonstrate its limitation and inaccuracy.[12]

In this paper we will only examine one of these four criteria of knowledge mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, inspiration.

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6. *Some Answered Questions* (trans. 296, sec. 83; *Mufávaḍát* 207).
7. Letters or short writings.
8. *Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1. (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Iran, n.d.), p. 109, hereafter Lawḥ-i-Fu'ad; English provisional translation: http://bahai-library.com/pdf/t/terry_abdulbaha_epistemology.pdf, retrieved on 19 October 2013.
9. Its third edition, 1893, may be found at http://archive.org/stream/ hourswithmystics1893vaug#page/n35/mode/2up, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.
10. Plotinus, "Letter to Flaccus," www.plotinus.com/who_was_plotinus.htm, retrieved on 15 Oct. 2013.
11. *Promulgation* 22.
12. Lawḥ-i-Fu'ad 109.

Inspiration[13]

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes inspiration (*ilhám*) as "the suggestions of the heart (*khuṭúrátin qalbiyyatin*),"[14] "the influxes of the heart (*wáridátu'l-qalbíyyan*),"[15] "the influx of the human heart,"[16] "the promptings or susceptibilities of the human heart."[17] The meanings of these definitions may be more easily understood, in the light of the meanings of the words *qalb*, *khuṭúrát* and *wáridát* in Islamic literature. The Italian Islamicist Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988) remarks in this regard that the Persian word *dil* (corresponding to the Arabic *qalb*) is "generally translated as 'heart,' but 'brain' or 'intuition' would be better."[18] As to the definition "the suggestions of the heart (*khuṭúrátin qalbiyyatin*)," it could mean the "'incoming thoughts (*khawāṭir*)'[19] which reach the heart," mentioned by the Andalusian philosopher Muḥíyi'd-Dín Ibn al-'Arabí (1165-1240), sometimes considered the greatest Sufi philosopher.[20] And as to the definition "the influxes of the heart (*wáridátu'l-qalbíyyan*)," it could mean an "'inrush (*wārid*) . . . which arrived at the heart without self-exertion,"[21] mentioned by the same philosopher.

In his explanation of inspiration (*ilhám*) as the fourth criterion of knowledge, 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions the categories of people that usually uphold it. He said: "There is still another, a fourth criterion, upheld by religionists and metaphysicians who say that the source and channel of all human penetration into the unknown is through inspiration."[22]

He said moreover:

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13. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha*, trans. Marzieh Gail (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978), pp. 37-38, sec. 18; *Some Answered Questions* 157, sec. 40, para. 4; *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911*. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 83-84, sec. 28, para.14, 185-8, sec. 54, paras.1-19; *Divine Philosophy*, p. 122. See also Savi, "Methods," pp. 316-21.

14. Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád 112.

15. *Makátíb-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1 (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Iran, n.d.) 153 and 397, hereafter *Makátíb*.

16. *Promulgation*, p. 22.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

18. Alessandro Bausani, *Religion in Iran*, trans. by J. M. Marchesi. New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000), p. 263.

19. *Khawáṭir* and *khuṭúrát* are two plural forms of *khátir*, "An opinion, or an idea, or object of thought, bestirring itself in the mind . . . a thing coming at random into the mind: or a cogitation which bestirs itself, or occurs, in the mind, with a view to the end, issue, or result, of a thing: [whence the phrase,] . . . *khaṭarátu ash-Sháyáṭín* the vain suggestions of the devil" (E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* [London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93]. CD-Rom edition published by Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation. Cairo: Tradigital, 2003), vol. 3, p. 401).

20. See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*: *Ibn al-'Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1989), p. xiii, hereafter *Sufi Path*.

21. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 266.

22. *Promulgation*, pp. 20-21.

> The fourth standard is that of inspiration. In past centuries many philosophers have claimed illumination or revelation, prefacing their statements by the announcement that "this subject has been revealed through me" or "thus do I speak by inspiration." Of this class were the philosophers of the Illuminati.[23]

In another circumstance, he explained: "Inspiration is the fourth criterion. Occultists say, "I have had a revelation. This truth has been revealed to me." For them everything outside direct revelation is viewed with doubt.[24]

And thus the categories of people who use inspiration as their preferred criterion of knowledge are, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "religionists and metaphysicians," "the Illuminati," whom he also calls "followers of the inner light,"[25] and "occultists."

As to "religionists," they could be those people whom the Islamic world calls "*ummat*."[26] They are "the community of the believers . . . the mass of the believers."[27]

As to "metaphysicians," they could be philosophers who believe in God and deal with metaphysics intended as "something that deals with what is beyond the physical or the experiential,"[28] or "those informed with divine philosophy."[29]

As to "the Illuminati," they could be the *Ishráqiyyún*, who follow the philosophy of the Muslim mystic Shihábu'd-Dín Suhravardí (1154-1191). Their school of thought holds

> that the origin of philosophy is divine revelation and that this wisdom was handed down in ancient times to the Persians and the Greeks, creating two traditions that met again in Suhrawardi, who spoke explicitly of eternal wisdom or the perennial philosophy. This school believes that authentic philosophy must

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23. *Ibid*., p. 254.

24. *Divine Philosophy*, pp. 93-94.

25. *Paris Talks*, p. 186, sec. 54, para. 2.

26. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá *Selections*, p. 229, sec. 193, Persian text: *Muntakhabátí az Makátíb-i Ḥaḍrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 222.

27. Marcello Perego, *Le parole del sufismo*: *Dizionario della spiritualità islamica* (Milan: Mimesis, 1998), p. 248.

28. Webster's (1986), pp. 1420-21.

29. *Divine Philosophy*, p. 100. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that divine philosophy studies and realizes "spiritual verities" (*Promulgation*, p. 138), "spiritual realities" (*ibid.*), "the mysteries of God . . . the wisdom of God, inner significances of the heavenly religions and foundation of the law" (*ibid.*), that is the "phenomena of the spirit" (*Promulgation*, p. 326). The Persian notes of the talk recorded in English in *Promulgation*, pp. 138-39 may be found in *Majmú'iy-i-Khaṭábát-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1984), pp. 386-89, hereafter *Majmú'ih*.

> combine the training of the mind with the purification of the heart and that all authentic knowledge is ultimately an illumination. The ishraqis always emphasized the unbreakable link between philosophy and spirituality and the salvific power of illuminative knowledge. They considered God to be the Light of lights and all degree of cosmic reality to be levels and grades of light.[30]

In other circumstances ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions the Illuminati as “the Society of the Friends, who gathered together for silent communion with the Almighty.”[31] Later he explained in a Tablet:

> This Society was founded in the city of Hamadan six hundred years ago and has nothing to do with this [Bahá’í] movement. It is almost disbanded, but under different names and forms one may come across them in Persia. They were called the Society of Sokoutyyoun, that is, the “Silent Ones.”[32]

As to “occultists,” occultism is “a belief in hidden or mysterious powers and the possibility of subjecting them to human control.”[33] He mentioned “occultists” in a talk delivered in Europe in 1913 and registered in *Divine Philosophy* 93. During his Western travels (1911-1913) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in touch with members of the Theosophical Society. The initial objective of the Theosophical Society, officially formed in New York, in November 1875 by Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) and others, was the “study and elucidation of Occultism, the Cabala etc.”[34] Therefore when he mentioned occultists, perhaps he also meant theosophists.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá takes into consideration the effectiveness of inspiration as a criterion of knowledge. He writes for example in his Tablet of the Inmost Heart:

> And the whisperings (*wasáwis*) of Satan are also inclinations (*khuṭúrát*), which arrive successively upon the heart (*qalb*) by the agency of the soul (*nafs*). If there occureth to the heart a certain idea or question, how is it to be known whether it is an inspiration (*ilhámát*) of the All-Merciful or a whispering (*wasáwis*) of Satan?[35]

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30. “Ishraqi School,” Nov. 30, 2011, in *Islam Encyclopedia*, http://islamweb.us/ishraqi-school.html, retrieved on 15 Oct. 2013.

31. *Paris Talks*, p. 185, sec. 54, para. 1.

32. “A question answered. [From a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Baha to Ella G. Cooper, translated and mailed from Haifa, Syria, March 19, 1916],” *Star of the West* (The first Bahá’í magazine in the Western world, published from 1910 to 1935. Issues 1910 to 1924, RP 8 vols. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1978), vol. 8, no. 14 (23 Nov. 1917), p. 204.

33. Webster’s, p. 1560.

34. See http://hpb.narod.ru/EarlyDaysTheosophyAPS.htm, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

35. Lawḥ-i-Fu’ád, p. 112.

He writes in another Tablet:

> Verily, inspiration, as people understands it, consisteth of the insights (*wáridát*) of the heart and of the intimations (*khuṭúrátin*) and whispers (*wasavis*) of Satan. And when this occureth in the heart, how is it to be known whether it is a divine inspiration (*ilhámát*) or a whispering (*wasáwis*) of Satan?[36]

As to the whisperings of Satan, this locution has its origin in the Surih of Men, which says:

> In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Say: I betake me for refuge to the Lord of Men, The King of men, The God of men, Against the mischief of the stealthily withdrawing whisperer (*al-waswási*), Who whispereth in man's breast – Against djinn and men. (114:1-6)

This critique of inspiration also is expounded in two of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks:

> But what are satanic promptings, which afflict mankind? They are the influx of the heart also. How shall we differentiate between them? The question arises: How shall we know whether we are following inspiration from God or satanic promptings of the human soul?[37]

> The promptings of the heart are sometimes satanic. How are we to differentiate them? How are we to tell whether a given statement is an inspiration and prompting of the heart through the merciful assistance or through the satanic agency?[38]

These words by 'Abdu'l-Bahá reflect a specific vision of human beings, which is summarized in his following words:

> . . . the spirit of man (*rúḥ-i-insání*) has two aspects: one divine (*raḥmaní*), one satanic (*shayṭání*) – that is to say, it is capable of the utmost perfection, or it is capable of the utmost imperfection. If it acquires virtues, it is the most noble of the existing beings; and if it acquires vices, it becomes the most degraded existence.[39]

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36. *Makátíb*, p. 153.
37. *Promulgation*, p. 22.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
39. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 144, sec. 36, para.4; *Mufávaḍát*, p. 102

> . . . . . the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man. This baser nature is symbolized in various ways. In man there are two expressions: One is the expression of nature; the other, the expression of the spiritual realm.[40]

> Satan . . . [is meant as] the natural inclinations of the lower nature. This lower nature in man is symbolized as Satan – the evil ego within us, not an evil personality outside.[41]

Moreover all these passages are reminiscent of the ancient wisdom of Sufi philosophers and poets. The French Islamicist Louis Gardet (1904-1986) writes that in Islamic thought the heart

> is not only the faculty of knowing, it is also the seat of all moral impulses, both evil desires and instincts and the struggle to be free of them and attentive to divine teaching . . . Salvation comes only from the heart's purified knowledge in its dual and inseparable aspects, speculative and actual. Thus it is a complete education of the "heart" that spiritual teachers must constantly develop and enrich in themselves and their disciples.[42]

In this vein Ibn al-'Arabí distinguishes "'the incoming thoughts' which reach the heart[43] into four categories: divine (*ilāhī*), spiritual (*rūḥānī*), ego-centric (*nafsānī*) and satanic" (*shayṭānī*)."[44] He also distinguishes "the influxes of the heart (*wáridátu'l-qalbíyyan*)"[45] into "four species . . . Lordly (*Rabbānī*), angelic (*Malākī*), arising from the soul [ego-centric] (*Nafsī*), satanic (*Shayṭānī*)]."[46] Moreover Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmí (1207-1273), the greatest poet in the Persian language, writes: ". . . both (Satanic) suggestion (*vasvasih*) and Divine inspiration are intelligible, and yet there is a (great) difference (between them)."[47]

He is echoed by the great Sufi poet Shamsu'd-d-Dín Ḥáfiẓ (1315-1390): "In

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40. *Promulgation*, pp. 294-95.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

42. Louis Gardet, "Ḳalb. I. Mysticism," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (CD-ROM edition v. 10 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1999).

43. See "the suggestions of the heart (*khuṭúrátin qalbiyyatin*)" in Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád, p. 112.

44. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. xiii.

45. *Makátíb*, pp. 153 and 397.

46. Ibn al-'Arabí, quoted in Perego, *Parole del sufismo*, p. 255, s.v. Wāridāt.

47. Rúmí, *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'Ddín Rúmí, edited from the oldest manuscripts available: with critical notes, translation and commentary by Reynold A. Nicholson* . . ., vol. 3 (Warminster, Wiltshire: Trustees of the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, 1926), p. 3490; Persian text: *Mathnavíy-i-Ma'naví*. Available at http://rira.ir/rira/php/?page=view&mod=classicpoems&obj=book&id=50, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

love's path, Ahriman's [the Zoroastrian God of evil] temptations (*vasvasih*) are many: Sense keep; and to Surush's [the Zoroastrian angel of obedience] message the ear of the heart put."[48]

In one of his talks delivered in London in 1913 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggested meditation as a path towards divine inspiration. He remarks that there is in man a faculty which "frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God,"[49] independently of the deductive or inductive processes of his mind. Through it "man attains to eternal life . . . he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit."[50] It is "the faculty of meditation."[51] While explaining the nature of this faculty. He quotes the school of "the Illuminati or followers of the inner light."[52] He said about them: "Meditating, and turning their faces to the Source of Light, from that central Light the mysteries of the Kingdom were reflected in the hearts of these people. All the Divine problems were solved by this power of illumination."[53]

Most people think that such a faculty can only be used in the mystic field. Yet it is well known that several great scientists have initially discovered physical laws through this "faculty of meditation" rather than reasoning and deduction: Newton, with his famous apple; Galileo, with the well-known episode of the swinging chandelier in the Cathedral of Pisa. The Bahá'í writings urge us to train ourselves in the use of divine inspiration by a daily practice of meditation and to use it in our endeavours to understand both physical and spiritual reality, for meditation – like a mirror – faithfully reflects whatever is placed in front of it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in this regard:

> The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror: if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these. ¶But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom[54] will be obtained.[55]

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48. *The Dīvān-i-Hāfiz*, trans. by H. Wilberforce Clarke (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 1997), p. 744, n. 444, v. 6; Persian text: *The Divan of Hafiz* (Teheran: Aban Book Publication, 1387 [2008-2009]), p. 411, n. 398, v. 2.

49. *Paris Talks*, pp. 187-88, sec. 54, para. 14.

50. *Ibid*., p. 187, sec. 54, para. 11.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, p. 185, sec. 54, para. 2.

53. *Ibid.*

54 The concept of "Kingdom" is very similar to the concept of "kingdom of heaven" in Matthews.

55. *Paris Talks*, p. 188, sec. 54, paras.17-18. The locution "Sun of Reality" denotes the Holy Spirit.

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that among the prerequisites to obtain the benefits of meditation are purification and detachment. He writes in an above-mentioned Tablet:

> . . . if thy mind become empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forget all else besides God and come in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe and of the divine doctrine.[56]

'Abdu'l-Bahá and, later on, Shoghi Effendi offered a number of suggestions for a better use of inspiration as a source of knowledge. Certainly, testing through the senses, the intellect and the Holy Scripture data received through inspiration and checking them against facts will help us to distinguish tinsel from gold. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote in this regard: "As to the difference between inspiration and imagination: inspiration is in conformity with the Divine Texts, but imaginations do not conform therewith.[57] And Shoghi Effendi said on the same issue: "The inspiration received through meditation is of a nature that one cannot measure or determine . . . We cannot clearly distinguish between personal desire and guidance, but if the way opens, when we have sought guidance, then we may presume God is helping us."[58]

He also said:

> With regard to your question as to the value of intuition as a source of guidance for the individual; implicit faith in our intuitive powers is unwise, but through daily prayer and sustained effort one can discover, though not always and fully, God's Will intuitively. Under no circumstances, however, can a person be absolutely certain that he is recognizing God's Will, through the exercise of his intuition. It often happens that the latter results in completely misrepresenting the truth, and thus becomes a source of error rather than of guidance.[59]

And thus even the fourth criterion of knowledge, inspiration, is limited and fal-

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56. *Tablets*, pp. 706-07.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 195. In this case inspiration could be interpreted as divine inspiration and imagination as the whisperings of our ego.

58. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 Jan. 1943, quoted in *Bahá'í Institutions. A Compilation* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973), p. 111, see also *ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

59. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 29 Oct. 1938, quoted in *Bahá'í Institutions*, p. 109.

lible. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes very clearly: "all the peoples and kindreds possess four balances with which they weigh the realities, the significances, and the divine questions. All of them are imperfect, unable to quench the burning thirst or heal the sick."[60]

And thus one could think that human beings have no possibility of knowing any kind of truth. However, at the end of his talk on "the four methods of acquiring knowledge" in *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "But the bounty (*fayḍ*) of the Holy Spirit (*rúḥu'l-quds*) gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit (*rúḥu'l-quds*) which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained."[61]

The same statement is recorded in the talk he delivered in Hotel Ansonia on 17 April 1912:

> Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable. What then remains? How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself.[62]

The inmost heart as the fifth criterion of knowledge

'Abdu'l-Bahá seems thus to suggest a fifth criterion of knowledge through which "certainty can alone be attained."[63] He specifically mentions this criterion in two of his Tablets. In one of them, the above-mentioned Tablet of the Inmost Heart or Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád, he quotes a Koranic verse: "His heart falsified not what he saw."[64] And he remarks that while explaining this verse he will unfold the details of the balances of discernment (*mawázíni'l-idrák*) that the people possess, and . . . explain and refute them, so that it will be evident and clearly proven that the divine balance (*al-mízani'l-iláhí*) is the inmost heart (*fu'ád*), the fountain-head of guidance (*rashad*).[65]

Then he adds in the same Tablet:

> . . . it is evident that all of [the] balances current among the people are defective and their conclusions are unreliable. Nay, they are confused dreams, doubts, and idle fancies that neither allay the sore athirst nor satisfy the seeker of knowledge (*'irfán*). As for the true,

60. Lawh-i-Fu'ád, p. 110.
61. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296, sec. 83; *Mufáviḍát*, p. 208.
62. *Promulgation*, p. 22.
63. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296, sec. 83; *Mufáviḍát*, p. 208.
64. Koran 53:11, Rodwell trans.
65. Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád, p. 110.

> divine balance which never strayeth, and which ever apprehendeth the universal realities and the sublime inner meanings, it is the balance of the inmost heart (*mízánu'l-fu'ád*), of which God hath made mention in the blessed verse.[66]

The meaning of the criterion of the inmost heart (*mízánu'l-fu'ád*) will be better understood, if one remembers that in the Islamic world the inmost heart (*fu'ád*) is the abode of the light of gnosis (*ma'rifah*), which the ancient Sufi master Ḥakím al-Tirmidhí (820-932 CE circa) defines "a bounty which God gives to His servant."[67] It is the repository of the vision of reality, "for the inner heart (*fu'ád*) sees and the heart (*qalb*) knows."[68] Al-Tirmidhí writes, "as long as the inner heart does not see, the heart cannot make use of its knowledge."[69] Those whose hearts do not see "are veiled by their own selves from the subtleties of the truth because of their preoccupation with their own deeds."[70]

'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that the inmost heart:

> . . . is an effulgence (*tajallíyát*) of the brilliant lights of the Divine Outpouring (*al-fayḍu'l-ilahí*), the secret of the All-Merciful, the manifestation of sincere faith, and the lordly sign. Verily it is an ancient Outpouring (*fayḍu qadím*), a manifest light and a mighty bounty. Should God favor with this gift one of His chosen ones, showering it upon one of His loved ones possessing certitude, verily he will draw nigh unto that station (*maqám*) of which 'Alí (upon him be peace) hath spoken, "If the veil be lifted, I would not increase in certitude!"[71]

These concepts re-echo in the above quoted words recorded in *Some Answered Questions*:

> But the bounty (*fayḍ*) of the Holy Spirit (*rúḥu'l-quds*) gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is

66. *Ibid.*, p. 112. The "blessed verse" is Koran 53:11, see above.

67. Nicholas Heere, "A Ṣūfī Psychological Treatise," in *The Muslim World* (a quarterly journal dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of scholarly research on Islam and Muslim societies and on historical and current aspects of Christian-Muslim relations (Hartford, CT: Wiley-Blackwell publishing, 1911-), vol. 51, no.1 (Jan. 1961): 31.

68. Nicholas Heere, "A Ṣūfī Psychological Treatise," in *The Muslim World*, no. 3 (July 1961): 163, hereafter Heere.

69. Heere, p. 166.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád, p. 113. As to the quotation in the quotation, see Abú Ja'far Ibn Shahráshúb (d. 1192), *Al-Manáqib al-'Alí Talib*, I, 317. http://thearrived.hashemstudios.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Al-Mutashabihat-Allegories-Volume-1.pdf, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

> through the help of the Holy Spirit (*rúḥu'l-quds*) which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained.[72]

'Abdu'l-Bahá also mentions this fifth criterion of truth in another Tablet.[73] After having written that the four common criteria of knowledge are limited and fallible, he writes: "Therefore only unveiling (*al-mukáshifat*) and contemplation (*ash-shuhúd*) remain. . . ." These two words are very well known in the Sufi world, but deserve an explanation in the Western world, which is not usually well versed in that tradition. The Italian essayist and expert in Sufism Paolo Urizzi explains in his Introduction to his translation of the treatise *Maḥásin al-Majális*, translated into English by William Elliot and Adnan K. Abdulla as *The Attractions of Mystical Sessions*,[74] composed by the Sufi Andalusian philosopher Abú'l-Abbás Ibn al-'Aríf (1088-1141) that according to a number of Sufis the seeker obtains "a direct and real knowledge" of the spiritual verities "by virtue of an intuitive unveiling (*kashf*)[75] or of a theophanic radiation (*tajallî*) in the moment in which the individual intellect is wholly absorbed in a contemplative state (*mushâhada*)."[76]

Therefore it seems that this fifth criterion implies two elements: on the one hand, a theophanic radiation (*tajallî* and *mukáshifa*), or divine illumination, on the other, a contemplative state (*shuhúd* or *musháhada*). As to the theophanic irradiation (or divine illumination), it is reminiscent of the description of the fifth criterion of knowledge as "inmost heart*"* given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his Tablet of the Inmost Heart: "an effulgence (*tajallíyát*) of the brilliant lights of the Divine Outpouring (*al-faiḍu'l-ilahí*) . . . an ancient outpouring (*fayḍu qadím*), a manifest light (*núru mubínu*) and a mighty bounty."[77] 'Abdu'l-Bahá said in this regard:

> But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith (*rúḥ-i-ímání*), does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it can-

72. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296, sec. 83; *Mufáviḍát*, p. 208.
73. See *Makátíb*, pp. 151-55.
74. England: Avebury, 1980.
75. The word *kashf* comes from the same root as the word *mukáshifat*.
76. Ibn al-'arif, *Sedute mistiche. Maḥāsin al_majālis* traduzione dall'arabo, con introduzione e note a cura di Paolo Urizzi (Giarre, Catania: L'Ottava Edizioni, 1995), p. 53). The word *mushâhada* comes from the same root, from which also *shuhúd* derives.
77. Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád, p. 113. As to the quotation in the quotation, see Abú Ja'far Ibn Shahráshúb (d. 1192), *Al-Manáqib al-'Alí Talib*, I, 317. http://thearrived.hashemstudios.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Al-Mutashabihat-Allegories-Volume-1.pdf, retrieved on 19 Oct. 2013.

> not discover the heavenly secrets.[78]

As to the spirit of faith, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that:

> . . . the spirit of faith (*rúḥ-i-ímání*) . . . comes from the breath of the Holy Spirit (*rúḥu’l-quds*), and by the divine power it becomes the cause of eternal life. It is the power which makes the earthly man heavenly, and the imperfect man perfect. It makes the impure to be pure, the silent eloquent; it purifies and sanctifies those made captive by carnal desires; it makes the ignorant wise.[79]

Shoghi Effendi compares the spirit of faith to a seed planted in the heart of the seeker, when he comes to recognize the Manifestation of God.[80] He explains:

> This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God. The fact of the matter is that service in the Cause is like the plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds.[81]

As to the contemplative state, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to describe it in this passage:

> I now assure thee, O servant of God, that, if thy mind become empty and pure from every mention and thought and thy heart attracted wholly to the Kingdom of God, forget all else besides God and come in communion with the Spirit of God, then the Holy Spirit will assist thee with a power which will enable thee to penetrate all things, and a Dazzling Spark which enlightens all sides, a Brilliant Flame in the zenith of the

78. *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 208-09, sec. 55; *Mufáviḍát*, p. 148.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-45; *Mufáviḍát*, p. 102.

80. The Manifestations of God are, according to the Bahá’í teachings, the Prophets-Founders of the revealed world religions: Hindu religions, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, the Bábí Faith and the Bahá’í Faith.

81. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 Oct. 1954, quoted in *The Compilation of Compilations.* Prepared by the Research Department of The Universal House of Justice 1963–1990, vol. 2 (Ingleside, NSW, Australia: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991), pp. 24-25, sec. 1334.

> heavens, will teach thee that which thou dost not know of the facts of the universe and of the divine doctrine.[82]

Finally 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes in another Tablet:

> Nothing can demonstrate to a man that what happens in his heart is a divine inspiration, beside the Effusion of Merciful. It is demonstrated by the following passage: "And thou shalt surely guide into the right way" [Koran 42:52]. The intermediary is the Supreme Intermediary, and the niche of the light of guidance, and any inspiration is a ray emanating from this lodestar, which guides and enlightens [coming] from this Luminary.[83]

Similar words echo in another Tablet: "O thou maid-servant of God! The aim of the theosophists is to attain to Truth, but the Truth is unattainable except through the favor of the Holy Spirit. The light hath a center and if one desire to seek it otherwise but from the center, he can never attain to it."[84]

These words seem to imply that without the assistance of the Intermediary, that is the Manifestation of God, it is very difficult for a human being to be divinely inspired. They are reminiscent of Augustine of Hippo (354-530 AD), considered as one of the greatest Christian thinkers of all times, who in the 4th century AD set forth a very similar concept in his well-known doctrine of enlightenment: God is Light that enables man to know.

In another Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains how this fifth criterion of truth works:

> A real, spiritual connection between the True One and the servant is a luminous bounty, which causeth an ecstatic (or divine) flame, passion and attraction. When this connection is secured (or realized) such an ecstasy and happiness become manifest in the heart that man doth fly away (with joy) and uttereth melody and song. Just as the soul bringeth the body in motion, so that spiritual bounty and real connection likewise moveth (or cheereth) the human soul.[85]

All these words are reminiscent of words ascribed to Plotinus by Vaughan:

> You ask, how can we know the Infinite? I answer, not by reason. It is the office of reason to distinguish and define. The Infinite, therefore, cannot be ranked among its objects. You can only apprehend the Infinite by a

82. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, 3 vols. (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1909-1915), pp. 706-07, hereafter *Tablets*.
83. *Makátíb*, p. 398.
84. *Tablets*, p. 592.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

> faculty superior to reason, by entering into a state in which you are your finite self no longer – in which the divine essence is communicated to you. This is ecstasy [Cosmic Consciousness]. It is the liberation of your mind from its finite consciousness. Like only can apprehend like; when you thus cease to be finite, you become one with the Infinite. In the reduction of your soul to its simplest self, its divine essence, you realize this union – this identity.[86]

It does not seem that the fifth criterion of knowledge may be developed through a mere intellectual effort. Rather it seems that it is the result of a process of inner transformation, depending on the achievement of that which the Bahá'i texts conceive as spirituality. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that spirituality is "the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of Divinity," made possible "through the breathes of the Holy Spirit."[87]

Knowledge is always a divine bounty. It becomes "certainty" on the one hand "through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man"[88] and bestows upon man the spirit of faith, on the other, through the effort exerted by the seeker who strives to acquire the capacity of recognizing this bounty out of his "love of reality."[89] These concepts are summarized in the following passage of the Seven Valleys:

> And if, confirmed by the Creator, the lover escapes from the claws of the eagle of love, he will enter the Valley of Knowledge and come out of doubt into certainty, and turn from the darkness of illusion to the guiding light of the fear of God. His inner eyes will open and he will privily converse with his Beloved; he will set ajar the gate of truth and piety, and shut the doors of vain imaginings.[90]

The intuitive knowledge of the Manifestations of God

This fifth criterion of knowledge is reminiscent of the "intuitive" knowledge, or "knowledge of being . . . [which] is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself," and which "is not the outcome of effort and study. It is an existing thing; it is an absolute gift," mentioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá,[91] as typical of the Manifestations of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes it as follows:

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86. Plotinus, "Letter to Flaccus," www.plotinus.com/who_was_plotinus.htm, retrieved on 15 Oct. 2013.

87. *Promulgation*, p. 142. The Persian notes of this talk are recorded in *Majmú'ih*, p. 378.

88. *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296, sec. 83; *Mufáviḍát*, p. 208.

89. *Promulgation*, p. 49.

90. Baha'u'llah, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. by Marzieh Gail in consultation with Ali-Kuli Khan (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 11, hereafter *Seven Valleys*.

91. *Some Answered Questions* p. 156, sec. 40, paras. 4 and 5.

> But the universal divine mind, which is beyond nature, is the bounty of the Preexistent Power. This universal mind is divine; it embraces existing realities, and it receives the light of the mysteries of God. It is a conscious power, not a power of investigation and of research. The intellectual power of the world of nature is a power of investigation, and by its researches it discovers the realities of beings and the properties of existences; but the heavenly intellectual power, which is beyond nature, embraces things and is cognizant of things, knows them, understands them, is aware of mysteries, realities and divine significations, and is the discoverer of the concealed verities of the Kingdom. This divine intellectual power is the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and the Dawning-places of prophethood; a ray of this light falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous, and a portion and a share of this power comes to them through the Holy Manifestations.[92]

This passage explains that "the universal divine mind" is "the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations and the Dawning-places of prophethood," but does not exclude that human beings may have a limited share of it: "a ray of this light falls upon the mirrors of the hearts of the righteous, and a portion and a share of this power comes to them through the Holy Manifestations." In the Manifestations of God this power is inborn and perfect. In human beings it is potential and limited and can be progressively and partially quickened through the divine confirmations and the efforts exerted by seekers, while struggling to acquire capacity and preparedness. As to the divine confirmations, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that they are "the rain of the bounties of God . . . and the heat of the Sun of Reality."[93] He explains that they "change a gnat into an eagle, a drop of water into rivers and seas, and an atom into lights and suns;"[94] make "the weak strong, the lowly mighty, the child grown, the infant mature and the small great;"[95] they "dilate . . . [human] breasts through the fragrances of joy and happiness;"[96] bestow "the utmost eloquence, fluency, ability and skill in teaching;"[97] give the power to "withstand all who inhabit the earth"[98] and to "quicken the souls."[99] Through those confirmations "tongues . . . become fluent . . . hearts like clear mirrors flooded with the rays of the Sun of Truth . . . thoughts expanded . . . comprehension more vivid and . . .

92. *Ibid*., p. 217, sec. 58, para. 4.
93. *The Tablets of the Divine Plan: Revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the North American Bahá'ís* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), p. 64, sec. 9, para. 8.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 73, sec. 10, para. 13.
95. *Tablets*, p. 274.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 460.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 674.

[human beings] progress in the plane of human perfections."[100] As to capacity and preparedness, we are reminded of the following words by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

> The Sun of Reality is shining upon you, the cloud of mercy is pouring down, and the breezes of providence are wafting through your souls. Although the bestowal is great and the grace is glorious, yet capacity and readiness are requisite. Without capacity and readiness the divine bounty will not become manifest and evident. No matter how much the cloud may rain, the sun may shine and the breezes blow, the soil that is sterile will give no growth . . . Therefore, we must develop capacity in order that the signs of the mercy of the Lord may be revealed in us. We must endeavor to free the soil of the hearts from useless weeds and sanctify it from the thorns of worthless thoughts in order that the cloud of mercy may bestow its power upon us. The doors of God are open, but we must be ready and fitted to enter . . . Unless the eyes of perception be opened, the lights of the sun will not be witnessed . . . Therefore, we must endeavor night and day to purify the hearts from every dross, sanctify the souls from every restriction and become free from the discords of the human world. Then the divine bestowals will become evident in their fullness and glory. If we do not strive and sanctify ourselves from the defects and evil qualities of human nature, we will not partake of the bestowals of God.[101]

Final remarks

The fifth criterion of knowledge described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá deserves a number of observations. First, it seems that in our days very few persons think that their inmost heart may be important in their search. And yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that "through the faculty of meditation man . . . receives the breath of the Holy Spirit – the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation."[102] He explains that "You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts."[103] These words are reminiscent of the following warning by Bahá'u'lláh: "we must labor to destroy the animal condition, till the meaning of humanity shall come to light."[104] May we deduct from these words that the inmost heart is especially developed in a spiritually progressed human being?

Second, it seems that the development of the inmost heart, as the fifth criterion of knowledge, is a gradual process related to the purification of the heart from the

100. *Promulgation*, p. 458.
101. *Ibid*., pp. 195-96.
102. *Paris Talks*, p. 187, sec. 54, para. 11.
103. *Ibid*., para. 10.
104. *Seven Valleys*, p. 34.

"whispers (*wasáwis*) which are influxes of the ego (*khuṭúrátin nafsiyyatin*),"[105] or, metaphorically, of Satan intended as "the evil ego within us, not an evil personality outside."[106] However, Shoghi Effendi remarks that:

> The only people who are truly free of the "dross of self" are the Prophets, for to be free of one's ego is a hall-mark of perfection. We humans are never going to become perfect, for perfection belongs to a realm we are not destined to enter. However, we must constantly mount higher, seek to be more perfect.[107]

And thus human beings are invited to strive towards "perfection," even if they are aware that they will never reach it, in the awareness that this struggle will yield a rich harvest of personal and collective progress. 'Abdu'l-Bahá may have mentioned this concept when he said:

> The confirmations of the Spirit are all those powers and gifts which some are born with (and which men sometimes call genius), but for which others have to strive with infinite pains. They come to that man or woman who accepts his life with radiant acquiescence.[108]

Third, it seems that "unveiling (*al-mukáshifat*)" and "contemplation (*ash-shuhúd*)," resulting from the development of one's inmost heart, may be sometimes accompanied by mystical experiences. 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions "ecstasy and happiness," born of the "spiritual connection between the True One and the servant."[109] Shoghi Effendi clarifies the nature and meaning of these kinds of experiences. He says that these experiences "are very rare,"[110] come "to an individual through the grace of God, and not through the exercise of any of the human faculties,"[111] and that "[i]t is very difficult to distinguish between true visions which are true spiritual experiences of the soul and imaginations which have no reality in spiritual truths."[112] Therefore, as precious as such experiences may be

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105. *Makátíb*, p. 397.

106. *Promulgation*, p. 286.

107. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 Jan. 1949, *Lights of Guidance*: *A Bahá'í Reference File* Compiled by Helen Basset Hornby (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 114, no. 389. Prophets may be intended as the Manifestations of God.

108. *'Abdu'l-Bahá in London Addresses and notes of Conversations*. Rpt. (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 120; see also *Divine Philosophy*, p. 22.

109. *Tablets*, p. 196, see above.

110. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 Oct. 1942, *Bahá'í News* (A monthly news journal published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States. Wilmette, IL: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 1924–), no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

111. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 May 1952, quoted in *Bahá'í Institutions*, p. 114.

112. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 26 Nov. 1939, *Bahá'í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

considered by the individual who had them, they "should under no circumstances, be construed as constituting an infallible source of guidance, even for the person experiencing them."[113] He warns his addressees not to "place much importance on" them,[114] and not "to go groping about in the darkness of . . . [one's] imagination after the true thing,"[115] since "[i]f we are going to have some deeply spiritual experience we can rest assured God will vouchsafe it to us without our having to look for it."[116]. He says: "'[w]hen a person endeavors to develop faculties so that they might enjoy visions, dreams etc., actually what they are doing is weakening certain of their spiritual capacities; and thus under such circumstances, dreams and visions have no reality, and ultimately lead to the destruction of the character of the person'."[117]

Therefore, "through the grace of God, and not through the exercise of any of the human faculties,"[118] a person may have meaningful personal mystical experiences, that is, "ecstasy and happiness," born of the "spiritual connection between the True One and the servant,"[119] and "that mystic feeling which unites Man with God,"[120] which are quite different from the sorts of dreams, visions, and psychic experiences about which Shoghi Effendi said, as it was mentioned above, that they "should under no circumstances, be construed as constituting an infallible source of guidance, even for the person experiencing them."[121] And the mystic search after holiness, enjoined upon each human being, is not intended as aiming to achieve these experiences, but to acquire virtues and spiritual powers, which may be used at the service of the cause of the commonweal of humankind. Likewise, unveiling and contemplation, seemingly the result of the development of one's inmost heart, are not a goal we should consciously and willingly pursue. It seems that they will be the spontaneous fruit, which will gradually come to maturation, as the sincere seeker will earnestly struggle on the path of search. This search is not an abstract and intellectual effort, it is an ongoing attitude of service to the common good of humankind.

Fourth, it seems that today most people are interested in attaining a kind of limited knowledge, a kind of knowledge, which is achieved through sense perception, reason, and quite seldom inspiration. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words sound as a call to pursue the path of inner perfection, trusting that it will assist us to develop the required capacities and preparedness so that our "inmost heart" may gradually become our fifth criterion of knowledge, and we may achieve "unveil-

113. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1 Nov. 1940, *Bahá'í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.
114. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 9 April 1948, quoted in *Bahá'í Institutions*, p. 113.
115. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 Oct. 1942, *Bahá'í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.
116. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 Oct. 1942, *Bahá'í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.
117. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 6 May 1952, quoted in *Bahá'í Institutions*, p. 114.
118. *Ibid*.
119. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets*, p. 196.
120. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 8 Dec. 1935, *Bahá'í News*, no. 102 (Aug. 1936): 3.
121. On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 1 Nov. 1940, in *Bahá'í News*, no. 152 (April 1942): 2.

ing" and "contemplation." In this case the range of our knowledge will be greatly widened; our interest will not be limited to the material world, but will be extended to the spiritual worlds. And this expansion is very important, because human beings are not only physical bodies, they also, and especially, are spirits. Therefore human beings should understand both worlds, if they want their lives on earth to be conducive to personal and collective progress. They should finally find a balance between science and religion. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

> Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism.[122]

Perhaps a deeper awareness of this fifth criterion of truth and a wider use of it may be one of the features of the "new race of men"[123] that is gradually arising in this day of "the coming of age of the human race"[124] announced by Bahá'u'lláh.[125]

Last but not least, the development of the inmost heart depends on spiritual progress. Spiritual progress or spirituality, intended as "the awakening of the conscious soul of man to perceive the reality of Divinity," made possible "through the breaths of the Holy Spirit,"[126] is characterized by a progressively deeper consciousness of one's divine nature.[127] This deeper consciousness implies for our intellect and insight to become keener, embracing both the material and spiritual worlds. It also implies for our understanding of tradition or Scripture to become deeper, and immune from superstition, fanaticism and exclusivism. We will thus acquire a kind of knowledge that will make the heart fearful and mindful of its Creator, submitted to His will, as it is revealed in His Scripture. That knowledge is

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122. *Paris Talks*, p. 147, sec. 44, para.15. The Persian notes of this talk are recorded in *Majmú'ih*, pp. 161-64.

123. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of the Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 16.

124. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*: *Selected Letters* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955), p. 206.

125. See Julio Savi, "The newly born babe of that Day." Mysticism in the age of the maturity of humankind. *Lights of 'Irfán. Papers Presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*. Book Seven (Evanston, IL: Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, 2006), pp. 201-20.

126. *Promulgation*, p. 142.

127. The divine nature of man is his power of expressing in the material plane of existence the divine attributes engraved in his soul. See Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God. An Introduction to the Divine Philosophy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989), pp. 91-93, 96-9 etc.

the knowledge of God and of one's true self, that is, the recognition of the image of God engraved in one's soul. There is but one Teacher from whom such knowledge is to be learned and who manifests the primal reason, the divine, universal mind: the Manifestation of God. His school is the best one, because it teaches "the science of the love of God."[128] And when a human being has learnt that science, he will adopt a correct standard of behaviour. Life will be easier for him, because he will more easily accept the divine decrees and recognize tests as opportunities. Otherwise, intellectual knowledge alone, with the sense of accomplishment and superiority that it sometimes implies, can be a real trap for the heart that is deceived by it, a great test for a person and for those about him. Bahá'u'lláh dwells on the theme of knowledge at length in His writings, explaining how both intellectual and inner knowledge are praiseworthy, but that as far as results are concerned intellectual knowledge is subordinate in importance to spiritual knowledge. For example He writes:

> That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds. . . parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.[129]

As to the children:

> We have directed that in the beginning they should be trained in the observances and laws of religion; and thereafter, in such branches of knowledge as are of benefit, and in commercial pursuits that are distinguished for integrity, and in deeds that will further the victory of God's Cause or will attract some outcome which will draw the believer closer to his Lord. We beg of God to assist the children of His loved ones and adorn them with wisdom, good conduct, integrity and righteousness. He, verily, is the Forgiving, the Clement.[130]

'Abdu'l-Bahá commented on this theme:

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128. *Seven Valleys*, p. 52.
129. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Compilation of Compilations* 1: 248, no. 565.
130. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Compilation of Compilations* 1: 250-51, no. 575.

> Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. . . . The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.[131]

In the light of such knowledge the satanic whispers will abate; the divine inspiration will be stronger and more easily recognized.

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131. *Selections*, pp. 135-36, sec.110.

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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IN 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S WRITINGS[*]

". . . if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs [of God's existence] become visible…"

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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Introductory Remarks

The Bahá'í Faith is a monotheistic religion, and the notion of one supreme Deity occupies the central place in Bahá'í thought. On various occasions 'Abdu'l-Bahá stressed the importance of formulating the rational proofs of God's existence. The purpose of human life on earth consists of spiritual progress. However, one cannot strive toward this goal rationally without achieving some certainty about the source of spirituality and life after death. Hence, acquiring the knowledge of God may serve as the first step in the human intellectual journey – an important step that would facilitate our further spiritual advancement. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá admonishes his audience during one of his public addresses:

> Day and night you must strive that you may attain to the significances of heavenly Kingdom, perceive the signs of Divinity, acquire certainty of knowledge and realize that this world has a Creator, a Vivifier, a Provider, an Architect – knowing this through

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> proofs and evidences and not through susceptibilities, nay, rather, through decisive arguments and real vision.[1]

In many of his talks and writings 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out that the essence and the nature of the Supreme Being are hidden from human cognition. The "reality of the Godhead," he writes in one letter,

> . . . is beyond the grasp of the mind . . . how could it be possible for a contingent reality, that is, man, to understand the nature of that preexistent Essence, the Divine Being? . . . man graspeth his own illusory conceptions but the Reality of Divinity can never be grasped. . . . That Divinity which man doth imagine for himself existeth only in his mind, not in truth.[2]

Since no one can ever have knowledge of God-in-himself, the only way for humans to acquire some understanding of divinity is to turn to the effects of God's work on the human plane or to prove the reality of God-for-others. "The utmost one can say," 'Abdu'l-Bahá argues, "is that [the Ultimate Reality's] existence can be proved, but the conditions of Its existence are unknown."[3] And although "the Divine Essence is unseen of the eye, and the existence of the Deity is intangible," he adds in another tablet,

> . . . yet conclusive spiritual proofs assert the existence of that unseen Reality. . . . For instance, the nature of ether is unknown, but that it existeth is certain by the effects it produceth: heat, light and electricity being the waves thereof. By these waves the existence of

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1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (*PUP*), in *Writings and Utterances* of *'Abdu'l-Bahá* (New Delhi, India: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2000), p. 1002.

2. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (*SW*), *ibid.*, pp. 321-22. 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeats his arguments for the impossibility of knowing the nature of God in many of his writings. In "The Tablet to Dr. Forel" (TF), for example, he writes: "Now concerning the essence of Divinity: in truth it is on no account determined by anything apart from its own nature, and can in nowise be comprehended. For whatsoever can be conceived by man is a reality that hath limitations and is not unlimited; it is circumscribed, not all-embracing. It can be comprehended by man, and is controlled by him. . . . Moreover, differentiation of stages in the contingent world is an obstacle to understanding. How then can the contingent conceive the reality of the absolute?" *Ibid*., p. 646.

3. *'Abdu'l-Bahá , SW, ibid.*, p. 326.

> ether is thus proven. And as we consider the outpourings of Divine Grace we are assured of the existence of God.[4]

My paper thus aims at the systematic exposition in the historico-philosophical context of the arguments for God’s existence that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses in his various writings and speeches.

Historical Background

Philosophical reflections about divine reality had already originated in antiquity. The Bible preserves for us, perhaps, the earliest examples of that. In the final book of the Torah, *Deuteronomy,* Moses taught his people how to distinguish false from true prophecies. He said: “If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the LORD has not spoken.”[5] In other words, Moses’ argument was that God’s existence should be inferred from the results of his actions that can be predicted by the prophets – the messengers of God’s will in the human world. And if the outcomes of those actions, as well as the prophecies themselves, do not turn out to be right, then the divine will had nothing to do with it.

Classical Greek philosophers Plato (428-348 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) developed the first known logical arguments for the existence of God. Both thinkers,

> . . . Plato . . . in *Laws X*, and Aristotle . . . in *Metaphysics XII*, argued that the finitude or contingency of objects or events in the world . . . could not provide adequate grounds for the world’s coming into being. An endless chain of contingent or finite causes, they argue, remains implausible. Similarly movement or change within the world points to a Being who is changeless, or the ground of change; to a Being who is “necessary” rather than contingent.[6]

In the Middle Ages this approach was revived and expanded upon by a variety of arguments not only within the Muslim and Christian religious traditions but also in the Hindu philosophical speculation.[7] In Modern

4. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, TF, *ibid.*, p. 647.

5. *New Revised Standard Version, Deuteronomy,* 18:15, 20-22. *The Complete Parallel Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryhal/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York – Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).

6. Anthony C. Thiselton, “God, arguments for the existence of,” *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2002), p. 117.

7. See, for example, a selection from Udayana Ācārya’s (10th century AD) *Kusumāñjali: The Kusumāñjali or Hindu Proof of the Existence of a Supreme Being,*

times, and especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the debates over the existence of God took a new turn in light of the most recent scientific developments in cosmology, biology, and human psychology.

Typology of Proofs – Inner Perception

The basic typology of arguments for the existence of God can be traced back to the early Fathers of the Christian Church. A second-century Christian thinker Clement of Alexandria (b. c. 150 CE) already distinguished between the arguments from the observation of nature and from the contemplation of the soul. The external cosmological proofs and the inner realization of the innate idea of God in one's soul, however, according to Clement, can only lead to the belief in God's existence but not to the discovery of God's nature or to the meaning of divine actions.[8]

In modern philosophical terminology these two types of arguments are called *a priori* (internal proofs) and *a posteriori* (external proofs). The *a priori* proofs of the existence of God were well known and discussed in the early Christian theology. A second-century Christian thinker Athanagoras, for example, was the first in the history of Christian thought to provide a philosophical argument for the existence of one God against the belief of pagan polytheism. Sometimes called "topological," his argument states that by its very definition, God is limitless. If one admits the existence of more than one God, then, those gods will limit each other, thus contradicting the basic premise of the argument. Hence, Athanagoras concludes, there must exist only one God.[9]

The classic formulation of the *a priori* proof, which is known in the history of philosophy as the ontological argument, belongs to the medieval Christian thinker, the Archbishop of Canterbury St. Anselm (1033-1109 CE). In his *Proslogion*, St. Anselm wrote that God

> . . . exists so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist. For it is possible to think that something exists that cannot be thought not to exist, and such a being is greater than one that can be thought not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought; and this

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in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, eds. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 379-85.

8. Mayorov, G. G. *Formirovanie srednevekovoi filosofii. Latinskaia patristika* [Formation of Medieval Philosophy: Latin Patristics] (Moscow: "Mysl'," 1979, p. 88.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 67. Mayorov points out that the topological argument, as Athanagoras formulated it, presupposes the spatial and, therefore, the bodily existence of God.

> is a contradiction. So that than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist.[10]

In Modern times it was René Descartes (1596-1650) who revived St. Anselm’s position and in the twentieth century Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932) discussed it in the context of modal logic of probabilities.[11]

The founder of German Idealism, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), proposed another version of the *a priori* argument – in his case, from the freedom of human will. Kant rejected any proofs that were based on observation of the external world since they rely on the nature of human experience that reflects the workings of the mind rather than the world as it actually is. Instead he appealed to the moral imperative as a necessary pre-condition of God’s existence because, without the fear of divine retribution, humanity would lose its most vital incentive for good moral behavior. Kant’s reference to morality, however, is not, strictly speaking, a valid proof but rather a postulate of practical reason that in no way – according to Kant himself – can be supported by the conclusions arrived at by theoretical reason. As a result, the Kantian approach turns into a paradox – in order for humanity to pursue moral virtues God must exist although we cannot prove that he does.

The third argument from inner perception addresses human emotions, especially those associated with faith and religiosity. The feelings of reverence and love toward God, the fear of losing connection with divinity, by the virtue of their very existence, seem to prove the existence of the object of those feelings. An Anglo-Catholic thinker, A. E. Taylor (1869-1945), provided a modern restatement of the argument in his essay “The Vindication of Religion.” He wrote here about the uniqueness of religious experience:

> It is universal voice of the mutable and temporal brought face to face with the absolutely eternal. . . . As nearly as we can express our attitude towards that which awakens this sense of being immediately in the presence of the “other-worldly” by any one word, we may say that it is the attitude of “worship.”[12]

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10. St Anselm and Gaunilo, “The Ontological Argument,” from *Monologion and Proslogion, with the replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, in *God*, Hackett readings in philosophy, edited, with Introduction, by Timothy A. Robinson Indianapolis – Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), pp. 2-3.

11. See, for example, Alvin Plantinga, *The Ontological Argument* (New York: Doubleday, 1965).

12. A. E. Taylor, “The Vindication of Religion,” in *The Existence of God*, ed. and with an introduction by John Hick (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 159.

This attitude of worship and the sense of the holy that are universally present in all of human civilizations, in Taylor's view, already represent a sufficient proof of the reality of God.

Classical *A Posteriori* Arguments

In contrast to the *a priori* proofs, the *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God rely on the observation of the external world. Thus, the holy book of Islam, the *Qur'ān*

> . . . teaches that God's revelation has occurred in several forms: in nature, history, and Scripture. [Therefore,] God's existence can be known through creation [that] contains pointers or "signs" of God… [through the] history of the rise and fall of nations [that provide the] lessons of God's sovereignty and intervention in history [and] through a series of messengers.[13]

In Islamic, Christian and Jewish philosophy one finds mostly the arguments from the nature of creation that lead to the conclusion of God's existence. The substance of the arguments goes back to Plato and Aristotle who discuss motion and causality and argue for the necessity of the "Prime Mover" in light of the contingency of the physical universe. This line of thought, which is known in the history of philosophy as the cosmological argument, received further development in the Middle Ages.[14]

Medieval Muslim thinkers al-Kindī (c. 813-c. 871 CE) and al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE), for instance, held that the universe was created and, therefore, finite, which made the infinite regress of "caused causes" in this universe impossible. Other Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, 980-1037 CE) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126-98 CE), distanced themselves from the Islamic theology of *kalam* by rejecting the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. For Ibn Rushd, "the world is eternal but caused; God is eternal and uncaused, since God is God's own ground…and is a 'necessary Being'."[15] Both Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, furthermore, argued that since our eternal universe contains contingent beings it must have the Necessary Being as its foundation.[16]

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13. Esposito, John L. *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York – Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), p. 19.

14. For a historical exposition of the cosmological argument see, for example, Craig, W. I. *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

15. Thiselton, "Cosmological argument for the existence of God" in *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 52.

16. For a modern version of Avicenna's cosmological proof, see an article by a Bahá'í philosopher William S. Hatcher "From Metaphysics to Logic: A Modern For-

Jewish and Christian thinkers – Moses Maimonides (1135-1204 CE) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-74 CE) – took the middle way between the interpretations of Muslim *kalam* and the speculations of Islamic philosophy. They sided with Muslim theologians in affirming the doctrine of creation, which is explicitly stated in the scriptures. At the same time they supported the rationalism of Muslim philosophers with respect to the laws of nature and in contrast to the providentialism of al-Kindī and al-Ghazālī who argued, “God is the only true causal agent of every event.”[17]

Overall, the following table can represent the different positions of Muslim, Christian and Jewish thinkers with respect to the cosmological argument:

	Universe is finite	Universe is infinite
God created the universe and is the only true cause agent of every event.	al-Kindī (c. 813–c. 871) al-Ghazālī (1058–1111)	
God created the universe but is not the only true cause agent of every event.	Maimonides (1135–1204) St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74)	Ibn Sīnā or Avicenna, (980–1037) Ibn Rushd or Averroes, (1126–98)

The doctor of the Christian Church, St. Thomas Aquinas, is especially known for his formulations of the *a-posteriori* arguments for God’s existence. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas wrote about the “Five Ways” one could prove the existence of the Almighty. The first three of them represent various versions of the cosmological argument that arrives at its conclusion on the basis of the existence of motion or change, causation and contingency in the world. The fourth way proceeds “from the gradation to be found in things” that points to the superlative degree of exist-

mulation of Avicenna’s Cosmological Proof of God’s Existence” in his book *Logic and Logos: Essays on Science, Religion and Philosophy* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990), pp. 60-80.

17. Thiselton, “Cosmological argument for the existence of God,” *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 52.

ence or divine perfection, to "something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God."[18] Finally, the fifth way presents the teleological argument that postulates the purposive character of the universe, which, in its turn, refers back to the existence of its Designer.

The *a posteriori* arguments that appeal to history and divine revelation, to my knowledge, have not been sufficiently explored in the Christian tradition. Their examples can be traced in medieval Hindu speculation, more specifically in the Nyāya school of religious philosophy. Here one finds proofs, which are based on the authority of scriptural texts and the very nature of religion and religious rituals that originate in sacred scriptures:

> The right knowledge caused by testimony is one which is produced by a quality in the speaker, viz., his knowledge of the exact meaning of the words used; hence the existence of God is proved, as he must be the subject of such a quality in the case of the [Hindu scripture of the] Veda.[19]

Or: "The knowledge produced by the Veda is produced by a virtue residing in its cause, because it is right knowledge, just as is the case in the right knowledge by perception…"[20]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Arguments from Nature

As far as I know, in his writings and public addresses, 'Abdu'l-Bahá never mentions the *a priori* arguments for God's existence. Sometimes he hints at the inner perception as the source of those arguments but even then he does not explore this line of thought in more detail. In *Some Answered Questions* he mentions the depth of inner perception as a sign of strength and adds that the external arguments are needed for those whose spiritual understanding is limited and whose souls are weak. He says, "if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible…but for those who are deprived of the bounty of the spirit, it is necessary to establish external arguments."[21]

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18. St Thomas Aquinas, "The Five Ways," from *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Question 2, articles 1 & 3, in *God*, Hackett readings in philosophy, p. 16.

19. Udayana Ācārya's (10th century AD) *Kusumāñjali: The Kusumāñjali or Hindu Proof of the Existence of a Supreme Being*, in *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, p. 381.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

21. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (*SAQ*), in *Writings and Utterances*, p. 133.

All of the proofs of God’s existence that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discusses are the *a posteriori* arguments, which are based on our observation of the external world. Most of them involve the order and composition of the natural universe, and echo the “Five Ways” of St. Thomas Aquinas. In his various writings and talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá formulates his own versions of the cosmological argument, which Aquinas divided into three separate parts that address change, causation and contingency of the world. With regard to change, in *Some Answered Questions* ‘Abdu’l-Bahá notes, that “the least change produced in the form of the smallest thing proves the existence of a creator: then can this great universe, which is endless, be self created and come into existence from the action of matter and the elements?”[22] The logic behind the argument is that change or motion in the world necessarily requires the existence of an entity, which set the world in motion, and that is what people call God.

In “The Tablet to Dr. Forel” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá turns to the second part of the cosmological argument, which is related to causation. He writes:

> As we . . . reflect with broad minds upon this infinite universe, we observe that motion without a motive force, and an effect without a cause are both impossible; that every being hath come to exist under numerous influences and continually undergoeth reaction…Such process of causation goes on, and to maintain that this process goes on indefinitely is manifestly absurd. Thus such a chain of causation must of necessity lead eventually to Him who is the Ever-Living, the All-Powerful, who is Self-Dependent and the Ultimate Cause.[23]

The third part of the argument that involves the existence of contingent beings as proof of the reality of the Necessary Being, takes several forms in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings. In *Some Answered Questions*, for example, he argues, “a characteristic of contingent beings is dependency, and this dependency is an essential necessity, therefore, there must be an independent being whose independence is essential.”[24] In another place, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá correlates dependency, which is essential to the entities in the contingent world, with limitations and mutual influences that follow from this notion. He points out: “although all created things grow and develop, yet are they subjected to influences from without.” He writes,

22. *Ibid.*
23. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, TF, *ibid.*, p. 647.
24. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *SAQ*, *ibid.*, p. 133.

> Thus each one of these entities exerteth its influence and is likewise influenced in its turn. Inescapably then, the process leadeth to One Who influenceth all, and yet is influenced by none, thus severing the chain. And further, all created beings are limited, and this very limitation of all beings proveth the reality of the Limitless; for the existence of a limited being denoteth the existence of a Limitless One."[25]

Yet another version of the same argument in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings is related to the creation of man – the highest creature who is still a contingent being that has limited abilities and depends on divine help in his intellectual and spiritual growth. "One of the proofs and demonstrations of the existence of God," he writes, "is the fact that man did not create himself…the creator of man is not like man because a powerless creature cannot create another being. The maker, the creator, has to possess all perfections in order that he may create."[26]

The "Fourth Way" of St. Thomas Aquinas is based on the gradations of things and various degrees of perfection, which presuppose the necessity of the superlative degree or God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes a similar argument in *Some Answered Questions* where he says that the "imperfections of the contingent world are in themselves a proof of the perfection of God" and, hence, "the smallest thing proves the existence of a creator."[27] In the "Tablet to Dr. Forel" he uses the idea of limitation in the same context:

> . . . limitation itself proveth the existence of the unlimited, for the limited is known through the unlimited; just as weakness itself proveth the existence of wealth. . . . Darkness itself is a proof of the existence of light, for darkness is the absence of light.[28]

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25. *'Abdu'l-Bahá , SW, ibid.*, p. 323.

26. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *SAQ, ibid.*, p. 132. 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeats the same argument in *PUP*: "It is perfectly evident that man did not create himself and that he cannot do so. . . . Therefore, the Creator of man must be more perfect and powerful than man. If the creative cause of man be simply on the same level with man, then man himself should be able to create, whereas we know very well that we cannot create even our own likeness." *Ibid.*, p. 876.

27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , *SAQ, ibid.*, pp. 132-33.

28. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, TF, *ibid.*, p. 648. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, repeats the same argument in *PUP*: "Among the proofs of the existence of a divine power is this: that things are often known by their opposites. Were it not for darkness, light could not be sensed. Were it not for death, life could not be known. . . . Therefore, our weakness is an evidence that there is might. . . . In other words, demand and supply is the law, and un-

The “Fifth Way” of St. Thomas Aquinas is known as the teleological argument, and it states that the natural order and harmony of the universe must have the intelligent Designer as their ultimate source. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often makes use of this argument in his speeches and writings. In “The Tablet to Dr. Forel,” for instance, he points out “as we observe the coming together of elements giveth rise to the existence of beings, and knowing that beings are infinite, they being the effect, how can the Cause be finite?” Later in his letter to Dr. Forel, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá elaborates on this point in greater details.

He begins with the assumption that “formation is of three kinds and of three kinds only: accidental, necessary and voluntary.” As for the first one, he argues, the “coming together of various constituent elements of beings cannot be accidental, for into every effect there must be a cause. It [also] cannot be compulsory,” he continues,

> . . . for then the formation must be an inherent property of the constituent parts and the inherent property of a thing can in nowise be dissociated from it…Thus under such circumstances the decomposition of any formation is impossible, for the inherent properties of a thing cannot be separated from it.
>
> Hence, only one possibility remains, namely, that of the voluntary formation, meaning, “an unseen force described as the Ancient Power, causeth these elements to come together, every formation giving rise to a distinct being.[29]

Therefore, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concludes, “this infinite universe with all its grandeur and perfect order could not have come to exist by itself.” And “[a]s one’s vision is broadened and the matter observed carefully,” he goes on,

> . . . it will be made certain that every reality is but an essential requisite of other reality. Thus to connect and harmonize these diverse and infinite realities an all-unifying Power is necessary, that every

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doubtedly all virtues have a center and source. The source is God, from Who all these bounties emanate.” *Ibid.*, p. 647.

29. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, TF, *ibid.*, pp. 647-48. The argument is restated on page 650: “. . . every arrangement and formation that is not perfect in its order we designate as accidental, and that which is orderly, regular, perfect in its relations and every part of which is in its proper place and is the essential requisite of the other constituent parts, this we call a composition formed through will and knowledge. There is no doubt that these infinite beings and the association of these diverse elements arranged in countless forms must have proceeded from a Reality that could in no wise be bereft of will or understanding.”

> part of existent being may in perfect order discharge its own function.[30]

To sum up, the perfect composition of the natural world presupposes its intelligent Designer in the same way as a "piece of bread proves that it has a maker."[31] Similarly, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out,

> . . . what has been written presupposes and proves the existence of a writer. These words have not written themselves, and these letters have not come together of their own volition…And now consider this infinite universe. Is it possible that it could have been without a Creator? Or that the Creator and cause of this infinite congeries of words should be without intelligence?[32]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Arguments from History

One has to note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides significantly less arguments for the existence of God with regard to history and historical events than he does with respect to the nature and order of the universe. His detailed explanations of the function of prophecy belong rather to the field of philosophical anthropology while his discussions of the evolution of religion and progressive revelation constitute an integral part of his philosophy of history. Nevertheless, one finds in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings one implicit argument from history that is supposed to deliver a definite proof of divine existence. It involves the effects, or, in Biblical terms, the fruits of the lives and teachings of the prophets.

"A Cause which all the governments and peoples of the world, with all their powers and armies, cannot promulgate and spread, one Holy Soul can promote without help or support!" – 'Abdu'l-Bahá exclaims in *Some Answered Questions* and asks his readers: "Can this be done by human power?" He continues: "For example, Christ, alone and solitary, upraised the standard of peace and righteousness, a work which all the victorious governments with all their hosts are unable to accomplish." "What I mean," he says in conclusion, "is that Christ sustained a Cause that all the kings of the earth could not establish!"[33] This achievement alone, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, stands as a definite proof of the divine source of Christ's power. It also represents, we may add, the mother of all proofs that relate to history, and can be extended to the teachings of all the prophets and founders of world religions as well as to the influences,

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 648-49.
31. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *SAQ*, *ibid.*, p. 133.
32. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *PUP*, *ibid.*, p. 876.
33. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *SAQ*, *ibid.*, p. 135.

which the sacred writings exert on people, and to the survival of religious minorities despite severe persecutions and cruel conquests by countless empires – the list of derivative historical proofs of the existence of God and his involvement in human affairs could be multiplied almost *ad infinitum*.

Conclusions

The aim of my paper was to systematize and present in the context of world philosophy the arguments for the existence of God that are scattered throughout the numerous writings and utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. From a Bahá’í perspective, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá occupies a unique place in religious history and Bahá’ís believe that his knowledge was inspired by the Holy Spirit. From the standpoint of comparative philosophy, one could also make the following conclusions:

(1) Most of the arguments that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explicitly uses are known in the history of philosophy as the so-called *a posteriori* proofs of the existence of God;

(2) Although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá never mentions St. Thomas Aquinas, most of the arguments he discusses – with certain individual variations – fall under the rubric of Aquinas’ “Five Ways.” Since medieval Christian thought was largely influenced by classical Muslim philosophy and theology, it is possible that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was well versed in and may have drawn from the Muslim thought on the subject.

(3) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá never wrote a systematic philosophical treatise on the subject of proofs and was not obliged to analyze the historical development of the topic. In his writings and public addresses he usually does not mention the names of individual philosophers but rather goes to the heart of the argument with the intention of strengthening the faith of his readers or listeners. Still, in my opinion, it is significant that he does not address modern Western thought on the subject of proofs, more specifically, the Kantian rebuttal of *a priori* and *a posteriori* arguments from his *Critique of Pure Reason*[34] and especially Kant’s critique of the ontological argument, which (the argument), as far as I know, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá never discusses. It seems to me that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá may have been less familiar with modern Western thought on the subject than with classical philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

34. See Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), ch. III, Sections 3-6, pp. 495-524, where Kant unfolds his critique of traditional arguments for the existence of God.

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COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

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A LOOK AT HARMONY AND UNITY AS COMMON PRINCIPLES IN THE CONFUCIAN SYSTEM AND THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

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Introduction

One may well ask the purpose of a comparison of two systems of philosophy or belief. More particularly, why a comparison of the Confucian system and the Bahá'í Faith, especially given the existence of a book that looks at this very subject, with Confucianism in the broader context of Chinese belief systems?[1] To answer the latter question first: This paper focuses exclusively on Confucianism, in part because Confucianism can be considered the driving philosophy – even if it is not always articulated consciously – at the root of most East Asian cultures.[2] In many ways, it is more fundamental in shaping the ethics and even daily practices of East Asian cultures than Buddhism, Daoism, or the various animist beliefs that continue to exist either independently or in a syncretic form in those cultures.[3]

As for the formalized comparison of the Confucian thought with the Bahá'í Faith presented here, the rationale lies in the continuing need to understand these kinds of systems as attempts to create cohesive, living

1. Phyllis Ghim Lian Chew, *The Chinese Religion and the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1993).

2. For one look at the development of Confucian thought in China, Korea, and Japan, see John H. Berthrong, *Transformations Of The Confucian Way* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

3. I wish to thank Prof. Mikhail Sergeev for giving me the opportunity to explore this subject through the present paper.

social structures, rather than simply abstract "sets of beliefs." If one looks at Confucian ethical principles and those of the Bahá'í Faith, it is clear that they are sophisticated attempts to bring rational and – in the case of the Bahá'í Faith – spiritual teachings to bear in organizing human behavior. The ultimate goal of both systems – and many other systems, of course – is for human beings to live in a society characterized by *harmony*, a goal achieved by the *unity* of a shared ethical practice.

The reader should understand that in the Bahá'í Faith, this concept of "unity" also exists beyond the idea of shared ethical practice (although this paper will focus on the latter). In the Bahá'í Faith, the concept of unity relates directly to the single nature of humanity as a whole ("Oneness of Mankind"), and reflects a truly universal vision:

> Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind – the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve – is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. . . . Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family.[4]

Note that the declarations here are of a broader vision, but at the same time there is – as in the writings of Confucius – a pragmatic element: this is, Shoghi Effendi states, "no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope". As one commentator puts it, "The Bahá'í vision is not some utopian fantasy – it is the next inevitable stage in the long process of human social evolution."[5] The overall message, moreover, is that this is not just about the "individual"; Shoghi Effendi goes on to say:

> It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. . . .

4. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, as quoted in Kenneth E. Bowers, *God Speaks Again: An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2004), p. 227; also see William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998), p. 76.

5. Bowers, *God Speaks Again*, p. 227.

> It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world – a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language. . . .[6]

Again, the concept is visionary and broad, even as the terms –"political machinery," "spiritual aspiration," "trade and finance," and so on, are quite practical.

Confucius outlines specific virtues, examined in detail in this paper, to build his model of ethical practice, while the Bahá'í Faith in some sense works in reverse, providing broad principles – such as love and tolerance – under which humans can then practice particular ethical behaviors, such as being free from prejudice.

Both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith represent complex and multifaceted systems of philosophy, practice, and belief, and the reader is asked here to accept a somewhat simplified representation of those systems for the sake of a clear and concise study. Moreover, for Confucianism, this paper will draw almost exclusively from the *Analects* (論語 *Lún yǔ*), again for the sake of presenting what one might call the "core" ethical system of Confucius.[7] We will not explore, for example, the philosophy of Neo-Confucianism and its parallels with the Bahá'í Faith – which could indeed, however, serve as the basis for an interesting subsequent study. [8] In terms of the Bahá'í Faith, we will draw primarily from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh here.

Finally, this paper is not a "survey" comparison of Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith; that has been done well elsewhere.[9] Rather, we focus here — through a close reading of the texts — on particular aspects of each system that resonate most strongly with each other.

Confucian Thought and the Bahá'í Faith: Origins and Contexts

Given the importance of Confucius and his philosophy, it is remarkable how little is known about him. In Chinese, he is typically known as 孔子 (*Kǒngzǐ*), which simply means "Master Kong." Another appellation is

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6. *Ibid.*

7. All reference to the *Analects* in this paper are from Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., eds., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998).

8. For a good introduction to Neo-Confucianism, see Anne D. Birdwhistell, *Transition to Neo-Confucianism: Shao Yung on Knowledge and Symbols of Reality* (Standford, CA: Standford University Press, 1989).

9. See Chew's *The Chinese Religion and the Bahá'í Faith*, cited in fn. 1.

孔夫子 (*Kǒngfūzǐ*), the source of the Latinized version of his name, "Confucius."

The actual dates of his life are uncertain, although they are traditionally given as 551 - 479 B.C.E. It seems that Confucius came from an aristocratic family, but one which was no longer wealthy in his lifetime. Confucius himself never held a high political post, although he indeed was an educated man. In fact, his goal was to realize his philosophy through serving a ruler, and so much of his life was spent moving from place to place, looking for the head of a feudal state who might be interested in his principles. Yet Confucius never gained any fixed role or position, and in the end he returned to his native state of Lu (魯國 *Lǔ guó*).

Confucius lived during a time of marked instability, with various states engaged in escalating internecine violence, driven by the knowledge that no state was exempt, and that all comers were competing in a zero-sum game – to fail to win was to perish. The accelerating ferocity of battle was like the increasing frequency and severity of labor pains, anticipating the eventual birth of the imperial Chinese state.[10]

Not surprisingly, the Bahá'í Faith appeared at a similar nexus of historical change. The fertile, even volatile, period of the mid-nineteenth century saw the rise of the Bábí movement, that later led to the founding of the Bahá'í Faith. The founder of the Bábí movement, Siyyid `Alí Muḥammad Shírází (1819 - 1850), later known as the *Báb* (literally, "gate"), was similar to Confucius in his awareness of his location in history, and the need for societal change. One study notes:

> His principle book, the Bayán, envisioned a time when Persia's accumulated legacy of misspent energy would be entirely destroyed and the intellectual capacities of its people liberated from superstition. He spoke of a coming age in which entirely new fields of scholarship and science would emerge and in which the knowledge of even young children would far surpass the learning current in his own time.[11]

Confucius, as we shall see, similarly rejected superstition, and as to youth, he similarly wrote:

10. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 2.
11. Hatcher and Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith*, p. 24.

> The young should be held in high esteem. After all, how do we know that those yet to come will not surpass our contemporaries?[12]

As in Confucian thought, the Bábí movement drew from the past while envisioning a very different future:

> The Báb's way . . . was to create the concept of an entirely new society, one that retained a large measure of cultural and religious elements familiar to hearers, but which, as events were to show, could arouse powerful new motivation. He called upon the Shah and the people of Persia to follow him in the establishment of this society . . . [and] he elaborated a system of laws for the conduct of public affairs [and] for the maintenance of peace and public order. . . .[13]

The Bábí leader who was to found the Bahá'í Faith was Bahá'u'lláh (meaning "Glory of God"), born Mírzá Ḥusayn-`Alí Núrí (1817 - 1892).[14] Again, much like Confucius, he had a "reputation for personal integrity" [15] and lived in a period of complex geopolitical and social change – the beginnings of the slow death of the Ottoman Empire, struggles between the European powers for influence in the Middle East and Central Asia, and the broader conflict between the modernity wrought by the nineteenth-century Western ideas and traditional beliefs.

As with many remarkable thinkers, Confucius gained renown posthumously. His idealized role as a teacher developed during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. - 220 A.D.). Eventually, of course, his philosophical principles became deeply influential in education and even political philosophy, not just in China but also other parts of East Asia. Bahá'u'lláh was much more influential in his own lifetime, although he seemed to have been little known to Westerners.[16]

Confucius' ideas are framed on a basic model that includes both the universe and mankind's role in that universe. Confucian philosophy draws from the fundamental idea that the universe is ordered and has a pattern, and second, that mankind can exist in natural harmony with this pattern. Moreover, Confucius considers humans to be social beings, who have to engage in the world and in relationships with each other. Such re-

12. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 131.
13. Hatcher and Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith*, p. 25.
14. For a brief overview of Bahá'u'lláh's life, see *ibid.*, pp. 28-49.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

lationships will be harmonious, Confucius notes, if they are clearly articulated and bound by "authoritative conduct." The key relationships are five in number: (1) sovereign-subject; (2) husband-wife; (3) parent-child; (4) elder brother-younger brother; and (5) friend-friend. These relationships require each individual to carry out their role to the utmost, in terms of responsible behavior, so that one is an integral part of a community – in short, "role ethics."[17] The connection between relationships and this "authoritative conduct" is nicely defined by the Chinese term for the latter, 仁 (*rén*), which is "the foremost project taken up by Confucius."[18] The character itself is composed of two Chinese characters: for "person" 人 (*rén*) and the character for "two" 二 (*èr*). As one study notes:

> This etymological analysis underscores the Confucian assumption that one cannot become a person by oneself – we are, from our inchoate beginnings, irreducibly social.[19]

Confucius thus believes both that mankind should adhere to proper conduct and that any kind of unified society would arise only through harmonious relationships. In such a society, moreover, a ruler's primary role was to be a model in terms of conduct, and have strong relationships to both the divine order of the universe and the subjects of the earthly realm. The ruler was to serve in some sense as an exemplar for the people, and as a conduit between the people and the divine order.

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh do not have such an explicit emphasis on relationships, although there is the similar idea that our individual spiritual growth happens in a social context. In other words, because, "we are social beings, our greatest progress is made through living in association with others."[20] This idea of association, even communality, is clearly outlined in the three basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith: "(1) the oneness of God; (2) the oneness of mankind; and (3) the fundamental unity of religion."[21] In this paper, we will focus particularly on the Bahá'í idea of "the oneness of mankind," as that is where Bahá'í thought is most akin to Confucian philosophy.

Despite what appears to us to be the profoundly novel way of thinking exhibited by Confucius, he viewed himself not as an originator, but as a

17. On this concept, see Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2011)

18. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 48.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Hatcher and Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith*, pp. 104-05.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

transmitter – he claimed that he was simply passing on the wisdom of the ancients. In *Analects* 7.1, Confucius says, "I do not forge new paths; with confidence I cherish the ancients."[22] This claiming of a heritage from a lost "golden age" is not unusual in Chinese thought, nor is it particular to Chinese culture. However, that is not to dismiss its importance in this particular case: Confucius wished to apply a "corrective" to the decadent practices and abuses of power that he saw around him, and by harkening back to the past he could put some weight behind his critiques. For Confucius, the past supplied a sound, irrefutable standard.

In a similar manner, the founders of the Bahá'í Faith – while presenting some quite new ideas – at the same time saw themselves as part of the continuum of the Islamic tradition.[23] In a broader sense than in the Confucian system, the Bahá'í see a very particular place for themselves, moreover, not only in that Islamic history, but also in the religious history of the world." Indeed, the "interventions by God in human history" are seen as "progressive, each revelation from God more complete than those which preceded it, and each preparing the way for the next."[24] In this continuum, Islam is the result of the most recent such intervention before the Báb, and historically served as the background for the rise of the Bahá'í Faith.[25] More particularly, just as Confucius wished to correct the decadence of his age, the Bábí movement that preceded the formalized Bahá'í Faith arose in opposition to a world that, as one study describes it, "had changed little from medieval times, except to become more obscurantist, isolated, and fatalistic."[26]

Some Contrasts

The most fundamental contrast between Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith, perhaps, is their place in history. Simply put, viewed from the present, Confucianism is old, while the Bahá'í Faith in some sense is "new," so that the latter addresses directly several contemporary issues, such as the equality of men and women; the elimination of prejudice; and the use of spiritual approaches to the solving of economic problems. Confucian principles certainly can be applied to these issues, but Confucius himself in the *Analects* does not quite address them directly. In terms of historical *contexts*, however, both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith arose in similarly unstable, troubled times, as highlighted earlier.

22. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 111.
23. See the comments in Hatcher and Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith*, p. 2 et ff.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The other key contrast, of course, is that Confucian ethics are not drawn directly from any complex theological structure, although there is an idea of the transcendent in the *Analects* and in other Confucian and Neo-Confucian works.[27] The Bahá'í Faith and its principles are based on a belief in God. It is interesting to note, however, that in the texts of Bahá'u'lláh, we see some pragmatic approaches to religion, which actually serve as a contrast to Confucian ideas:

> It is not necessary to undertake special journeys to visit the resting-places of the dead.[28]

In Analects 1.9, however, a disciple of Confucius, states:

> Be circumspect in funerary services and continue sacrifices to the distant ancestors, and the virtue of the common people will thrive.[29]

But these are small differences. Given the vast separation in time between the Confucian *Analects* and the rise of the Bahá'í Faith, and their quite different cultural contexts, it is actually remarkable how similar their principles are.

Points of Convergence

Even a quick reading of the *Analects* with certain Bahá'í texts also at hand shows some rather clear points of convergence. But this is not surprising in that these two systems – like many other such systems – are broad attempts to wrestle with human behavior in an attempt to create a better world. Yet even when we look more closely here, we still see this convergence, and on a rather detailed level.

A fruitful place to look, in fact, is in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. We begin with the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, a collection of writings comprising selected tablets that cover such subjects as teachings and laws, personal character, knowledge of God, and the development of mankind.[30]

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27. See the discussion in Yong Huang, "Confucian Theology: Three Models," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 4 (July 2007): 455-78.

28. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh: A Compilation*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998), p. 212.

29. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 73.

30. The full title of this work is *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice . . .*, trans. Habib Taherzadeh (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994).

In Bahá'u'lláh's *Bishárát* ("Glad Tidings"), for example, we find a number of analogues to passages in the *Analects*. In the "fifth Glad-Tidings," we read:

> In every country where any of this people reside, they must behave towards the government of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness.[31]

This passage reflects the idea that individual followers of the Bahá'í Faith are to keep the faith separate from political matters and questions. A follower of this faith, wherever they might reside, should obey a government, as long as that government is duly constituted. Recall that one of the underlying principles of both Confucian thought and the Bahá'í Faith is for human beings to live in a society characterized by *harmony*, and one aspect of achieving such a goal is abiding the law. In *Analects* 1.2, we read the words of one of the Confucian disciples, Master You:

> It is a rare thing for someone who has a sense of filial and fraternal responsibility to have a taste for defying authority. And it is unheard of for those who have no taste for defying authority to be keen on rebellion. Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way [道 *dào*] will grow therefrom. As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct.[32]

The key part here is the first line – "It is a rare thing for someone who has a sense of filial and fraternal responsibility to have a taste for defying authority" – and the third line: "Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way [道 *dào*] will grow therefrom." What Confucius is saying here is not to "obey authority," but rather to concentrate on the matter at hand – as in the Bahá'í Faith, this means one's own direct moral and social responsibilities.

There are several implications in the *Analects* passage. The first is that it is wise to avoid getting involved in outright rebellion. Second implication is that good governance at a larger scale will follow *naturally* from individuals concentrating on their own "filial and fraternal responsibility," i.e., at a smaller, local scale. Finally, individuals engaging in these responsibilities will create a model for others to follow, and thus bring about change "organically" rather than through confrontation and revolt.

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31. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 209.
32. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 71.

One can certainly read the *Bisháárát* passage above in the same way. Indeed, in a letter written by Shoghi Effendi (1897 - 1957), who was the head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 until 1957, we find a comment that explicates this passage from the *Bisháárát*:

> The cardinal principle which we must follow... is obedience to the Government prevailing in any land in which we reside. . . . We see, therefore, that we must do two things – shun politics like the plague, and be obedient to the Government in power in the place where we reside... [T]he Bahá'ís must turn all their forces into the channel of building up the Bahá'í Cause and its Administration. They can neither change nor help the world in any other way at present. If they become involved in the issues the Government's of the world are struggling over, they will be lost. But if they build up the Bahá'í pattern they can offer it as a remedy when all else has failed.[33]

Note here the idea of disengagement from broad-scale politics, as in the *Analects*. Note, too, the idea that one could become "lost" in the sense of one's moral compass if involved in political issues. Most important, however, is the last line. In the *Analects*, "filial and fraternal responsibility" can be the "root" of a world that runs with proper "conduct," and here in Shoghi Effendi's commentary we see the very similar idea that the "Bahá'í pattern" can be a "remedy" to a world that is "struggling." This is also the fundamental idea introduced at the beginning of this paper: the *unity* of a shared ethical practice can serve as the road to a society characterized by *harmony*, or a remedy for a society that suffers from disharmony.

Confucius, of course, was greatly concerned with governance and its relation to achieving a better society. In *Analects* 2.1, we read:

> Governing with excellence can be compared to being the North Star: the North Star dwells in its place, and the multitude of stars pay tribute.[34]

This passage can be read, too, as resonant with Bahá'í thought. As a metaphor for leadership, the North Star is carefully chosen by Confucius – and not just because of its use in navigation. Perhaps drawing from a typically contrarian Daoist perspective, Confucius has chosen a *passive*

33. See Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, comp. Gertrude Garrida (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 56-57.

34. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 76.

object as an exemplar of leadership. The North Star does not *try* to be a leader; it governs by simply being what it is: a fixed star in the heavens.

Even as fine a detail as the role of clothing is found both in the Confucian *Analects* and Bahá'u'lláh's *Bishárát*. In *Analects* 10.6, we read:

> Persons of nobility do not use reddish black or dark brown for the embroidered borders of their robes, nor do they use red or purple in casual clothing. In the heat of summer, they would wear an unlined garment made of fine or coarse hemp, but would invariably wear it over an undergarment to set it off. With black upper garments they wear lambskin; with undyed silk upper garments, fawn fur; with yellow-brown upper garments, fox fur. Casual fur robes were long overall, but the right sleeve was somewhat short. They are certain to have a nightcoat half his body in length. They use the thick fur of the fox and badger for sitting rugs. Outside of the mourning period, they wear whatever girdle ornaments they please. Apart from pleated ceremonial skirts, they would invariably have their skirts tailored. A lambskin coat and a black cap could not be worn on funeral occasions. On New Year's Day, they would invariably go to court in full court attire.[35]

Similarly, in *Analects* 10.7, we read that, "In periods of purification, Confucius would invariably wear a spirit coat made of plain cloth."[36] To the modern reader, the description in the passage above seems obsessive, if not outright absurd. But in the Confucian system, how one dresses is part of adherence to ritual – and that is, in turn, part of propriety (禮 *lǐ*). Propriety is an idea, interestingly, which appears rarely in Western philosophical systems. In its most literal sense, it the "performance of a ritual action."[37] But by extension, then, it is the way an individual should behave so that society – which, to Confucius is the sum of careful, reflective individuals behaving with propriety can function.

While the *Bishárát* does not include such a prescriptive passage concerning clothing, we do indeed read the following:

35. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

37. For an extended definition, see Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the* Zhongyong (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 34.

> The choice of clothing and the cut of the beard and its dressing are left to the discretion of men. But beware, O people, lest ye make yourselves the playthings of the ignorant.[38]

Here, we see an obvious reference to clothing as regulated by religious edicts. But note the message here: One the one hand, there is the idea of a breaking away from particular strictures. But on the other hand, there is also an admonition. The subtext here may be the same, then, as in the passage from the *Analects*: however one dresses, and even given freedom of choice, *observe propriety*.

Connected with the idea outlined above is the sense that when a person dresses and goes out, they are on display – and must be self-aware so as to not "lose face" (丢臉 *diū liǎn*). This concept of "face" and the culture of shame often are considered uniquely Chinese, but actually can be found in other cultures as well.[39] As pertains to Bahá'í thought, the "first leaf" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* ("Words of Paradise") states that 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.[40]

Confucius ties together, too, the idea of shame and the concept of good governance in *Analects* 2.4:

> Lead the people with administrative injunctions and put them in their place with penal law, and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves.[41]

38. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 209.

39. For a discussion of the role of shame in Chinese culture, see pp. 181 et ff. of Heidi Fung, "Affect and Early Moral Socialization: Some Insights and Contributions from Indigenous Psychological Studies in Taiwan," in Uichol Kim, Kuo-Shu Yang, and Kwang-Kuo Hwang, eds., *Indigenous and Cultural Psychology: Understanding People in Context* (New York: Spring, 2006), pp. 175-96. For an example in another culture, see Kofi Agyekum, "The Sociocultural Concept of Face in Akan Communication," *Journal of Pragmatics and Cognition* 12, no. 1 (2004): 71-92.

40. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 232.

41. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 76.

Shame, in this view, is another structure to help guide individuals in their ethical development. Such individuals can then "order themselves" – a term that once more suggests the larger goal of creating a better society.

In contrast to this communal model, another early school of Chinese thought, Daoism – especially as articulated in the *Zhuangzi* (莊子 *Zhuāngzǐ*) – seems to advocate at least a certain degree of seclusion and withdrawal from society. In Western philosophy, we find a similar strain, though with some caveats. Epicurus "advocated withdrawal" from mercantile and political affairs.[42] However, he also "stressed engagement with neighbors," and "intended to aid humanity as a whole through his philosophy."[43] Confucius seems to be more of the Epicurean strain, and here again we will see a connection to an idea in Bahá'í thought. *Analects* 18.6 addresses the issue directly:

> Old Marsh and Boldly Sunk were out in harness ploughing the field. Confucius, passing their way, sent Zilu to ask them where to ford.
>
> Old Marsh asked him, "Who is that man holding the reins of your carriage?"
>
> "He is Confucius," replied Zilu.
>
> "The Confucius of Lu?"
>
> "Indeed."
>
> "Then he already knows where the ford is."
>
> Zilu turned and asked Boldly Sunk where to ford.
>
> "Who are you?" asked Boldly Sunk.
>
> "I am Zilu."
>
> "You are that follower of Confucius of Lu?"
>
> "The very one."
>
> He then said, "We are inundated like floodwaters. And the whole world is the same. Who then is going to change it into a new world? You follow after a teacher who avoids people selectively. Wouldn't you be better off following a teacher who avoids the world altogether?" As he spoke he continued to turn the earth over the seeds.
>
> Zilu left to inform Confucius. Confucius, with some frustration, replied, "We cannot run with the birds and beasts. Am I not

42. See Yonder M. Gillihan, *Civic Ideology, Organization, and Law in the Rule Scrolls: A Comparative Study of the Covenanters' Sect and Contemporary Voluntary Associations in Political Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 98.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89; also see Jeffrey Fish and Kirk R. Sanders, eds., *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), p. 76.

> one among the people of this world? If not them, with whom should I associate? If the way [道 *dào*] prevailed in the world, I wouldn't need to change it."[44]

A closely related idea is found in the subsequent passage, *Analects* 18.7, where Zilu, a disciple of Confucius, speaks:

> To refuse office is to fail to do what is important and appropriate. If the differentiation between young and old cannot be abandoned, how could one think of abandoning what is appropriate between ruler and subject? This is to throw the most important relationships into turmoil in one's efforts to remain personally untarnished. The opportunity of the exemplary person to serve in office is the occasion to effect what is judged to be important and appropriate.[45]

The careful handling of the issue of seclusion appears also in the *Bisháárát*:

> The pious deeds of the monks and priests among the followers of the Spirit . . . are remembered in His presence. In this Day, however, let them give up the life of seclusion and direct their steps towards the open world and busy themselves with that which will profit themselves and others.[46]

Again, in both sources, we see the idea of engagement with the world, rather than withdrawal. Another text by Bahá'u'lláh, the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* ("Words of Paradise") reiterates this concept. In the "tenth leaf" we read:

> O people of the earth! Living in seclusion or practising ascetism is not acceptable in the presence of God. It behoveth them that are endued with insight and understanding to observe that which will cause joy and radiance. . . . In former times and more recently some people have been taking up their abodes in the caves of the mountains while others have repaired to graveyards at night. . . . Abandon the things current amongst you and adopt

44. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 214.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
46. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 210.

> that which the faithful Counsellor biddeth you. Deprive not yourselves of the bounties which have been created for your sake.[47]

We clearly see the idea here that those who possess what Bahá'u'lláh calls "insight and understanding" should – as the Confucian disciple Zilu puts it – "serve... to effect what is judged to be important and appropriate."

While engagement is emphasized in both the Confucian system and Bahá'í thought, there are also admonitions against distractions from worldly goods. Near the beginning of the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*, we read:

> Man's distinction lieth not in ornaments or wealth, but rather in virtuous behaviour and true understanding. Most of the people in Persia are steeped in deception and idle fancy. How great the difference between the condition of these people and the station of such valiant souls as have passed beyond the sea of names and pitched their tents upon the shores of the ocean of detachment.[48]

Note the use of the term "detachment"; so, while engagement in the world is a key part of these systems, there still must be a separation, one brought about through adherence to virtue and the seeking of understanding. Confucius, not surprisingly, also speaks of kind of detachment from the material:

> To eat coarse food, drink plain water, and pillow oneself on a bent arm – there is pleasure to be found in these things. But wealth and position gained through in appropriate means – these are to me like floating clouds.[49]

In the same passage of the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*" cited above, we also read:

> People for the most part delight in superstitions. They regard a single drop of the sea of delusion as preferable to an ocean of certitude. By holding fast unto names they deprive themselves of the inner reality and by clinging to vain imaginings they are kept back from the Dayspring of heavenly signs. God grant you may be graciously aided under all conditions to shatter the idols of

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 236-37.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
49. *Analects* 7.16, in Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 114.

> superstition and to tear away the veils of the imaginations of men.[50]

So, not only may "ornaments or wealth" distract mankind, but also spurious beliefs. We find a very tersely expressed but quite similar idea in *Analects*. 7.21:

> The Master had nothing to say about strange happenings, the use of force, disorder, or the spirits.[51]

The emphasis here is on engagement, even though not explicitly stated. Confucius's mind was on cultivation of the virtuous individual and engaging the world through sound relationships, not a false harmony achieved through the appeasement of some ephemeral realm.

Connected with the concept of engagement in the word is the shared idea in both Bahá'u'lláh's writing and the *Analects* that idleness is pernicious and loathsome. The "twelfth Glad-Tidings" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Bisháárát* states:

> It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.
>
> The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means. When anyone occupieth himself in a craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded in the estimation of God as an act of worship; and this is naught but a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty.

The *Analects* (9.23) is more succinct in its admonition, and does not frame the issue of work in such a directly theological context:

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50. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 228.

51. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 115; see the brief comments concerning Confucius and superstition in Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety in the Far East* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2004), pp. 127-28.

> The young should be held in high esteem. After all, how do we know that those yet to come will not surpass our contemporaries? It is only when one reaches forty or fifty years of age and yet has done nothing of note that we should withhold our esteem.[52]

That such a philosophy exists in both sources is not that surprising, but what is interesting here is the implication. It is not so much the Puritanical idea that "idle hands are the Devil's playground" recounted here, but rather something more subtle. Work and "engagement in such work," as Bahá'u'lláh puts it, are necessary for both living in accordance with God and for the kind of cohesive, universal society that the Bahá'í Faith envisages.

Both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith are concerned with character, and in some sense for the same reason: good character means sound relationships, and sound relationships mean a cohesive society. This is a "bottom to top" model of building a society, where the fundamental units in their active process of cohesion yield a solid "whole." If each person engages in virtuous conduct, then there is unity in practice. If there is unity in practice, then sound relationships can form; and if there are sound relationships, a harmonious society will arise.

But both Confucian *Analects* and the writings of Bahá'u'lláh also present an overall framework, and in a way address the issue of governance directly, "top to bottom." In the Confucian system – and, one could argue, in much of Chinese thought there is a clear model of a heavenly or cosmic *order*. This is expressed with the term 天 (*tiān*), often translated as "heaven" or "heavens," but really having little to do with the Western connotations that that word bears.[53] Rather, the term signifies the "cosmic order," or even more precisely as "the order [of the world] itself, and what orders it."[54]

More particularly, there is the concept of 天命 (*tiān mìng*), usually rendered as the "mandate of heaven," but again meaning more specifically the "order" or even "propensities"[55] (命 *mìng*) of the "cosmos" (天 *tiān*). What is key, then, is the concept that any ruler of the state must be aligned with this "mandate of heaven." A ruler who does not follow this

52. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 131.

53. See pp. 46-48 of Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius* for a complete analysis of how this term, 天 (*tian*), should be understood.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

55. As in *Analects* 16.8, discussed below.

"cosmic order" or defies it (違命 *wéi mìng*, to "defy the mandate of heaven") is no longer legitimate, and can have no authority over the people.

In *Analects* 16.8, Confucius lays it out clearly:

> Exemplary persons hold three things in awe: the propensities of *tian* [天命 (*tiān mìng*)], persons in high station, and the worlds of the sages. Petty persons, knowing nothing of the propensities of *tian*, do not hold it in awe; they are unduly familiar with persons in high station, and ridicule the words of the sages.[56]

Understanding the "propensities of *tian*" is no easy task, of course, and in a famous passage (*Analects* 2.4), we find the following:

> From fifteen, my heart-and-mind was set upon learning; from thirty I took my stance; from forty I was no longer doubtful; from fifty I realized the propensities of *tian*; from sixty, my ear was attuned; from seventy I could give my heard-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries.[57]

For the individual, then, it takes some time to become aware of – and then aligned to – the "propensities of *tian*" or the "mandate of heaven." For a ruler, the process is even more fundamentally important: as an individual, the ruler must be aligned to the "propensities of *tian*" *and* incorporate such propensities into their every act of governance.

How this finds an analogue in Bahá'í thought is not immediately obvious. But implications certainly appear in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. In the "fifteenth Glad-Tidings" of the *Bishárát*, one finds what is to the modern reader a rather curious passage:

> Although a republican form of government profiteth all the peoples of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should remain deprived thereof.[58]

How does this connect with the Confucian expression of 天命 (*tiān mìng*), the "mandate of heaven"? Note the emphasis on kingship: the idea here is that an *individual*'s majesty is most reflective of God, and the im-

56. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 198.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.
58. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 212.

plication is that an individual ruler is best suited to be like God in terms of fairness and ethical rule. At the end of the "fifteenth Glad-Tidings," we see a reinforcement of this reading:

> We earnestly beseech God – exalted be His glory – to aid the rulers and sovereigns, who are the exponents of power and the daysprings of glory, to enforce His laws and ordinances.[59]

Just as in the Confucian model, the ruler's role is to "channel" the "laws and ordinances" from above – from 天 (*tiān*) or from God. This structure and the patterning of the earthly realm on the heavenly realm is clearly articulated in the "sixth leaf" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*:

> Verily I say, whatever is sent down from the heaven of the Will of God is the means for the establishment of order in the world and the instrument for promoting unity and fellowship among its peoples.[60]

Bahá'u'lláh's writings emphasize this point in other places, as well. In the "first Ishráq" of the *Ishráqát* ("Splendors"), we have the following:

> They that are . . . invested with authority and power must show the profoundest regard for religion. In truth, religion is a radiant light and impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world. . . .[61]

Here, the suggestion is both that human authority must be based on divine principles and that people can be protected from the vagaries of secular rule by the power of religious – i.e., divine – principles.

The "second Ishráq" explicitly states that the "sovereigns of the world" are the manifestations of the power of God and the daysprings of his authority. We beseech the Almighty that he may graciously assist them in that which is conducive to the well-being of their subjects.[62]

Very much as in the *Analects*, we have here rulers as transmitters of the divine or cosmic order.

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59. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
60. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 234.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
62. *Ibid.*

In addition to this linear model of governance, there is also the suggestion of the use of merit, and other ways of creating social order, in both Confucianism and the Bahá'í thought. *Analects* 2.19 has the following:

> Duke Ai of Lu inquired of Confucius, asking: "What does one do to gain the allegiance (fu) of the people?" Confucius replied: "Raise up the true and place them over the crooked, and the allegiance of the people will be yours; raise up the crooked and place them over the true, and the people will not be yours.[63]

In a close parallel, the "fifth Ishráq" states:

> Governments should fully acquaint themselves with the conditions of those they govern, and confer upon them positions according to desert and merit.[64]

A second way of bringing about harmony is by addressing the very question of what is being governed. Is it a collection of individuals? Sovereign states? The "sixth Ishráq" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Ishráqát* includes a very interesting passage on this topic. It looks to a time in the future when the earth will be regarded as one country and one home. . . . Let not man glory that he loveth his country, let him rather glory in this that he loveth his kind.[65]

The key term here is "one country and one home." In a very similar manner, Confucius saw the larger political entity of the state as no more than a collection of households, and thus itself a household or home. As one commentator notes:

> In the writings of Chinese intellectuals and officials, the word *jia* (family or home) is regularly featured as a metaphor for the nation. . . . This is not surprising, since the state (*guo*) is explicitly figured as family in the modern Chinese term for nation or country (*guojia*).[66]

Indeed, still today the term 國家 (*guó jiā*, literally "state + home") is used to refer one's country. For Confucius, the family or household mod-

63. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 80.
64. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 271.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
66. Gloria Davies, *Worrying about China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), p. 58.

el of society can be realized when the ruler acts in a parental role – not through strictures, however, but through exemplary behavior. In *Analects* 2.20, there is the following:

> Ji Kangzi asked: "How do you get the people to be respectful, to do their utmost for you, and to be eager?" The Master replied: "Oversee them with dignity and the people will be respectful; be filial to your elders and kind to your juniors, and the people will do their utmost for you; raise up those who are adept and instruct those who are not and the people will be eager."[67]

Again, we have a linear structure, where the person in authority rules, but does so as a father who models behavior for his child. Moreover, recall the idea in the "sixth Ishráq" that man should "loveth his kind"; this is not a simple injunction, but rather a way of creating a unified society without use of coercion from above. Similarly, *Analects* 13.6 states:

> If people are proper in personal conduct, others will follow suit without need of command. But if they are not proper, even they command, others will not obey.[68]

Exemplary behavior by a ruler leads to effortless rule, and exemplary behavior by other individuals will lead to their fellows doing the same.

Earlier, we noted that both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith are concerned with an individual's good character. People of good character make a good society. But what particulars concerning character development do the Confucian system and the Bahá'í Faith prescribe? Again, we can find similar concepts in the *Analects* and the words of Bahá'u'lláh. In Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*, the "first Taráz" has the following:

> [M]an should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfilment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth though crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom.[69]

At first glance, this seems a rather simplistic philosophy, but the underlying themes here are the very important ones of responsibility, stabil-

67. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 80.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
69. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215.

ity, and self-knowledge – part of the over-arching theme of building a harmonious and unified society.

For Confucius, the same holds true, although he approaches the matter in a slightly different way. At the root, there is an emphasis of paying attention to one's role or one's "craft"; in *Analects* 19.7, we have:

> The various craftsmen stay in their shops so that they may master their trades; exemplary persons study so that they might promote their way.[70]

The "sixth Taráz" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*" adds:

> Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it. Such arts and material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of His knowledge and wisdom which have been revealed in Epistles and Tablets through His Most Exalted Pen – a Pen out of whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts of the world are brought to light.[71]

The *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*" adds a definition:

> By the wise it is meant those whose knowledge is not confined to mere words and whose lives have been fruitful and have produced enduring results.[72]

Note the meaning here: knowledge must include the pragmatic, and it must engage the world, a theme examined earlier.

But where does one gain the knowledge to know one's role? Returning to the "first Taráz" in Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*," we read that "men of wisdom" are, in truth, cup-bearers of the life-giving water of knowledge and guides unto the ideal way. They direct the peoples of the world to the straight path and acquaint them with that which is conducive to human upliftment and exaltation. The straight path is the one which guideth man to the dayspring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding and leadeth him to that which will redound to glory, honour and greatness.[73]

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70. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, pp. 219-20.
71. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 218.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
73. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215.

Note two subtle points here: first of all, those who have wisdom and knowledge are called "cup-bearers." What they know is not something that they invented themselves; rather these wise figures are preservers and transmitters. The emphasis is not on innovation. Second, we note the idea of the "straight path." This is not exactly like the "path" (道 *dào*) that we find in Confucius, but in some manner the idea is the same: our journey through life is defined by how well we fulfill our role, and if we each succeed in that, we are on our way to "human upliftment and exaltation."

These two points are also found in Confucius; in *Analects* 7.28, Confucius states:

> There are probably those who can initiate new paths while not understanding them, but I am not one of them. I learn much, select out of it what works well, and then follow it. I observe much, and remember it.[74]

The emphasis again is on learning and preserving, not innovation. In *Analects* 7.20, Confucius again talks about knowledge in terms of the past: ". . . loving antiquity, I am earnest in seeking it out." Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the "straight path" as "the one which guideth man to the day-spring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding . . . ." *Analects* 1.14 presents a similar idea, in its frequent use of the term *dao* (道 *dào*), noted above:

> In eating, exemplary persons do not look for a full stomach, nor in their lodgings for comfort and contentment. They are persons of action yet is cautious in what they say. They repair to those who know the way [道 *dào*], and find improvement in their company. Such persons can indeed be said to have a love of learning.[75]

In another passage, Confucius says, "Set you sights on the way know the way [道 *dào*]. . . ."[76] and later, "People who have chosen different ways [道 *dào*] cannot make plans together."[77]

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74. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 117
75. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
76. *Analects* 7.6, *ibid.*, p. 112.
77. *Analects* 15.40, *ibid.*, p. 192.

Moreover, both in the writings of Confucius and Bahá'u'lláh, the capacity to follow or forge the right path or way comes from self-knowledge. Note, of course, that in the case of Bahá'í Faith, this self-knowledge has a strong theistic foundation: self-knowledge comes from fully recognizing the Manifestation of God, and obeisance to what He has ordained.

Returning to the "first Taráz" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*, we read that through the "loving-kindness of the All-Wise, the All-knowing," "people may discover the purpose for which they have been called into being."[78] As the Bahá'í Faith has a well-articulated concept of God, naturally self-knowledge would come from there. In Confucius, the concept of a deity is not expressed in this way; nonetheless, self-knowledge is paramount. In the famous passage in *Analects* 2.15, we read:

> Learning without due reflection leads to perplexity; reflection without learning leads to perilous circumstances.[79]

Similarly, in *Analects* 1.4, we read the words of Confucius' disciple, Master Zeng:

> Daily I examine my person on three counts. In my undertakings on behalf of other people, have I failed to do my utmost? In my interactions with colleagues and friends, have I failed to make good on my word? In what has been passed on to me, have I failed to carry it into practice?

These three questions embody the Confucian process of gaining self-knowledge. That self-knowledge leads to the practice of becoming a person of integrity who can engage in sound relationships.

The "third Taráz" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát* reinforces the connection between God, a person's character, and the path of proper conduct:

> A good character is, verily, the best mantle for men from God. With it He adorneth the temples of His loved ones. By My life! The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men. The glory and the upliftment of the world must needs depend upon it. A goodly character is a means whereby men are guided to the Straight Path. . . .[80]

78. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215.
79. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 79.
80. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 216.

Again, in both the Confucian system and the Bahá'í Faith, self-reflection leads to self-knowledge, and an easing of one's way onto the path. Individuals with sound self-knowledge are sharing a unity of practice. Moreover, they naturally will be drawn to one another, leading to harmonious relationships – something clearly emphasized in the passage above. In Confucianism, it is clear that self-reflection, in turn, ultimately will lead to a harmonious society. The Bahá'í Faith also employs self-reflection, but in terms of building a society characterized by harmony, recognition of God's Manifestation takes a primary role.

Conclusions: Future Directions in Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith

Both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith deal directly with the role of the individual in society, and the future of these systems lies in this core of their philosophical approaches. Without taking a particularly cynical stance, one could argue that we live in an increasingly narcissistic age, and in a society that has for some time now become increasingly "atomized" due to the sparsity of meaningful social interactions. In such an environment, systems such as Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith at the same time may find both greater challenges in promoting their philosophies and a greater need for those same philosophies.

Confucianism is not global in view, but the *Analects* reveal a system that has such an expansive potential. Individuals of good character, Confucius notes, should associate with each other, and from a modern perspective there is no reason that this cannot mean across the globe. Indeed, one might have to journey far to find a Confucian associate, as we see in *Analects* 7.26:

> The Master said, "I will never get to meet a sage – I would be content to meet an exemplary person."
>
> The Master said, "I will never get to meet a truly efficacious person – I would be content to meet someone who is constant. It is difficult indeed for persons to be constant in a world where nothing is taken to be something, emptiness is taken to be fullness, and poverty is taken to be comfort."[81]

Despite such challenges, Confucius was aware that like minds would benefit from finding each other:

> In taking up one's residence, it is the presence of authoritative persons that is the greatest attraction. How can anyone be called

81. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, pp. 116-17.

> wise who, in having the choice, does not seek to dwell among authoritative people?[82]

In the "second Taráz" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*, a similar idea can be found, although in more poetic language:

> They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with the peoples and kindreds of the earth with and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world. . . .[83]

And what of harmony and unity? At the beginning of this piece, we pointed out that both the Confucian system and the Bahá'í Faith seek a future where human beings live in a society characterized by *harmony*, achieved by the *unity* of a common ethical practice. As noted earlier, Confucius looks to the past in seeking a better state for the future:

> Achieving harmony is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety [禮 *lǐ*]. In the ways of the Former Kings, this achievement of harmony made them elegant, and was a guiding standard in all things large and small. But when things are not going well, to realize harmony just for its own sake without regulating the situation through observing ritual propriety will not work.[84]

So, harmony may be achieved through propriety (禮 *lǐ*) – in this case, a term very particularly defined as understanding one's role. Such understanding and engaging in one's role properly by all individuals is the unity of practice noted above. In *Analects* 16.1, Confucius is engaged in a conversation about a potential attack by clan against a vassal state. But Confucius turns the conversation to the issue of avoiding conflict, and a potential ideal situation for society:

> For if the wealth is equitably distributed, there is no poverty; if the people are harmonious, they are not few in number; if the people are secure, they are not unstable. Under these circumstances, if distant populations are still not won over, they per-

82 *Analects* 4.1, *ibid.*, p. 89.
83. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 216.
84. *Analects* 1.12, in Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 74.

> suade them to join them through the cultivation of their refinement and excellence, and once they have joined them, they make them feel secure.[85]

This connection between harmony and unity is also nicely summed up in the "seventh leaf" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*:

> O ye men of wisdom among nations! Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity. Cleave tenaciously unto that which will lead to the well-being and tranquillity of all mankind. This span of earth is but one homeland and one habitation. It behoveth you to abandon vainglory which causeth alienation and to set your hearts on whatever will ensure harmony. In the estimation of the people of Bahá man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, his wisdom, and not in his nationality or rank.[86]

The message of the Bahá'í Faith echoes that in the Confucian *Analects*, despite the marked difference in style and tone. First, the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* has, as in Confucius, the injunction to cling that which "will lead to the well-being and tranquillity of all mankind." In other words, harmony is the goal, and all pursuits should be those that lead to that end. Further, there is the Chinese idea of the "one homeland and one habitation" – the country as a collection of households but also a *single* household, i.e., 國家 (*guójiā*). Then there is the direct statement to avoid "vainglory," and, again, pursue actions that will "ensure harmony." Finally, the last line mirrors Confucian thought very closely indeed:

> In the estimation of the people of Bahá man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, [and] his wisdom.[87]

All of these values – knowledge, good conduct, and solid character – are ones that Confucius would say precisely comprise the mature individual.

Confucius perceived a world in distress, riven with violence, and run by leaders out of touch with both the "heavenly mandate" above and their subjects below. The Bahá'í Faith arose in a nineteenth-century culture

85. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
86. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 234-35.
87. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

trapped between archaic tradition and encroaching modernity, one that had set the stage for – but was also not quite ready for – new principles, especially the principle of the oneness or unity of mankind. Both the Confucian system and Bahá'í thought urge individuals to transcend existing circumstances, and develop beyond human frailties and ignorance. While the Confucian system works primarily on the ethical development of the individual in terms of interpersonal relationships and the Bahá'í Faith looks for broader change based on religious precepts, the goals are the same: a more just and cooperative world.

What is this "broader change" sought by the Bahá'í Faith? Certainly, it is change towards a society structured according to the principles of harmony and unity. But note that in the Bahá'í faith the relation between harmony and unity is shaped by a particular factor – namely, the Bahá'í belief that harmony that is imposed without a clear expression of the need for justice and equity would not lead to genuine unity in society. While Confucius does not always argue about justice in the way it is understood in a contemporary perspective, the Bahá'í teachings do: justice serves as a key component for the dream of unity. As one commentator has noted about justice, "Time and again Bahá'u'lláh addresses this theme."[88] In the "sixth leaf" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*, for example, Bahá'u'lláh states:

> The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.[89]

Bahá'u'lláh also puts it in this way:

> No radiance can compare with that of justice. The organization of the world and the tranquility of mankind depend upon it.[90]

Bahá'u'lláh here makes an explicit connection between the concept of justice and the idea of "organization" – that is, the pragmatic building of a new society.

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88. Bowers, *God Speaks Again*, p. 118.
89. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 67, as quoted *ibid.*
90. *Ibid.*

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

IAN KLUGE (Abbotsford, B.C., Canada)

THE PHILOSOPHY SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP SESSIONS AT THE 38TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES (NORTH AMERICA), AUGUST 2014

Interest in studying the Bahá'í Writings from a philosophical perspective continues to grow among attendees of the annual Bahá'í Studies Conference. Four presenters shared their findings with audiences that were at or near room capacity and who provided lively debate in the question and answer segment ending each session. Indeed, a lot of discussions carried over into the breaks. I am pleased to share with you my understandings of these fine presentations.

There are four main reasons for studying the Bahá'í Writings from a philosophical perspective. The first is to understand the Writings themselves because they not only contain numerous explicitly philosophical passages and arguments but also implicitly contain philosophical ideas and arguments embedded in images, analogies anecdotes and examples. The second reason is based on the first, namely, to improve our ability to explain and/or teach the Faith to others in a clear, coherent and rational manner. This is a *sine qua non* for all effective teaching whether it is of a religious nature or not. Third, a philosophical understanding of the Bahá'í Writings aids in apologetics, i.e. in defending the Bahá'í teachings with rational counter-arguments to critiques of the Writings. Finally, understanding the Writings philosophically enables us to carry on in-depth discussions and explorations with other religions which also have well-developed philosophical traditions. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism come readily to mind. Our discussions will no longer be confined to the surface appearances of various faiths.

Presentation 1

Kevin Naimi: *Thinking Sociologically About Independent Investigation*

Kevin Naimi is a P.hD student in the sociology of education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. His research focuses on student engagement and meaningful inquiry (independent investigation) in schools.

In this paper, Kevin Naimi explored how the concept of situated agency affects our understanding of ourselves and consequently our understanding of the Bahá'í principle of the independent search for truth. This principle is one of the foundation stones of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. The concept of situated agency points out that all human thought, feeling and action – whether at the personal or social level – is shaped by our 'situation' which includes culture, social class, language, educational level, nation, personal and collective history, traditions and so on. We are embedded in these 'situations' and, according to the concept of situated agency, cannot ever remove ourselves their power, though we can, of course, go from one kind of situation to another. It is possible to move from a lower socio-economic bracket to a higher one, to improve one's education and to absorb more of our own or even different cultures. What we cannot escape is that our thoughts, feelings and actions are irrevocably concretely 'situated.'

According to Kevin Naimi, our conditioned nature has an important impact on our understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's principle of the independent investigation of truth. This is because our conditioned or situated nature profoundly affects our understanding of ourselves. We can no longer accept our common-sense self-understanding of ourselves as absolutely self-sufficient independent beings, or what some philosophers have called 'social atoms.' The truth is, we are connected to and influenced by society both consciously and unconsciously. Therefore, we cannot always be sure of the full ownership of a thought, an attitude, a feeling or an action. In other words, Bahá'ís must learn to understand themselves as a part of the social web in which we all find ourselves. This, in turn, leads us to a better understanding of the connection between personal and social transformation. We are not merely passive parts of the social web but can transform the web itself by transforming ourselves with the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh. In this way, the subtle influences of His teachings will be felt, unconsciously perhaps at this time, but felt nonetheless.

Kevin Naimi makes it clear that the most effective way to engage in the independent investigation of truth requires us to understand how our thoughts, feelings, attitudes and actions are connected to our society, indeed, to our whole situation. Only then can we gain some detachment from these connections by factoring them into our thinking. The Bahá'í Writings draw our attention to this in their call for detachment from our ties to the world in the quest for knowledge and truth. For example, Bahá'u'lláh says, "Arise in the name of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge, and, with absolute detachment from the learning of men lift

up your voices."[1] In other words, we must know the dependencies in our thinking, and how they subtly encourage our thoughts in one direction or another. Without knowing such things consciously, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to gain a more *a*ccurate view of the truth. Of course, the concept of situated agency suggests that such conscious knowledge is never complete and, therefore, genuine objective knowledge is impossible. The Bahá'í principle of consultation is designed to help overcome this challenge by removing the sense of ownership and with it, feelings of defensiveness, from the exchange of ideas in the quest for truth.

Presentation 2

Ian Kluge: ***Procrustes' Bed: The Insufficiencies of Secular Humanism***

Ian Kluge is a poet, playwright and independent philosophy scholar from Abbotsford, B.C. He has published numerous articles comparing the Bahá'í Writings with other belief systems and philosophies. These include Aristotle, Buddhism, Whitehead, Heidegger and Postmodernism.

Ian Kluge's basic argument is that secular humanism – defined as an exclusively human-centered and non-theist philosophy – has four main insufficiencies which undermine its claim to have an adequate understanding of human nature and to be a sufficient guide for ethical action.

The first problem is secular humanism's (SH) application of the amputating function of Procrustes' Bed to the empirically, i.e., scientifically established fact that religion, religious beliefs, or an orientation to Transcendence are a universal feature of human existence. No culture without religion has ever been discovered and even phenomena like political ideologies share the orientation to Transcendence, i.e., an inclination to look to something that is (1) not limited by time and space as all other things are and (2) is not dependent on anything else for its existence. Marx's dialectical materialism is one example of this orientation to Transcendence. By amputating an essential attribute of human nature, SH undermines its claims to have a scientific and empirical theory of human nature.

Second: having amputated humanity's orientation to Transcendence, SH also cuts off the important benefits of this orientation. SH forces us to understand ourselves as purely physical beings bereft of intrinsic value. A divine Creator bestows value on us – value that is intrinsic because it cannot be taken away. As Bahá'u'lláh says:

> Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and

1. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), XXXV, p. 84.

> names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.[2]

SH's understanding of human nature leaves no room for the existence of a soul, free will, life after death or even objective morals. A consciousness informed by the knowledge that it has no intrinsic value and that whatever value it has is a mere social convention or material processes is substantially different than a consciousness informed of by a sense of intrinsic value based on a Transcendent entity, or by the will of God.

The third problem is that SH cannot provide an objective moral code strictly on the basis of its own intellectual resources. As Hume's well-known argument makes clear, we cannot get from a description of facts to a prescription for behavior, which reduces all purely empirical resources. While religions may disagree about ethics – although the number of similarities is astounding – they can, at least in principle, achieve an objective ethics by reference to God. This internal coherence strengthens their arguments about ethics. Nor can SH adequately answer the following questions: (1) Who or what has the knowledge of reality as a whole and human nature in particular to decide the appropriateness of ethical precepts? (2) Who or what has the universal knowledge, and the understanding of humanity to legitimize demands for obedience?

The fourth problem concerns the stretching functions of Procrustes' Bed. Some SH writers like Alain de Botton[3] understand that secular humanism alone robs us of many important experiences and feelings that religion provides. Despite his good will, it is not clear how a "Temple of Tenderness"[4] dedicated to pictures of the Virgin Mary can replace the religious experience of reverence for the 'mother of God' as a metaphysical concept. De Botton's efforts to stretch a psychological state into a metaphysical belief is ineffective.

Presentation 3:
Mikhail Sergeev: *The Bahá'í Faith and Modernity: A Comparative Analysis*

Mikhail Sergeev holds his doctorate in religious studies from Temple University. He teaches history of religion, philosophy and modern art at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

Mikhail Sergeev's presentation examined the relationship between the principles and doctrines of the Bahá'í Faith and the eighteenth century

2. *Ibid.*, XC, p. 177.
3. Alain de Botton, *Religion for Atheists* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

Enlightenment, or, what some call modernity. He finds that the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith converge to a significant degree with the ideology of the Enlightenment which they re-affirm albeit in a different religious context. For example, both the Enlightenment and the Bahá'í Writings make the application of reason – even to religion – a major principle. Furthermore, both extoll the principle of free investigation of truth including religious truth; free expression of personal viewpoints on all subjects; freedom of conscience in regards to religious beliefs; freedom of association; the rule of law as the basis of an orderly society in which all may flourish, and the equality of men and women. The Bahá'í Faith and the Enlightenment also converge in regards to their belief in individual and collective or social progress; the importance of scientific and technological advancement and in the principle of fundamental and irrevocable human rights unfettered by any considerations of race, culture, socio-economic status, nationality or religion. On the practical side, these doctrines are combined with an Administrative Order that clearly distinguishes between and separates administrative institutions which manage and legislate action (on the basis of the Writings) and personal interpretation of the Writings (a free right for all) and worship. Combine these traits with the absence of clergy and free elections at the local, national and international level and it is not difficult to see why the Bahá'í Faith providers unique attractions among the world's religions.

However, the Bahá'í Faith cannot simply be categorized as a phenomenon of modernity or the Enlightenment. It is not merely a part of the story of modernity but neither is it a part of contemporary postmodernism which is characterized by a deep epistemological scepticism, by ethical and cultural relativism and an abiding predilection for destabilizing any and all knowledge structures for the sake of destabilization which it regards as salutary. Nonetheless, the Bahá'í Faith is postmodern – but in a unique way insofar as Dr. Sergeev views it as employing Enlightenment ideas as a launching pad from which to begin developing its own interpretations and applications of Enlightenment thought. In other words, the Bahá'í Faith makes positive use of and incorporates modern, Enlightenment principles in order to supersede them.

According to Dr. Sergeev, the Bahá'í Faith progresses beyond the Enlightenment ideology insofar as it includes human spirituality and thereby displays a spiritual depth that is lacking in the dogmatic rationalism of the Enlightenment. This dogmatic rationalism limits the Enlightenment's vision of progress to external social reforms which completely ignores the hidden dimensions of human nature and finds no place for social reform by individual spiritual transformation. Furthermore, the Bahá'í confirmation of many Enlightenment principles gives these principles a more solid

foundation in human nature, i.e., in human needs and in the human psyche. Human beings are not only logic-chopping machines but also have hearts and souls that need to be satisfied. Finally, the Bahá'í system is able to adapt the application of its principles and doctrines to the various levels of social and cultural, economic and political development found in the variety of nations found on earth. In this way the Bahá'í practice of Enlightenment ideas as developed through Bahá'í principles and doctrines is better able to serve humankind.

Presentation 4

Jay Howden: *The Unconscious Civilization, The Great Awakening and John Ralston Saul*

Jay Howden is a writer and educator. He has spent the past five years teaching and learning in Dalian, China, with his wife and the youngest of his four sons. He has been searching for the Bahá'í way since his teens. His writing can be sampled at JamesHowden.com.

The primary purpose of Jay Howden's presentation was to encourage Bahá'ís to explore the work of John Ralston Saul in regards to the principles and doctrines of the Bahá'í Writings. He is a like-minded thinker from whom Bahá'ís can learn a great deal. Saul, who is not only a writer but social activist has written two books of particular interest to Bahá'ís – *The Unconscious Civilization* and *On Equilibrium*. Howden admits that Saul diverges from the Bahá'í Writings at times but contends that the convergences are of important and far-reaching consequences.

The Unconscious Civilization is an in-depth critique of Western culture and its attempts to construct a world order almost entirely on the basis of market-place principles. The resulting mass society with its mass communication systems has led to a diminishment and disempowerment of the individual as the interests of corporatist special interest groups exert undue power in all aspects of life. Individualism declines into conformity which manifests itself in a weakness for total theories (like Marxism, Fascism, Nationalism or Neo-conservatism) that purport to simplify and explain everything for us. The pressure to conform inevitably clashes with the concept of democracy. Ironically, these 'totalizing developments' work to make us less conscious and not more conscious and, thereby, to divorce us from reality. From a Bahá'í perspective, these developments are problematic, not least because conformism discourages the independent investigation of truth mandated by Bahá'u'lláh as one of His main teachings, as well as asking questions. The Bahá'í Faith, after all, even has a Feast of Questions. Furthermore, these developments make us one-dimensional. They encourage the overdevelopment of humanity's physical or material nature, thereby devaluing other, non-material aspects

of life like ethics, culture, self-expression, or what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls our "spiritual susceptibilities." They also enshrine injustice as the needs and rights of all individuals are subjected to the over-riding forces of the national and international market. Howden also points out that Saul denies the contemporary dogma that democracy depends on a free market economy, i.e., a market of countless individuals making their own choices for their own well-being.

On Equilibrium embodies one of Bahá'u'lláh's most important teachings, namely, the need for moderation in all things. Bahá'u'lláh, after all, states that even civilization and freedom, if carried to excess, will lead us astray. According to Saul, humanism at its best is a dynamic equilibrium of six factors: (1) common sense; (2) ethics; (3) imagination; (4) intuition; (5) memory and (6) reason. When one factor unduly dominates the others, the whole 'system' falls into disequilibrium and problems arise, one of which is that the over-emphasis of one leads to a narrow world-view, or, what Saul calls "ideologies." These undermine the ability to think and act intelligently because we are no longer perceiving, thinking or acting as whole beings. To regain equilibrium we must understand these "ideologies" and bring them under our control.

Coordinator of the Philosophy SIG

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ЗАРУБЕЖНАЯ РОССИЯ: RUSSIA
ABROAD PAST AND PRESENT

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