# STUDIES IN BAHÁ'Í PHILOSOPHY

# Studies in Bahá'í Philosophy

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# Studies in Bahá'í Philosophy

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Christopher Buck**, PhD, JD, independent scholar and Pittsburgh attorney, publishes broadly in American studies, religious studies, Baha'i studies, Islamic studies, African American studies, and Native American studies. A former university professor, Dr. Buck previously taught at Pennsylvania State University (2011), Michigan State University (2000–2004), Quincy University (1999–2000), Millikin University (1997–1999), and Carleton University (1994–1996). Buck is author of: *God and Apple Pie* (2015) – with Introduction by J. Gordon Melton, Distinguished Professor of American Religious History, Baylor University – being the revised edition of *Religious Myths and Visions of America* (2009), acclaimed as "an original contribution to American studies," *Journal of American History* 98.1 (June 2011), p. 280; *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (2005); *Paradise and Paradigm* (1999), *Symbol and Secret* (1995/2004); *Religious Celebrations* (co-author, 2011); and book chapters: *'Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey West* (2013); *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (2006/2016); The Islamic World (2008); *American Writers* (2004/2010/2015); *British Writers* (2014). Buck has published various journal and encyclopedia articles as well (see http://christopherbuck.com), along with over 100 brief articles on the Baha'i Faith at http://bahaiteachings.org/author/christopher-buck. Buck currently practices law as a plaintiff's attorney (see http://pribanic.com/attorneys/christopher-buck/) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he lives with his wife, Nahzy Abadi Buck, and his sons, Takur Buck, and Taraz Buck, Ph.D. Email: BuckPhD@gmail.com

**Ian Kluge** is a poet, playwright and philosophy scholar who lives in Prince George, British Columbia. He has an M.A. and PhD (ABD) from the University of Alberta, Edmonton, and currently teaches courses for the BIHE and the Wilmette Institute. Ian Kluge has published numerous articles about philosophical aspects of the Baha'i Writings. He is also the author of several books, including *Conrad Aiken's Philosophy of Consciousness* and two collections of poetry – *Elegies* and *For the Lord of the Crimson Ark*.

**Benjamin B. Olshin** Benjamin B. Olshin is the Director of the School of Design and Professor of Philosophy, History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, and Design at The University of the Arts. His teaching and research work are interdisciplinary, with publications in the history of technology, philosophy of physics, the history of cartography, and cross-

cultural issues in epistemology. He completed an M.A. and Ph.D. at the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology (I.H.P.S.T.) at the University of Toronto.

**Mikhail Sergeev** holds his Master's degree (1993) and a doctorate (1997) in the history and philosophy of religion from Temple University in Philadelphia. Dr. Sergeev has taught in several universities and colleges of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Now in addition to the history of religion he teaches philosophy and modern art at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. He is the author of many articles on the history of religion, philosophy and contemporary art, which were published in Russian and American scholarly journals, as well as of several books, including *The Project of the Enlightenment: Essays on Religion, Philosophy and Art* (2004) and *Sophiology in Russian Orthodoxy: Solov'ev, Bulgakov, Losskii, Berdiaev* (2006).

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

# ETHICS BASED ON SCIENCE ALONE?

## Introduction

Can ethics be based on science alone? Is it possible to develop a coherent and internally sufficient ethical system without relying on a transcendental power as the ground and/or goal of our existence as moral beings? Despite the confident assurances of such contemporary authors as Paul Kurtz, Greg M Epstein and Sam Harris, there still are numerous reasons to doubt why this is possible. These authors maintain that it is possible to establish a viable system of personal and social ethics on a strictly empirical basis provided by the sciences, most especially neuro-science, psychology, physiology sociology and anthropology. Each of these sciences can supply the objective, physical, quantitative and universal knowledge needed by individuals and collectives to establish moral codes and make moral decisions. In short, science alone is necessary and sufficient.

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify our two key terms – ethics and science – as precisely as we can. At the foundational level, ethics concerns itself with obligations, i.e., it is prescriptive in telling us what we must do or not do. It concerns value judgments of good and evil; right and wrong; virtuous and blameworthy; and just and unjust. For its part, science is the empirical study of the natural world. For a thing or an event to be an appropriate object of scientific study, it must be:

(1) physical/material;

2) susceptible to empirical direct or indirect observation by the humans senses or instruments;

(3) measurable or quantifiable;

(4) observer independent

(5) disprovable or falsifiable by observation and/or experiment, at least in principle.

(6) universal, i.e., applicable everywhere under the same circumstances

While ethics concerns *prescription*, science concerns *description* about the attributes and behaviors of natural beings. The advocates of basing ethics on science, i.e., on the description of empirical facts, believe that science alone is both necessary and sufficient to prescribe behavior

without any appeal to a transcendental ground or goal. As Greg Epstein puts it, "God is beside the point."[1]

In this paper we shall argue that while science is necessary for developing a coherent ethical system, it is not sufficient to achieve this goal. By that we mean that an ethics based on science alone is irremediably deficient in regards to the establishment of values and obligations; in regards to its criteria for moral evaluations; and in regards to internal self-sufficiency. How shall we determine values and obligations? How can we establish standards by which to judge? How can we acquire internal self-sufficiency so that our arguments do not need to go beyond the boundaries of empiricism and science?

Greg Epstein recognizes this problem when he states, "Can you rationally justify your unconditional adherence to timeless values without implicitly invoking the existence of God?"[2] In our view – which we hope to prove below – the answer is negative. Making up the inherent deficiencies of a strictly empirical science-based ethics, logically requires an implicit or explicit appeal to something transcendent to the phenomenal world, i.e., 'God.' Otherwise, our reasoning remains trapped in the empirical realm, and that is precisely one of the chief logical problems of a strictly science-based ethic. In short, to ground a coherent ethical system, science and religion or religion-based ethics must work together.

To forestall any misunderstanding, we hasten to emphasize that this is not an argument to diminish the role of science in establishing morals and making ethical decisions. For the Bahá'í Writings, science is much too important to be shunted aside. 'Abdu'l-Bahá summarizes the Bahá'í view of the importance of science:

> If we say religion is opposed to science, we lack knowledge of either true science or true religion, for both are founded upon the premises and conclusions of reason, and both must bear its test.[3]

Elsewhere he asserts,

> We may think of science as one wing and religion as the other; a bird needs two wings for flight, one alone would be useless. Any

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1. Greg M. Epstein, *Good without God* (New York: Harper, 2009), p. 14.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 2nd ed. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 107.

religion that contradicts science or that is opposed to it, is only
ignorance – for ignorance is the opposite of knowledge.[4]

Given the inter-dependence of science and religion – and by
implication, ethics – the question is not *if* science has a role in ethics but
*what kind* of role it has and what are the parameters of that role? To
discover the parameters of science's role in ethics, we shall have to
examine its limits and go on from there to establish its appropriate
function. As this paper will attempt to show, both science and religion are
required to ground necessary and sufficient ethical principles in a rational
and incoherent manner.

**Separating Ethics and Religion**
The goal of separating ethics from religion and, thereby, building
ethics on a strictly empirical and/or scientific basis is not new in the
history of Western ethics. The three best known attempts are Hume's
emotivism and communitarianism, Kant's deontology and Bentham and
Mill's utilitarianism. Unlike other attempts to establish a fully empirical
and scientific ethics such as Social Darwinism and Communism,
emotivism and communitarianism, deontology and utilitarianism have
survived as viable alternatives in contemporary ethical debates and have
numerous intellectual offspring. Although Hume, Kant or Bentham and
Mill do not specifically refer to science as the basis of their ethics, but
science based ethics are a logical extension of their insistence on a strictly
empirical basis for morality.
For Hume, sentiment or feelings are the foundation of ethics. Indeed,
he states that the "notion of morals implies some sentiment common to all
mankind,"[5] to which he adds,

> The hypothesis which we embrace is plain. *It maintains that
> morality is determined by sentiment*. It defines virtue to be whatever
> mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of
> approbation; and vice the contrary.[6]

Feeling, and the community's approbation or condemnation determine
that

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4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 130.
5. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Part II, p. 64,
http://www.guten berg.org/files/4320/4320-h/4320-h.htm.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

we must at last acknowledge, that the *crime or immorality is no particular fact or relation, which can be the object of the understanding*, but arises entirely from the sentiment of disapprobation, which, by the structure of human nature, we unavoidably feel on the apprehension of barbarity or treachery.[7]

Hume emphasizes that the morality (or lack of it) of an act is found in "entirely" in personal and community sentiment and that there is nothing in the act itself that makes it good or evil. This view reminds us of Hume's famous is/ought distinction (sometimes known as Hume's Guillotine) by which he shows that a description of a fact cannot logically lead to a prescription of how we ought to behave. As we shall see, this distinction is one of the key weaknesses of all empirical and scientific ethics. The importance of sentiment is further emphasized in his statement that

though reason, when fully assisted and improved, be sufficient to instruct us in the pernicious or useful tendency of qualities and actions; *it is not alone sufficient to produce any moral blame or approbation.* Utility is only a tendency to a certain end; and were the end totally indifferent to us, we should feel the same indifference towards the means. *It is requisite a sentiment should here display itself, in order to give a preference to the useful above the pernicious tendencies. This sentiment can be no other than a feeling for the happiness of mankind, and a resentment of their misery;* since these are the different ends which virtue and vice have a tendency to promote. Here therefore reason instructs us in the several tendencies of actions, and humanity makes a distinction in favour of those which are useful and beneficial.[8]

Three points must be noticed here. First, we need for sentiment or feeling to motivate us. Second, this sentiment is for the happiness of humankind and rejection of its misery, and that this sentiment is in favour of the "useful and beneficial actions." The third point concerns the role of reason which can guide our sentiments into proper directions once such sentiments exist but cannot arouse such sentiments by itself. Reason cannot, in Hume's, view to motivate us to choose "the useful above the pernicious tendencies." Consequently, Hume writes that "Reason is, and

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 75; emphasis added.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 72; emphasis added.

ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them."[9]

From the foregoing discussion we may conclude that the basis of Hume's ethic is immanent to the phenomenal world. The actual decision as to whether an act is right or wrong belongs to the individual and the community and not to any transcendent entity for whom there is actually no need. In short, the community and its customs have replaced God as the arbiter of virtue and vice and consequently, have provided an empirical foundation for ethical issues. By separating ethics from religion in this manner, Hume helps clear the way for a scientific approach to ethics.

Immanuel Kant's deontological ethics took another major step of separating ethics from religion. Unlike Hume, who saw the power of reason as quite limited, Kant's ethics are based on pure rationality. His goal was to develop an ethical system based only on reason and nothing else. In the "Preface to *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), Kant writes,

> So far as morality is based upon the conception of man as a free agent who, just because he is free, binds himself through his reason to unconditioned laws, it *stands in need neither of the idea of another Being over him,* for him to apprehend his duty, nor of an incentive other than the law itself, for him to do his duty. At least it is man's own fault if he is subject to such a need; and if he is, this need can be relieved through nothing outside himself [10]

The gist of these statements is clear: "morality" is independent of everything except reason which is the basis of all moral injunctions; ethics cannot rely upon God. If we are to devise a system of ethics it must work strictly within the empirical realm and must have no other basis than reason. In his earlier book, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone,*, Kant goes even further in the direction of a scientific ethic than he did in *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) in which he says that the idea of God is a practical necessity for an ethical system. However, he reminds us that this does not give us "the least encouragement to run riot into the

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9. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Part III, Section 3, p. 253, https://www.gutenberg. org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm.

10. Immanuel; Kant, *Preface* to *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. by Theodore M Greene and Hoyt M Hudson, http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/rbbr/toc.html.

transcendent."[11] As a transcendent being, God has no place in rational ethics.

Utilitarianism and its offshoot consequentialism are another attempt to uncouple ethics and religion. Despite some differences in emphasis both assert "that actions are right or wrong according to their consequences rather than any intrinsic features they may have."[12] For utilitarianism which began with Jeremy Bentham in nineteenth century England, that consequences that mattered were pleasure and pain. Utilitarianism is based on

> the *greatest happiness or greatest felicity* principle . . . which states the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question, as being the right and proper, and only right and proper and universally desirable, end of human action . . . [This forms the] . . . *standard of right and wrong*, by which alone the propriety of human conduct, in every situation, can with propriety be tried. [13]

Although Bentham speaks of "happiness" in general, his ideas focus more on pleasure which he believed we could measure empirically by means of his "hedonistic calculus" (or "felicific calculus") on a quantitative scale including such factors as intensity, duration, predictability (certainty) and purity, i.e., the absence of later pain. Mill, however, centers his deliberations on "happiness," a far more encompassing term than 'pleasure.' He writes,

> The creed which accepts as the *foundation of morals, Utility,* or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.[14]

Mill associates happiness with "well-being" [15] which is also something we can measure empirically in order to build a moral system. Mill

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11. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, ch. 1, http://philosophy.eserver.org/kant/critique-of-practical-reaso.txt.

12. Tom L Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1991), p. 129.

13. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, p. 11, http:// www.econlib.org/library/Bentham/bnthPML.html. This note was added to chapter 1 by Bentham in July, 1822.

14. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: Longmans, Green, 1901), p. 9; emphasis added.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 88.

differed from Bentham insofar as Mill thought there were qualitative differences between experiences. Some pleasure or happiness is of a higher quality than others and, therefore, more desirable. "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."[16] As we shall see, Mill's doubts about the hedonistic calculus also point to some problems with "well-being" in Harris's attempt to establish a strictly scientific ethic. [17]

The goal of this critical analysis of the attempts to establish an ethic based on science alone is to show that the inherent deep-seated problems in these attempts revive the viability of transcendentally based ethics as a worthwhile alternative.

**The First Problem: The Scientific Method**

The most obvious problem in developing an empirical and science-based ethics is the scientific method itself. As noted above, for a thing to be a proper object of scientific study, it must, among other things be physical/material, quantifiable, observer independent and testable. In addition, it must be subject to the process of observing facts, forming a hypothesis, testing the hypothesis and forming a testable explanation of the findings. The insurmountable difficulty with a strictly science-based ethics is that the scientific method makes this impossible. Obligations, values, prescriptions and judgments cannot meet any of the criteria of appropriate objects for scientific study: they are not physical/material, quantifiable or necessarily observer independent. Nor can we conceive of or set up an experiment to show that a certain act is 'immoral.' Such concepts do not fit into the scientific method. Consequently, concepts of morality have to be imported from outside the boundaries of empirical science to arrive at any conclusion about ethics. Those concepts are not empirical – a fact already noted by Hume who writes:

> we must at last acknowledge, that the *crime or immorality is no particular fact or relation, which can be the object of the understanding*, but arises entirely from the sentiment of disapprobation, which, by the structure of human nature, we unavoidably feel on the apprehension of barbarity or treachery.[18]

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16. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

17. Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010), p. 2.

18. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Part II, p. 75; emphasis added. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4320/4320-h/4320-h.htm

Because morality is not one of the things for which empirical science can test, any strictly science-based ethical system lacks internal self-sufficiency in its reasoning since it must import its moral categories from beyond empirical science. Therefore, it is inherently incomplete and fails to establish its own intellectual foundations.

A second and equally serious problem for science-based ethics is the is/ought or facts/value distinction, sometimes known as Hume's Guillotine. According to Hume:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that *instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not.* This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this ought, or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, `tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for *what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it . . .* [I] am persuaded, that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceiv'd by reason. [19]

Hume's argument is devastatingly simple: we cannot argue from *description* to *prescription*, from an *is* to an *ought*, from a *statement of fact* to a statement of *obligations.* As Hume notes, the "crime or immorality is no particular fact or relation, which can be the object of the understanding."[20] The moral status of an act is not intrinsic to the act, it is not an empirically observable fact, and, therefore is not an appropriate object for science. That being the case, drawing an ethical conclusion from a factual premise is a logical *non sequitur.* This error applies to all science-based ethics. The only way to remedy this error is to begin with facts that already imply intrinsic values – something which theist ethics are able to do.

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19. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part 1, Section 1, https://www.gutenberg .org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm.
20. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Part II, p. 75, http://www.gu tenberg.org/files/4320/4320-h/4320-h.htm.

Let us examine this argument more closely. The problem is that if we wish to establish a strictly empirical and scientific system of morality, it is necessary to close the gap between empirical facts which are established by the scientific method and human values which are the products of human judgments *about* those facts. From a purely empirical perspective, valuation is something that we bring to the facts; the facts themselves do not give us an evaluative judgment, although they do give us the material on which to base such judgments. For example, nothing in the strictly empirical evidence from a body sprawled on the sidewalk allows us to establish that this death is 'sad,' 'wrong' or 'evil' or even a 'crime.' Such moral evaluations are not scientifically testable because moral values are not physical, measurable, physically observable, observer independent, objective or disprovable.' No coroner's report will say that certain physical evidence shows the moral evil of this death. How could the scientific method even begin to investigate the 'evil' nature of such an event – even when the evil is as egregious as the Holocaust, Stalin's Gulags or Mao's Red Guards? How could scientific experimentation establish the moral 'rightness' of picking a flower or saving a child from drowning? The inescapable conclusion is that moral values are not proper scientific objects, i.e., they are not suited to discovery or exploration by the scientific method.

We may, of course, show that a certain act is more advantageous to some people, but advantage and morality are not the same kinds of things. This is well illustrated in 'The Hospital' scenario.[21] There are five people desperately requiring an organ transplant (a different organ in each case) when the chief surgeon realizes he has a healthy young man with a multiply fractured leg available to him. By transplanting the organs from the young man, he can save five lives – the greatest good for the greatest number – and bring the advantage of life to the five. Although the advantage to the five is clear, few would consider the advantage to be moral. Advantages may be moral – but do not necessarily have to be.

It is important not to confuse the process of reaching ethical judgments with the sociological and psychological study of the judgments that people actually make. The latter study measures the popularity of opinions, and the intensity with which they are held but does not measure the moral value of the act *per se*. Hume's fact/value distinction is clearly at work. The fact that a certain opinion has a popularity rating of 80% cannot in itself make that opinion morally right; it is a fact *about which* we can make a moral judgment but is not a moral judgment in itself.

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21. Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), p. 131.

The significance of Hume's argument cannot be exaggerated because it undercuts the possibility of establishing moral rules on an empirical or scientific basis. This negates the logical foundations of ethics in utilitarianism, consequentialism, hedonism, egoism, "self-realization-ism,"[22] pragmatism, scientific ethics, situation-ethics and deontological ethics. We must especially remember that advantages to one or many, practical, or 'best' results, pleasure, logical consistency and agreement with science are in themselves neither moral nor immoral – they are simply facts *about which* we must make ethical judgments. By themselves such results are morally neutral and we cannot use them to 'bootstrap' our way to moral imperatives. An act is what it is – and no strictly empirical scientific argument can demonstrate that it is inherently more than that.

### A Reply from Harris and Kurtz

Although Harris seems unaware of the problem concerning the non-scientific nature of values and obligations, he is fully aware of Hume's is/ought difficulty. In his view, "the divide between facts and values is illusory"[23] and he states that "the division between facts and values is intellectually unsustainable especially from the perspective of neuroscience."[24] He begins his argument by asserting that

> Questions about *values* – about meaning, morality, and life's larger purpose – are really questions about the *well-being* of conscious creatures. Values, therefore, translate into facts that can be scientifically understood . . . The more we understand ourselves *at the level of the brain*, the more we will see that there are right and wrong answers to questions of human values.[25]

He adds,

> "good" [is] that which supports well-being . . . it makes no sense at all to ask whether maximizing well-being is "good." It seems clear that what we are really asking whether a certain state of pleasure is "good,"

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22. William S Sahakian, *Ethics: An Introduction to Theories and Problems* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1974), p. viii.

23. Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, p. 14.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2; emphasis added.

is whether it is conducive to or obstructive of, some deeper form of well-being.[26]

According to Harris, brain-states are a reliable way to determine whether or not an action contributes to our well-being. Because neuroscience is able to determine the attributes of the brain-state of well-being, it is possible for us – so says Harris – to measure whether or not well-being, i.e., the moral good, is being achieved. This will even work across cultures.[27] In other words, brain-states provide physical/material, quantifiable, objectively observable and testable standards by which to measure moral goodness or well-being. For this reason, Harris says:

> science can, in principle, help us understand what we *should* do and *should* want – and, therefore, what *other people* should do and want in order to live the best lives possible.[28]

In other words, brain-states can cross the chasm between is and ought, between description and prescription and between what we do and what we should do.

However, only a little reflection reminds us that Harris' argument is not safe from Hume's Guillotine. The problem is that the brain-scans are facts i.e. descriptions of reality, and facts by themselves cannot logically lead to prescriptions without committing the logical *non sequitur* fallacy. Furthermore, there is also a category mistake in such attempts. Facts belong to one logical category – namely, statements of that which is actually the case – while prescriptions belong to another – statements of what *should, ideally be* the case.

To rebut Harris' claim that an fMRI brain scans can give a scientific proof of well-being, and, thereby, of moral good, we need only point out that even the most positive brain-scan imaginable, is still only a brain scan, i.e., an objective piece of scientific data *about which* one must pass judgment and which is still subject to all the limitations of the scientific method. As Hume has already pointed out, nothing in the data provided by a brain scan itself tells us whether this state of mind or state of brain or the action that accompanies it is morally 'good,' 'virtuous,' 'blame-worthy' or conducive to well-being. There is no empirical evidence in the brain-scan to instruct us whether we are obligated or have a duty to avoid or cultivate such acts or their correlated brain-states. The judgment that

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
27. *Ibid.,* p. 60.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 28; original emphasis.

certain brain-states are morally good must be imported from outside the scientific framework – illustrating thereby, that such a science-based science is not internally self-sufficient.

This problem is not just a matter of awaiting future refinements in fMRI technology; rather the problem is intrinsic to the scientific method and the fMRI machines themselves. Such equipment is not designed to detect moral evaluations because such evaluations do not meet the criteria of being scientific objects, i.e., they are not physical, measurable, physically observable, observer independent, objective or disprovable. What Harris tries to do is to substitute a physical state – well-being as measured by fMTRI – for a moral condition – being ethically justified. This, too, is a logical category mistake since a physical and a non-physical state cannot be interchanged without destroying his argument since he is, in effect, changing the subject. Moreover, this exchange seems to work until we ask if all positive brain-states are moral? It is not difficult to imagine that a man like Dr. Mengele had positive brain-states while subjecting victims to vivisection 'in the name of science.' His brain-states may have been just as positively correlated with well-being as Mother Teresa's because both believed they were serving humanity and doing the morally 'right thing'. We might also recall the surgeon in "The Hospital Story' mentioned earlier; she, too, might have fully positive brain-scans while sacrificing the healthy young man to the lives of five transplant candidates. The problem is obvious: the evidence provided by even the most positive brain-scans is insufficient to define the moral good.

Of course, science can tell us that people who have a lot of type X brain scans tend to be a lot physically healthier than people who have a lot of type O's. However, science cannot tell us why we are morally obligated to prefer type X scans, why we 'ought' to, or why it is our 'duty' to facilitate type X scans in as many people as possible. Interestingly enough Harris admits as much: "Science cannot tell us why, *scientifically*, we should value health."[29] In effect, he concedes that science has nothing to say about moral valuations or obligations and, thereby, undermines his own thesis. It seems clear that if "scientifically" speaking there is no reason to value something as self-evidently important as health, then there is not much hope of building an ethical system – with all its complex questions – on science alone.

How, for example, could science-based ethics help us in the following situation which often played out in the twentieth century? You believe in

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29. *Ibid*., p. 37; original emphasis.

always telling the truth, but one night, you are hiding an innocent man from unjust persecution by the state police. The police come and ask if you have anyone in your house. Most people would probably lie (or like to think they would) but the real point of recounting this story is that no conceivable scientific experiment has the slightest bearing on the morality of your act one way or the other. Science is simply not intended or equipped to answer these kinds of questions that do not involve mass, measurability, repeatability, predictability, objectivity and falsifiability.

Interestingly enough, Harris tries to dismiss the question "*why* the well-being of conscious beings *ought* to matter to us."[30] He says he does "not think anyone sincerely believes this kind of moral skepticism makes sense."[31] He misses the point of the question which is not to doubt that well-being is worthwhile but to show that science cannot establish the moral 'goodness' of this goal – which he admits several pages later, saying "Science cannot tell us why, *scientifically*, we should value health."[32]

In the last analysis, Harris is left with the problem so clearly articulated by Daniel Dennett: "If 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is,' just what *can* it be derived from?"[33] That is exactly the problem to which Harris' argument about science-based ethics is unable to provide a logically coherent answer.

In *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism*, secular humanist Paul Kurtz also seeks to develop a science-based ethics, the sciences in this case being physiology, evolutionary science and anthropology. He calls his approach "eupraxsophy,"[34] which he defines as "good practical wisdom."[35] Kurtz, like Harris, believes that "The intrinsic value we seek to achieve is *eudaemonia*: happiness or well-being."[36]

The heart of Kurtz's ethical philosophy is the concept of "the common moral decencies"[37] which are "transcultural in their range."[38] They are

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30. *Ibid*., p. 32.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

33. Daniel Dennett, quoted in Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, p. 196; original emphasis.

34. Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2008), p. 22.

35. *Ibid*., p. 22.

36. Paul Kurtz, *Free Inquiry*, Volume 23, Number 1, Winter, 2002/2003, https://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/cont_index_23.

37. Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 93.

38. Kurtz, *Free Inquiry*, Volume 23, Number 1, Winter, 2002/2003, https://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/cont_index_23.

universal because they are based on the needs of human nature which, in Kurtz's view is grounded in biology. (One cannot help remembering Maslow's hierarchy of needs at this point.) Therefore, we can expect that "humankind, including the specific societies within it, already possess a number of [these] principles . . . as binding."[39] Among the major "decencies" we find truthfulness; promise-keeping; trustworthiness; justice and fairness; tolerance and benevolence and cooperation to name a few. Without these attributes, human individuals could not survive as members of society and societies could not maintain unity and function successfully, i.e. survive. As Kurtz says, "They no doubt grow out of the long evolutionary struggle for survival."[40]

According to Kurtz, these "common moral decencies" provide a scientific foundation for ethics because they have an empirical

> *socio-biological* basis; they are rooted in the nature of the human animal and the *processes of evolution* by which the species adapts and survives. Human beings are social animals, and our young require an extended period of nurturing for survival. Given this, a number of moral rules that govern behavior have developed . . . Moral codes thus have an adaptive function; one can postulate that those groups which had some effective regulation for conduct were better able to survive, reproduce and compete with other species or human groups . . . The test of the truth of these principles was their consequences.[41]

Kurtz makes clear the empirical science-based nature of his ethical system vis-à-vis its "socio-biological" and evolutionary basis as well as the anthropological study of "moral codes" among various groups. As noted before, the aim is not only survival but also well-being. As a result of the socio-biological and evolutionary processes working in individuals and societies, the "common moral decencies" are rooted in human nature and, therefore, they "need not be divinely ordained to have moral force, for they are tested in the last analysis by their *consequences* in practice."[42] In other words, the ontological basis of ethics lies in human nature which, at bottom, is given to each human being; we have no choice about being born human with a particularly defined nature.

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39. Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 105.

40. Paul Kurtz, *Free Inquiry*, Volume 23, Number 1, Winter, 2002/2003, https://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/cont_index_23.

41. Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit*, pp. 97 – 98.

42. Paul Kurtz, *Free Inquiry*, Volume 23, Number 1, Winter, 2002/2003, https://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/cont_index_23.

These "socio-biological" needs are the ontological basis on which the "socio-cultural"[43] and the "historical"[44] moral codes are built. In this way, Kurtz answers his own challenge about the necessity for building moral systems on ontological foundations. He says that the central issue about moral and ethical principles concerns their ontological foundation. If they are neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they ephemeral? . . . The moral and ethical principles that we live by and to which we are committed are "real": that is, we can make factual descriptive statements about their centrality of human behavior.[45]

In Kurtz's view, because the "common moral decencies" are empirically verifiable and can be studied by the scientific method, there is no need to appeal beyond empirical phenomena to any transcendental entity as a basis for morality. Therefore, he argues that we can make "factual descriptive statements" about ethics since they are "part of nature"[46] and therefore protected from subjective relativism. He rejects subjective relativism by stating:

> Ethical principles are not simply subjective emotional attitudes or states unamenable to any critical justification. There are important objective criteria that we use to evaluate ethical principles.[47]

Kurtz aims at establishing reason and critique as integral parts of making ethical judgments and to remove reliance on faith i.e. on unexamined presumptions, on authority and tradition.[48]

There are at least three problems with Kurtz's argument. The first is that it cannot escape Hume's Guillotine. The fact that the "common moral decencies" are found everywhere and seem necessary to individual and/or societal well-being and/or survival does not make them morally obligatory. It makes them advantageous, but being advantageous and being moral are not the same things. Advantage is an *aspect* of morality but it does not exhaust the concept of morality, as we have already seen in the hospital dilemma, and in various problems with utilitarianism and consequentialism. Letting the old and sick die might be financially advantageous to a society, i.e., the greatest good for the greatest number, but the morality of that is dubious. The "common moral decencies" may

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43. Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 97.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
48. *Ibid.*

also be seen as necessary *vis-à-vis* survival, but how do we distinguish them from the "common moral *indecencies*" such as slavery, the suppression of women and the rule of paterfamilias which many societies regarded as necessary to survival and even moral? In other words, the fact that the "common moral decencies" are/were ubiquitous and could be important to survival is not sufficient to bridge the gap between description and prescription.

There is a second difficulty: by what standard are we to distinguish between the "common moral decencies" and the common moral indecencies? It is not difficult to argue that slavery, the suppression of women and the paterfamilias contributed to survival in the past. To say that their 'time is over' simply appeals to an argument that has no basis in science or empirical evidence since there is no scientific way to prove that we are morally obligated to give up practices that no longer contemporary preferences even though they do not threaten human survival. Indeed, someone might argue that we should keep these practices because they have served us so well for so long. Such a morally perverse argument becomes possible precisely because there is no scientific way to exclude it without some standard by which to do so – and science cannot provide that standard.

A third, similar, difficulty arises *vis-à-vis* the actual applications of the "common moral decencies" which sound positive if we implicitly assume they are intended for all human beings. Few if any of these decencies were missing in Nazi, Fascist or Soviet society, for example, because they are rooted in human nature and in the humanity's "socio-biological" nature. However, few would defend their application of these decencies as moral. These societies – and others like them in the past – applied these decencies to a limited circle, i.e., family, tribal, racial, class or national members. However, by what empirical or scientific standard can we judge them as 'immoral'? This problem undermines Kurtz's argument because it clearly shows that within his empirical/scientific framework, there is no answer to the question of what is really good and really bad. At best, we have individual or societal preferences. Ultimately, Kurtz's argument falls into the very relativism it seeks to avoid.[49]

Strangely, both Kurtz and Harris recognize that they cannot produce a compelling scientific obligation to act for well-being or the "common moral decencies." As Harris notes, "Science cannot tell us why, *scientifically*, we should value health."[50] Kurtz asks, why should we be

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49. *Ibid*., pp. 95-96.
50. Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, p. 37.

moral, "Why ought I to perform *this* obligation or *that* duty?"[51] These questions point to the heart of the problem: if a science-based ethic cannot give us science-based reasons for being moral – or even determine what constitutes morality and a moral standard – then something is missing in that ethic. It is not internally self-sufficient, which is to say, it must import the ethical concepts of obligation and value from outside empirical science.

At this point it is important to remind ourselves that the lack of self-sufficiency and the problems caused by Hume's is/ought division do not completely invalidate Harris' and Kurtz's arguments. Only their limitations are revealed. The information they provide can, as we shall see, be used in other arguments that complete the foundation for ethics by other means.

### 'Is' to 'Ought" in the Bahá'í Writings

Before beginning this discussion about the is/ought distinction in the Bahá'í Writings – and, by implication – other theistic systems, two introductory remarks must be made regarding the invocation of God. First, there is the empiricist critique that invoking the transcendent God is simply a desperate artifice to cover up a lack of logic and evidence, i.e. the 'God-of-the-gaps' argument. But this is little more than an accusation since the critic cannot prove that the theist answer is false. The critics' accusation is no more than an expression of hope of 'things unseen' to which the theist can easily reply that the denial of God is simply a tactic to remove the only logically remaining answer from the debate about the ontological foundations of ethics. On one hand, it might be argued the concept of God is merely an artifice to give absolute grounding to a specific moral position; on the other hand, it can be equally argued that the denial of God is merely a way of avoiding the consequences of the existence of absolute moral standards. Such criticisms and counter-criticisms are, in effect, moot, and, therefore the 'God-of-the-gaps' argument is not really of much use in arguing against the Bahá'í other theistic positions. Second, the censure that God's existence is an illegitimate assumption, whereas the assumption that He does not exist is somehow allowable also fails. Both are assumptions and proving that one assumption or the other is 'more justified' simply leads us to an infinite regress of assumptions that cannot – even in principle – decide the problem. For these two reasons, and the implications of Hume's is/ought problem, we maintain that the most rational response is evaluate the theist

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51. Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit*, p. 196.

and non-theist positions on the basis of their internal logical coherence and self-sufficiency, and on their ability to answer logical problems such as the is/ought distinction.

In contrast to empiricist ontologies, the 'is-ought' problem does not exist in Bahá'í ethics or in the ethics of other theistic systems. In this paper, we shall focus on the Bahá'í Writings but it will become clear that none of the theistic religions fall victim to Hume's Guillotine. The reason is clear. Empiricism and the scientific method cannot find more in nature than can be revealed by the scientific method – and obligations, values, judgments and goodness or evil cannot be found in that way. However, the Bahá'í Writings – like all theistic religions – do not see nature as exclusively material. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon."[52] More specifically, 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 names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop . . . all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God.[53]

Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that there is more to reality than what is empirically perceptible and scientifically measureable, i.e., the "signs . . . of that Most Great Light." Indeed, physical reality reveals the "names and attributes of God" which appear in all things to an appropriate degree. These signs are ontologically real "spiritual realities"[54] even though they are not available for empirical analysis and can only be known if we "awaken [our] spiritual susceptibilities"[55] (As a quick digression, we note that science, too, requires the cultivation of special 'susceptibilities' and understandings for us to become aware of certain scientific truths, as in, for example, quantum physics. Thus, the requirement for "spiritual susceptibilities" is not an extraordinary claim made by religious thought.)

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52. 'Abdu'l-Bahá , *Paris Talks*, p. 174.
53. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 177.
54. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 302.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Through the signs and knowledge revealed or instantiated in His creations, God makes His will known to a degree consistent with humankind's abilities to understand. Therefore, it is not necessarily a logical error to extract an ethical argument, i.e., an 'ought' or a prescription, from a natural fact, an 'is.' A particular argument may be faulty due to its own inherent flaws but, in principle, the procedure of reasoning from an 'is' to an 'ought' in a universe preternaturally charged with spiritual significances is valid. That is because prescriptions based on natural facts are grounded in an ontology that gives spiritual – in this case, ethical – significance to natural facts. Thus, spiritually speaking, there is an intrinsic connection between the subject matter and the moral to be learned. Natural facts have "spiritual significance"[56] which is not just a pleasing but fictitious analogy but is, rather, ontologically real, like "the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom."[57]

This non-materialist outlook on the phenomenal world provides an ontological foundation for our ethical systems. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

> all humanity must be looked upon with love, kindness and respect; for what we *behold in them are none other than the signs and traces of God Himself*. All are evidences of God; therefore, how shall we be justified in debasing and belittling them, uttering anathema and preventing them from drawing near unto His mercy? This is ignorance and injustice, displeasing to God; for in His sight all are His servants.[58]

In other words, we must treat all created beings – and especially humankind – in a morally upright fashion precisely because they contain spiritual value as direct references to God. This is straight forward 'is' to 'ought' reasoning which, in a Bahá'í or theist context, is valid because the conclusion we draw is already implicit in the premise or the 'is.' Of course, theists may disagree about which specific moral imperative may be taken from certain natural facts, but that does not invalidate the effort to go beyond mere material knowledge. Here is another example. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

> For Christ declared, "Love your enemies . . . and pray for them which . . . persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father

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56. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 98.
57. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings,* p. 177.
58. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 231; emphasis added.

which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."[59]

From this natural example, he extracts a moral lesson, an 'ought,' an obligation, a prescription for human behavior. We are to be like the rain and offer good to everyone. From an empiricist perspective, this is an illogical violation of the 'is/ought' distinction. Of course, it might be argued that 'Abdu'l-Bahá simply uses rain as a convenient metaphor just as an empiricist might. However, for an empiricist, this metaphor is at best a clever and pleasing analogy; there is no intrinsic connection between the example and the lesson drawn from it. The connection is purely accidental. Consequently, the metaphor cannot give authority to any argument on which it is based. This is not true of the Bahá'í Writings in particular and theism in general. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of this natural illustration is grounded in an ontology that gives spiritual – in this case, ethical – significance to natural facts. Therefore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's example is not merely a pleasing embellishment but points to a real ethical truth. From this it follows that there is an intrinsic connection between the subject matter and the moral explicated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

All this is not to say that God created rain solely for the purpose of teaching humans about doing good to all. Rain, like anything else, has other reasons for being, but it also performs a spiritual function for those who are spiritually awake and are "informed of the mysteries of the world of significances."[60] They will understand that these "significances" are not merely subjective phenomena but are ontologically real aspects of reality since, as, Bahá'u'lláh tells us, everything that exists reveals God's names and attributes. In short, ethics have an ontologically real foundation.

To sum up our foregoing argument: the exemption of the Bahá'í Writings (and other theistic systems) from Hume's is/ought distinction is of tremendous logical significance because it legitimizes the move from 'is' to 'ought.' Therefore, unlike scientific and empirically based ethics, theistic ethics can build on the factual descriptions of nature – be they fMRI brain-scans or "socio-biological" discoveries about human nature or scientific studies of well-being – to lead to prescriptive conclusions because values are already in the premise, i.e., in the natural data. Whether or not this possibility is always used well is another matter. What counts is that the principle has been established. On this issue, the Bahá'í Writings and other theistic ethics are internally self-sufficient and

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59. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

coherent, i.e. they do not have to import concepts from beyond the framework they have adopted.

## The Problems of Legitimacy, Authority/Power and Universality

The belief in God helps us deal with three basic issues that any system of ethics must deal with: legitimacy, authority and universality. Legitimacy deals with the questions, 'Who – if anyone – has the legitimacy or qualifications to lay down moral principles and precepts for the human race? Who or what – if anything – has the knowledge, understanding and intrinsic goodness necessary to legitimize a demand for obedience? Who – or what – is inherently entitled to make obedience a condition for attaining 'rightness,' or true value and appropriate worth as a human being?' Clearly, no human individual or collective has the unlimited knowledge needed to dispense perfect justice, understanding and compassion. Human beings are fallible and fickle, have personal agendas, lack absolute independence from all things, are susceptible to outside influence, interference and coercion. Therefore, it is virtually self-evident that no individual and no collective inherently possess such legitimacy by virtue of their human nature. This leaves science-based ethics in a weak position regarding the legitimacy of any ethical system it might adopt because no one has the qualifications that justify making particular demands. Of course, we may give governments or social institutions the power to do so but this is legal not moral legitimacy. On the other hand, in Bahá'í or in any other theist ethical system, God is not only unaffected by the aforementioned deficiencies, but He is also the actual maker of the world and the nature of everything in it. Consequently, it is difficult to imagine who else could be better qualified and possess the moral legitimacy to legislate for humanity.

All ethical systems must also deal with the issue of authority or power which refers to the power to enforce ethical commands in some way or another, i.e., to ensure that some kind of consequence follows moral or immoral behavior, just as consequences follow all behaviors in the natural world. Without power, legitimacy remains purely theoretical, in effect, impotent, thereby undermining and endangering one of the main *raisons d'être* of ethics, i.e., providing unity and the basis for co-operation among people.

In the last analysis, science-based ethics are forced to rely on political power to impose their ethical standards; they rely on government or social institutions to make their moral standards effective in the world. Here, too, they show their lack of internal self-sufficiency because they need to import an essential aspect of their ethical systems from beyond the scientific domain. What experiment could possibly tell us which political

decision – regardless of how it is made – is correct? Neither political nor moral correctness can be measured by the scientific method. Bahá'í, and by implication, theistic ethics, do not suffer this deficiency because the question of power is soluble within their conceptual frameworks. They are logically coherent on these foundational matters.

The third challenge for scientific and empirical ethics is 'universality' by which we mean the applicability of ethical standards everywhere, at all times and under all circumstances. Harris deals with this by referring to the human brain which is substantially the same among all ethnicities and which is part of the body that humans have evolved over the last three million years. For his part, Kurtz relies on the "common moral decencies" that he believes underlie all human culture because human "socio-biology" requires them. Because the is/ought divide is an insurmountable problem in establishing brain-scan results or "common moral decencies" as moral obligations, it is impossible to maintain any claims to universality. From the perspective of the Bahá'í Writings, these suggestions are not so much mistaken as incomplete insofar as the Manifestations of God in every time and place "restate the eternal verities"[61] i.e., the basic religious truths which, of course, include the moral truths. These truths may appear in different forms under different circumstances but are always fundamentally the same. However, the problem with the science-based ethics is that they can neither bridge the is/ought divide nor definitively establish their legitimacy, authority and universality on the basis of their own premises. Here, too, they reveal their lack of internal conceptual self-sufficiency which undermines their claims.

### Conclusion

In this paper we have examined two claims that a science-based ethics is a viable alternative to theist-based ethics such as we find in the Bahá'í Writings. We have found these claims to be untenable for three major reasons. First, they cannot logically bridge the divide between 'is' and 'ought' as explained by David Hume. Second, because of their inability to bridge the is/ought divide, they are not internally self-sufficient, i.e. they have to import ethical concepts from outside their empirical framework. Science simply cannot prove 'goodness' or 'obligation.' Third, because of their failures in the foregoing two endeavors, they cannot adequately assert claims to legitimacy, authority/power and universality. The fact that science-based ethics cannot establish their conceptual framework and

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61. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 108.

work within it, indicates that the serious logical deficiencies undermine their project. As our examples from the Bahá'í Writings have shown, theist ethical systems do not suffer from these difficulties and, therefore, remain a logically viable alternative to science-based ethics.

*Wilmette Institute*

CHRISTOPHER BUCK (Pittsburgh, USA)

## ALAIN LOCKE'S PHILOSOPHY OF DEMOCRACY

There is no formal "Baha'i philosophy." Yet there are professional philosophers who are Baha'is, who therefore may be broadly characterized as "Baha'i philosophers." [1] Foremost among Baha'i philosophers is Alain Leroy Locke (1885–1954).[2] Columbus Salley, in *The Black 100*, ranks Locke as the 36th most influential African American ever, past or present. [3] More significantly, Locke has been acknowledged as "the most influential African American intellectual born between W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr."[4]

This paper presents Alain Locke's philosophy of democracy, in nine dimensions, as a contribution to the study of Baha'i philosophy, in its broader context as philosophical thinking by professional philosophers who were religiously engaged as members of the Baha'i Faith. Baha'i values synergized Locke's philosophy of democracy or, at the very least, now serve as a useful heuristic for understanding and appreciating certain aspects of Locke's philosophy of democracy. Locke's grand (though not systematic) theory of democracy sequenced local, moral, political, economic, and cultural stages of democracy as they arced through history, with racial, social, spiritual, and world democracy completing the trajectory. Adjunct notions of natural, practical, progressive, creative, intellectual, equalitarian democracy crystallized the paradigm.

Locke made history in when he became the first African American Rhodes Scholar in 1907. As one contemporary, writing that same year, has said: "*In what he has achieved, a race has been uplifted.*" [5] Historically, Locke is most closely associated with the Harlem Renaissance (c. 1919–1935), aptly characterized as a movement that

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1. Christopher Buck, "Alain Locke: Baha'i Philosopher," *Baha'i Studies Review* 10 (2001/2002): 7–49.

2. Christopher Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005).

3. Columbus Smalley, *The Black 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential African-Americans, Past and Present*, revised and updated (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1999 [1993]), p. 137.

4. Leonard Harris & Charles Molesworth, *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 1.

5. William C. Bolivar, "Alain LeRoy Locke." *African Methodist Episcopal Church Review* 24, no. 1 (July 1907): 19.

sought to achieve "Civil Rights by Copyright."[6] In 1925, Locke edited *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, the historical significance of which Eric King Watts notes: "Only a few claims regarding the Harlem Renaissance are uncontested: that *The New Negro* stands as the 'keystone,' the 'revolutionary' advertisement, and the 'first national book' of African America is one of them."[7]

There is also synergy between the social objectives of the Harlem Renaissance and Alain Locke's philosophy of democracy. As to the purpose behind the Harlem Renaissance, Locke is crystal clear: "The Negro mind reaches out as yet to nothing but American wants, American ideas. But this forced attempt to build his Americanism on race values is a unique social experiment, and its ultimate success is impossible except through the fullest sharing of American culture and institutions."[8] The Harlem Renaissance achieved a major objective of the New Negro movement, which was to instill a race pride in Blacks and a corresponding respect for Blacks by mainstream America. This race pride created the group consciousness that was a necessary precondition for the mass mobilization of African Americans led by Dr. King during the Civil Rights movement. As the acknowledged "Dean" of the Harlem Renaissance, Locke sought to ennoble the perception (and self-perception) of African Americans through an "ameliorative use of stereotypes" and by "advocacy aesthetics"[9] whereby art served as a cultural ambassador in promoting ideal race relations.

As historically important as his pivotal role in Harlem Renaissance surely was, Locke's legacy as philosopher may just as profound, as Leonard Harris points out: "Alain Locke, I believe, is the sentinel historical figure in the history of African American professional philosophers because he conjoins an interest in the historically important issues of social well-being crucial to the African American intellectual

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6. David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Penguin, 1998), p. xxviii.

7. Eric King Watts, "African American Ethos and Hermeneutical Rhetoric: An Exploration of Alain Locke's *The New Negro*." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 1 (Feb. 2002): 19–32, citing Houston Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 85.

8. Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro." *Survey Graphic*. Special Issue: *Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro* (March 1925): 631–634 (633).

9. Leonard Harris, "Alain L. Locke," in *A Companion to Pragmatism*, ed. John R. Shook and Joseph Margolis (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), ch. 7, pp. 87–93 (91).

agenda with central issues in the modern history of philosophy."[10] Locke has been called "the father of multiculturalism."[11]

Alain Locke was a pragmatist philosopher. Of the pragmatists, John Dewey most influenced democratic theory from the pragmatist perspective. But the pragmatist whom Locke admired most was likely Franz Boas, whom Locke called a "major prophet of democracy."[12] Locke is credited with having first coined the term, "critical pragmatism." "The actual phrase, 'critical pragmatism'," writes Alison Kadlec, "appears at least as early as 1935 in Alain Locke's pragmatic theory of valuation. In the context of Locke's work, the idea of a critical pragmatism was supposed to undergird the development of cultural pluralism."[13] Leonard Harris, arguably the foremost scholar on Alain Locke, notes:

> Critical pragmatism was created by Locke and has its religious sensibilities in a place other than Cornel West's prophetic pragmatism and Dewey and James' American forms of Christianity. Locke was affiliated with the B'hai faith [*sic*: Bahá'í Faith] and thereby a radical cultural pluralist and influenced by the B'hai [*sic*: Bahá'í] demand, as a tenet of religious faith, that racism is a sin.[14]

10. Leonard Harris, "The Horror of Tradition or How to Burn Babylon and Build Benin While Reading *A Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note.*" *Philosophical Forum* 24, nos. 1–3 (Fall–Spring 1992–93): 94–119. Reprinted in *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John P. Pittman and Marx W. Wartofsky (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 94–119 [112].

11. Charles Molesworth, "Alain Locke and Walt Whitman: Manifestos and National Identity," in *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education*, ed. Leonard Harris (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 176.

12. Alain Locke, "Major Prophet of Democracy" (Review of *Race and Democratic Society* by Franz Boas), *Journal of Negro Education* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1946): 191–92. See also Mark Helbling, "Feeling Universality and Thinking Particularistically: Alain Locke, Franz Boas, Melville Herkskovits, and the Harlem Renaissance," *Prospects* 19 (1994): 289–314.

13. Alison Kadlec, "Reconstructing Dewey: The Philosophy of Critical Pragmatism," *Polity* 38, no. 4 (Oct. 2006): 519–42 (520, n. 3).

14. Leonard Harris, Review of *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race*, Bill E. Lawson and Donald F. Koch, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 41, no. 2 (Spring, 2005): 440–43 [442].

Cornel West's "prophetic pragmatism" is said to have been inspired by "his trinity of Christ, Marx, and Dewey."[15] As the Cornel West of the Jim Crow era, Locke's own "critical pragmatism" drew its inspiration from the trinity of Baha'u'llah, Royce, and Boas. One can say that Locke has synergized faith (Baha'u'llah) and philosophy (Royce), reinforced by scientific anthropology (Boas). While all but Josiah Royce among the first white pragmatists had turned a blind eye to race, Locke would agree with Cornel West in characterizing American pragmatism as "unique as a philosophical tradition in the modern world in its preoccupation or near obsession with the meaning and value of democracy." [16] (Here, pragmatism is Cornel West's synecdoche for philosopher John Dewey.) Although West, in *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (1989), had excluded him, Locke has finally entered the canon of American philosophy and taken his rightful place in the philosophical pantheon with the appearance of John Stuhr's *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy* (2000).[17]

Locke anchored philosophy in human values and formulated his own theory of relativity by way of a naturalized epistemology of human values. One of Locke's lectures captures the essence of his philosophy by its very title: "Cultural Pluralism: A New Americanism." [18] Locke's integrationism was not assimilationism. Locke held to the Bahá'í principle of "unity in diversity,"[19] which he reformulated as "unity

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15. Charles W. Mills, "Prophetic Pragmatism as a Political Philosophy," in *Cornel West: A Critical Reader*, ed. by George Yancy (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 196, quoting Lewis R. Gordon, "Black Intellectuals and Academic Activism: Cornel West's 'Dilemmas of the Black Intellectual'," in *idem*, *Her Majesty's Other Children: Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), p. 195.

16. Qtd. in Mills, "Prophetic Pragmatism," p. 197.

17. John J. Stuhr, ed., *Pragmatism and Classical American Philosophy: Essential Readings and Interpretive Essays*, 2nd edn. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002).

18. Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center (hereafter, "MSRC"), Howard University, Box 164-167, Folder 4: 1950-1953 (Programs on which Locke's Name Appears). Sponsored by the Department of Philosophy, Locke's lecture, presented on November 8, 1950, was held in the faculty lounge, Douglass Hall, Howard University.

19. The Bahá'í Faith's "watchword is unity in diversity." Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 42.

through diversity."[20]

Seeing America as "a unique social experiment," Locke's larger goal was to "Americanize Americans,"[21] with the simple yet profound message that equality benefits everyone, and that democracy itself is at stake. Locke's cosmopolitan paradigm of unity is a "theoretical and praxical transformation of classical American pragmatism."[22] According to Judith Green, Locke had precociously conceptualized "deep democracy" as "cosmopolitan unity amidst valued diversity."[23] In raising democracy to a new level of consciousness, Locke internationalized the race issue, making the crucial connection between American race relations and international relations. Racial justice, he predicted, would serve as a social catalyst of world peace.

Locke was trained as a philosopher at Harvard University. The primary branch of philosophy that Locke studied was the theory of values. Locke's dissertation was *The Problem of Classification in Theory of Value: or an Outline of a Genetic System of Values*.[24] Harvard University conferred Locke's Ph.D. on 25 February 1918, after he had successfully defended his dissertation.[25] That same year, he adopted the Bahá'í Faith, as documented and discussed in *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy*.[26] Locke, moreover, established the study of philosophy at Howard

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20. Alain Locke, "Unity through Diversity: A Bahá'í Principle," in *The Bahá'í World: A Biennial International Record*, Volume IV, 1930–1932 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1933) pp. 372–74. Reprint (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980). Reprinted again in Locke, *The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond*, ed. Leonard Harris (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), pp. 133–38 [above quote from p. 137]. Harris' reference on p. 133 n. should be emended to read, "Volume IV, 1930–1932" (not "V, 1932–1934").

21. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-124, Folder 15 ("The Preservation of the Democratic Ideal"), p. 5.

22. Segun Gbadegesin, "Values, Imperatives, and the Imperative of Democratic Values," in Leonard Harris, ed., *The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke: A Reader on Value Theory, Aesthetics, Community, Culture, Race, and Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 288.

23. Judith Green, "Cosmopolitan Unity Amidst Valued Diversity: Alain Locke's Vision of Deeply Democratic Transformation," in *Deep Democracy: Community, Diversity, and Transformation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 96.

24. Alain Leroy Locke, *The Problem of Classification in the Theory of Value: or an Outline of a Genetic System of Values* (Ph.D. dissertation: Harvard University, 1918).

25. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-228, P Oversize (Diploma awarded by Harvard University 25 Feb. 1918).

26. Christopher Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005), "Chapter Four: Conversion," pp. 58–67.

University – an institution of higher learning aptly characterized as the equivalent to Harvard University among traditionally black universities.

Leonard Harris credits Alain Locke for having contributed a "unique version of pragmatism," which "promotes a deep-seated commitment to transforming a world" through "intellectual engagement" and "aesthetic pluralism whereby beauty-making properties are considered subject to transvaluation."[27] And further:

> Locke's theory of valuation, his advocacy aesthetics, his insistence on moral imperatives as a necessary condition for the possibility of a moral community, his pedagogy of discipline and cultural integration, and his views of community as an evolving democratic experiment, all form a unique chapter of American pragmatism.[28]

Beyond his philosophy of values, Locke also developed a comprehensive theory of democracy. By devoting "Chapter Ten" to "Theorizing Democracy" in their definitive biography of Locke, Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth identify Locke's philosophy of democracy as his greatest contribution as a philosopher, which has yet to be fully understood and appreciated: "Locke's views on democracy deserve fuller study than they have received."[29]

In the fall of 1947, Locke taught a course on the "Philosophy of Democracy"[30] at Howard University, where he was a distinguished professor for over forty years. While the notes that have survived are fragmentary at best, it is now possible to reconstruct Locke's philosophy of democracy in its broad conceptual outlines. In an unpublished typescript, Locke sets forth his definition of democracy as follows:

> In a democracy built out of many peoples by this great historical process of immigration, the only safe principle of democracy is that embodied in this conception of democracy: – A democracy is a

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27. Leonard Harris, "Alain L. Locke," in *A Companion to Pragmatism*, p. 88. See also idem, "Alain L. Locke, 1885–1954," in *The Blackwell Guide to American Philosophy*, ed. Armen T. Marsoobian and John Ryder (Blackwell, 2004), ch. 17, pp. 263–70.

28. Harris, "Alain L. Locke," in *A Companion to Pragmatism*, pp. 91–92.

29. Harris & Molesworth, "Chapter Ten: Theorizing Democracy," *Alain L. Locke: Biography of a Philosopher*, pp. 328–57 (329).

30. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-112, Folder 6: "Concept of Democracy." Outline of lecture for Philosophy of Democracy course. 10 Dec. 1947.

system of government and corporate living in which there is no distinction between minority and majority rights; and under which life is safe and equally abundant for all minorities. In historical perspective[,] this is really the distinctive foundation[al] principle of American life. Our task today is to make America truly and consistently American.[31]

Locke forged a vital linkage between American democracy and world democracy. In his previously unpublished Bahá'í essay, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century" (2005), Locke wrote that "[t]he gospel for the Twentieth Century" and its message of "social salvation" must first address "[t]he fundamental problems of current America," which are "materiality and prejudice."[32] The sad irony is that America – "the land that is nearest to material democracy" – happens to be the land that "is furthest away from spiritual democracy."[33]

Democracy is a process of progressive equalizing. It is a matter of degree. For Locke, democracy was a much broader concept than its narrow political definition. Locke proposed a multidimensional model of democracy, against which he measured America's fidelity to its democratic ideal. His model ranged from concepts of "local democracy" all the way up to "world democracy." In the notes on his lecture, "Concept of Democracy," delivered on 10 Dec. 1947, Locke spoke of how the "[i]dea of democracy has evolved." Locke's dimensional model of democracy is not only typological, but evolutionary as well. In a survey of his writings, one may begin to typologize or systematize Locke's thinking on democracy. These are some of the various dimensions of democracy that Locke spoke and wrote about:

(1)    Local Democracy;
(2)    Moral Democracy;
(3)    Political Democracy;
(4)    Economic Democracy;
(5)    Cultural Democracy;
(6)    Racial Democracy;

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31. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-141, Folder 14 ([Notes] Democracy – political, economic, cultural).

32. Alain Locke, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century," in idem, "Alain Locke in His Own Words: Three Essays." *World Order* 36, no. 3 (2005): 39–42 [39–40]. (Previously unpublished essays, introduced by Christopher Buck and co-edited with Betty Fisher.)

33. Alain Locke, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century," p. 42.

(7)    Social Democracy;
(8)    Spiritual Democracy;
(9)    World Democracy.

Locke's philosophy of democracy was both historical and phenomenological. It may aptly be characterized as a "grand theory" of democracy – anchored in history, grounded in philosophy, and validated by personal experience. Locke's philosophy of democracy harks back to Athens, arcs through history, and telescopes into the future. His point of departure was, of course, the historical development or evolution of democracy. The first five dimensions may be roughly characterized as "Historical Democracy," as they are sequenced in Locke's paradigm of social evolution. In his farewell address at Talladega College (1941), Locke spoke of local, moral, political, economic, and cultural stages of democracy. The present writer published the speech in 2005.[34] Locke begins his speech by saying:

> And now, I should like to talk about something that we all take for granted – these are things we know least about. The words most frequently used are words understood least[.] – Democracy is one of those words. Thinking Negroes, of course, know much about what democracy is not, and have a more workable conception of what democracy truly means than those who have just enough to be content with or those to whom it is just a commonplace concept and way of life. Democracy, of course, is one of the basic human ideals, but as an ideal of human association it is something quite superior to any outward institution or any particular society; therefore, not only is government too narrow to express democracy, but government from time to time must grow to realize democracy.[35]

Not only is government too narrow a concept of democracy, but democracy started out historically as a narrow concept as well.

**Local Democracy:** The historical origins of democracy hark back to Athens, as one would expect. And while it is a breakthrough concept of the profoundest historical moment, Locke emphasizes its limitations:

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34. Alain Locke, "Five Phases of Democracy: Farewell Address at Talladega College," in idem, "Alain Locke in His Own Words: Three Essays." *World Order* 36, no. 3 (2005): 45–48.

35. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-113, Folder 4 ([re: democracy] Departure speech to students at Talladega College, 1941), p. 1.

It may be a little daring in the time we have at our disposal, but let us put on seven-league boots and trace democracy – one of the great social concepts. Both in concept and in practice democracy began in Greece – in the Greek city[-]state. In its day it was a great achievement, but in that day democracy was a concept of local citizenship. Our nearest approach to it is the kind of fellowship we find in college fraternities and sororities in which the bonds are of "like-mindedness" excluding others. The rim of the Greek concept of democracy was the barbarian: it was then merely the principle of fraternity within a narrow, limited circle. There was a dignity accorded to each member on the basis of membership in the group. It excluded foreigners, slaves and women. This concept carried over into the Roman empire.[36]

In staging the evolution of democracy, the next developmental phase in the evolution of democracy, accordingly, was Christianity.

**Moral Democracy:** Christianity, in Locke's estimate of it, provided the ideal basis for a moral democracy. Ideally universal, and socially so in its pristine beginnings, over time Christianity became circumscribed, as Locke, true to his critical temper, points out:

Christianity was responsible for the introduction of the next great revision in the concept of democracy. We owe to Christianity one of the great basic ideals of democracy – the ideal of the moral equality of human beings. The Christian ideal of democracy was in its initial stages more democratic than it subsequently became. It always held on to the essential ideal of moral equality of man within the limits of organized Christianity – anybody else was a potential member only as he became converted. Christianity was thus a crusading ideal in bringing humanity into wider association. But the Christian church was a political institution and in making compromises often failed in bringing about real human equality.[37]

Notwithstanding its contribution to the evolution of democracy by promoting "the ideal of the moral equality of human beings," Christianity later failed to live up to its own ideals.

**Political Democracy:** Locke explains the profound influence of the

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36. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

French Revolution on the establishment of American democracy by the Founding Fathers. In one speech, Locke states:

> Then later came that political and secular strand of colonial experience, which out of the fight against tyranny and taxation grew into the issue of political freedom and the liberty of self-government. But even then, when these developments had been fought for and won, and were being institutionalized, it took another strain of radical thinking imported from Revolutionary France to consolidate this into a formally democratic doctrine, the fundamental historical creed of American democracy that we know so well and rightly treasure so highly.[38]
>
> It was the political philosophy of the French that most impressed Thomas Jefferson, and profoundly influenced the development of democracy in America:
>
> The third great step in democracy came from [P]rotestant lands and people who evolved the ideal of political equality: (1) equality before the law; (2) political citizenship. This **political democracy** pivoted on individualism, and the freedom of the individual in terms of what we know as the fundamental rights of man. It found its best expression in the historic formula of "Liberty, equality and fraternity."[39]

Locke appreciated the Bill of Rights and subsequent Amendments as milestones in the evolution of American democracy. But the political system – not to mention the social manifestations of democracy – were still far from perfect:

> In terms of this ideology our country's government was founded. But for generations after many of the fundamentals of our democracy were pious objectives, not fully expressed in practice. In the perspective of democracy's long evolution, we must regard our country's history as a progressive process of democratization, not yet fully achieved, but certainly progressing importantly in terms of the [T]hirteenth, [F]ourteenth and F]ifteenth

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38. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-112, Folder 18 ("Creative Democracy"), p. 2.

39. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-113, Folder 4 ([re: democracy] Departure speech to students at Talladega College, 1941), p. 2.

[A]mendments, and the amendment extending the right of franchise to women. It is still imperfect.[40]

The perfection of democracy requires a "democratic spirit," without which democracy, by legislation standing alone, cannot succeed: "[I]f we are going to have effective democracy in America we must have the democratic spirit as well as the democratic tradition, we must have more **social democracy** and more **economic democracy** in order to have or keep political democracy."[41]

This statement reveals the cornerstone of Locke's philosophy of democracy: that democratic ideals must be complemented by democratic attitudes. In other words, the democratic spirit is what really animates a democracy, not simply its institutions and legal safeguards. Consistent with this analysis is Locke's stage-wise progression from political to economic democracy, in which human values (on which political democracy is ostensibly based) can and must be linked to economic values.

**Economic Democracy:** Although Locke was no economist, he clearly understood that reality. It was totally obvious in the ghettoes. Economic reform was a necessary development of democracy:

The fourth crucial stage in the enlargement of democracy began, I think, with the income tax amendment. Woodrow Wilson tried to put into operation an extension of democracy which may well have been seriously hindered by World War number one. The income tax [A]mendment was an initial step in **social** [economic] **democracy** as distinguished from the purely political, – a step toward economic equality through the partial appropriation of surplus wealth for the benefit of the commonwealth.

In this country for many generations we thought we had economic equality. What we really had was a frontier expansion which developed such surpluses and offered such practical equality of opportunity as to give us the illusion of economic equality. We later learned that we did not have **economic democracy**, and that in order to have this, we must have guaranteed to all citizens certain minimal standards of living and the right to earn a living. Faced with the crisis of unemployment, the New Deal has been

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
41. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-124, Folder 15 ("The Preservation of the Democratic Ideal"), p. 5.

confronted with the problem of inaugurating some of these beginnings of economic democracy and of constitutionally implementing a larger measure of social justice. The whole program of what is now called [S]ocial [S]ecurity is directed toward such objectives.[42]

Locke spoke of "the two basic economic roots of war – unequal access to markets and sources of raw materials and widespread differentials of living standards and economic security."[43] Locke taught that political freedom ought to lead to economic equality. What Locke means by economic democracy is an "equitable distribution of wealth."[44] Redistribution of surplus wealth is part and parcel of that process. But what about the connection between economic democracy and race? In the conclusion of an unpublished essay, "Peace Between Black and White in the United States," Locke wrote:

> We used to say that Christianity and democracy were both at stake in the equitable solution of the race question. They were; but they were abstract ideals that did not bleed when injured. Now we think with more realistic logic, perhaps, that economic justice cannot stand on one foot; and economic reconstruction is the dominant demand of the present-day American scene.[45]

**Cultural Democracy:** Locke's next form of democracy is clear enough, although his name for it ("cultural democracy") is not so much "cultural" as it is "intercommunal." Locke sums up the problem he is addressing as follows: "Less acute than race prejudice, but by no means unrelated to it, is the social bias and discrimination underlying the problem of cultural minorities. [. . .] Cultural bias, like that directed against the Mexican, Orientals, the Jew, the American Indian, often intensifies into racial prejudice."[46] As an antidote to this social ill, Locke

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42. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-113, Folder 4 ([re: democracy] Departure speech to students at Talladega College, 1941), pp. 3–4.

43. Alain Locke, "Democracy Faces a World Order," *Harvard Educational Review* 12, no. 2 (March 1942): 124.

44. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-112, Folder 6 ("Concept of Democracy"). Outline of lecture for Philosophy of Democracy course. 10 Dec. 1947, p. 1.

45. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-123: Folder 19 ("Peace between Black and White in the United States").

46. Alain Locke, *World View on Race and Democracy: A Study Guide in Human Group Relations* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1943), p. 5.

advocates cultural pluralism, and rejects "Americanization," whether forced or coerced by social pressures. Think of "culture" in this context as analogous to the idea of a "corporate culture." As Locke explains:

> A fifth phase of democracy, even if the preceding four are realized, still remains to be achieved in order to have a fully balanced society. The present crisis forces us to realize that without this also democracy may go into total eclipse. This fifth phase is the struggle for **cultural democracy**, and rests on the concept of the right of difference, – that is, the guarantee of the rights of minorities. Again in the colonial days, we achieved the basic ideals of this crucial aspect of democracy, but scarcely realized them in fact. Today we have the same problems of the freedom of speech, worship and conscience, but in a complex modern situation these things are even more difficult to work out.
>
> One of our greatest problems then today is a real democratic reciprocity for minorities of all sorts, both as over against the so-called majority and among themselves. These contemporary problems of democracy can be vividly sensed if we realize that the race question is at the very heart of this struggle for cultural democracy. Its solution lies beyond even the realization of political and economic democracy, although of course that solution can only be reached when we no longer have extreme political inequality and extreme economic inequality.[47]

This is where the Harlem Renaissance fits in. During its heyday, and throughout the post-Renaissance period, Locke expressed the hope that "our writers and artists" would achieve a "victory" through "a psychological conquest of racism, prejudice and cultural intolerance."[48] His race loyalty was the gold vein in a rock of solidarity with the rest of humanity. As one scholar observes: "Locke was pro-human rather than pro-negro."[49] Of course, he was both. Alain Locke was both a "race man" and an integrationist. The role of culture in a "cultural democracy" is that of enrichment in full representation:

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47. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-113, Folder 4 ([re: democracy] Departure speech to students at Talladega College, 1941), pp. 4–5.

48. Alain Locke, "Reason and Race," in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke*, p. 320.

49. Yvonne Ochillo, "The Race-Consciousness of Alain Locke." *Phylon* 47, no. 3 (1986): 173–81 (176).

Instead of saying, as was said for so long, that we should recognize the Negro because he has been neglected and needs recognition, recent American literature, – and for that matter, American art generally – has come forward, at least in its more creative talents, with a very new and democratic formula: We will recognize Negro materials because they are intrinsically interesting and because the national culture needs them in the picture to be truly representative.[50]

**Racial Democracy:** Alain Locke was a precursor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "[T]he race question," wrote Locke in 1949, "has become the number one problem of the world."[51] The next statement follows from the first: "Race," Locke states, "really is a dominant issue of our thinking about democracy[.]"[52] In his small book, *World View on Race and Democracy: A Study Guide in Human Group Relations*, Locke states this another way: "Of all the barriers limiting democracy, color is the greatest, whether viewed from a standpoint of **national** or **world democracy**."[53] Locke sees this as part of "total democracy."[54]

Prophetically, Locke forged a linkage between racism as an American problem and racism as a world problem, as he explicitly states: "Race as a symbol of misunderstanding has become fully the great tragedy of our time, both nationally and internationally."[55] Race is the crux, the litmus test, the hinge on which the entire project of democracy hangs. In a previously unpublished report on racism, Locke writes:

The American race problem may eventually become just a phase and segment of the world relationship of races, and in slight degree it is already in process of becoming so. Historically, and in the

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50. Alain Locke, "The Negro Minority in American Literature," in *The Works of Alain Locke*, edited by Charles Molesworth (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 83–88 [87].

51. Alain Locke, "Dawn Patrol: A Review of the Literature of the Negro for 1948," *Phylon* 10, nos. 1–2 (1949): 5–14; 167–72. Reprinted in Jeffrey C. Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture* (New York and London: Garland, 1983), pp. 337–49 [337].

52. Alain Locke, "Reason and Race," in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke*, p. 325.

53. Alain Locke, *World View on Race and Democracy*, p. 1.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 2, citing Howard H. Brinton (no reference given).

55. Alain Locke, "A Critical Retrospect of the Literature of the Negro for 1947," *Phylon* 9, no. 1 (1948): 3–12. Reprinted in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke: A Selection of His Essays on Art and Culture*, pp. 329–36 [329].

general American thought of it, whether among the Negro minority or the white majority, it is thought of as peculiarly and exclusively a national problem. In some respects, its situations are relatively unique. [. . .] So, as between the white and the black peoples, the American situation is the acid test of the whole problem; and will be crucial in its outcome for the rest of the world. This makes America, in the judgment of many, the world's laboratory for the progressive solution of this great problem of social adjustment.[56]

Locke takes Christianity to task for what today is called self-segregation: "It is a sad irony," Alain Locke wrote, "that the social institution most committed and potentially most capable of implementing **social democracy** should actually be the weakest and most inconsistent, organized religion."[57] Particularly egregious, in Locke's view, is what today is termed "self-segregation": "Of all the segregated bodies, the racially separate church is the saddest and most obviously self-contradicting. The separate Negro church, organized in self-defensive protest, is nonetheless just as anaomolous [sic], though perhaps, more pardonably so."[58] Locke's remark presaged those of the Rev. Billy Graham and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., both of whom later observed that Sunday morning is the most segregated time in America.

**Social Democracy:** In "Reason and Race" (1947), Locke underscores "the fact that the contemporary world situation clearly indicates that **social democracy** is the only safe choice for the survival of Western and Christian civilization."[59] In the Seventeenth Annual Convention and Bahá'í Congress (5 July 1925), Locke was reported to have said, in gist:

Dr. Alain LeRoy Locke of Washington, D.C., delivered a polished address, portraying the great part which America can play in the establishment of world peace, if alive to its opportunity. The working out of **social democracy** can be accomplished here. To this end we should not think in little arcs of experience, but in the big, comprehensive way. Let our country reform its own heart and

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56. Alain Locke, "[Through Mrs. Ruth Cranston] Report on The Race Problem in the American Area." Alain Locke Papers, MSRC. Box 164-43, Folder 3 (Writings by Locke – Notes[:] Christianity, spirituality, religion.), p. 1.

57. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-105, Folder 34 ("American Education's Latest Task: Teaching Democracy." [incomplete]), p. 8.

58. *Ibid.*

59. Alain Locke, "Reason and Race," in Stewart, *The Critical Temper of Alain Locke*, p. 327.

life. Needed reforms cannot be worked out by the action of any one group, but a fine sense of cooperation must secure universal fellowship. He praised Green Acre, which he declared to be an oasis in the desert of materiality. He urged all who were favored by this glorious experience to carry forth its glorious message and thus awaken humanity. In final analysis, peace cannot exist anywhere without existing everywhere.[60]

The very integrity of democracy itself is put to test by the state of its race relations.

**Spiritual Democracy:** Democracy is more than a political system. It is a state of mind, a province of the heart, a radiation of attitudes, from which all actions flow. Spiritual democracy is the democracy of the heart. It's a place, a state of mind that legislation cannot reach. It is the interiority of democracy that Locke emphasized:

> Constitutional guarantees, legal and civil rights, political machinery of democratic action and control are, of course, the skeleton foundation of democracy, but you and I know that attitudes are the flesh and blood of democracy, and that without their vital reenforcement [sic] democracy is really moribund or dead. That is my reason for thinking that in any democracy, ours included, the crucial issue, the test touchstone of democracy is minority status, minority protection, minority rights.[61]

During World War II, Locke wrote of the potential role that religion could play in promoting democracy on a world scale:

> The world crisis has led to the reexamination of the traditional doctrines of human equality and brotherhood among the leading

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60. "The Seventeenth Annual Convention and Baha'i Congress," *Baha'i News Letter*, No. 6 (1925): 3. Here, Locke's reference to "Green Acre" is the Green Acre Baha'i School, Retreat, and Conference Center in Eliot, Maine, where, in 1925, Baha'i delegates assembled primarily to elect the "National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada" — a council of nine Baha'i representatives charged with overseeing the affairs of the American and Canadian Baha'i community at that time. (The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada was separately elected beginning in 1948, and was legally incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1949, while The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States would be elected annually thereafter.)

61. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-124, Folder 15 ("The Preservation of the Democratic Ideal"), pp. 1–2.

thinkers of the Christian churches. As a result, a fresh crusade for aligning organized religion with the constructive forces of world democracy has come to the vanguard of liberal religious thought and action. Both intercultural, intersectarian and interfaith movements have grown out of these considerations.[62]

In attempting to remold the American temperament, Alain Locke led a civil rights movement of the American spirit. Of particular importance are Locke's views on "spiritual democracy" – an aspect of Locke's thought that, so far, has received scant attention. In an evidently unpublished Bahá'í essay (2005), Locke expresses his conviction that "Spiritual Democracy" is the "largest" dimension of democracy as a whole "and most inner meaning." In his essay, "The Gospel for the Twentieth Century," Locke states:

> The gospel for the Twentieth Century rises out of the heart of its greatest problems [. . .] Much has been accomplished in the name of Democracy, but Spiritual Democracy, its largest and most inner meaning, is so below our common horizons. [. . .] [T]he land that is nearest to material democracy is furthest away from spiritual democracy [. . .] The word of God is still insistent, [. . .] and we have [. . .] Bahá'u'lláh's "one great trumpet-call to humanity": "That all nations shall become one in faith, and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled [. . .] These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and family.["][63]

The spirit of democracy is best realized in a spirit of confraternity of the races, as a basis for the social solidarity of society as a whole. In *The Negro in America* (1933), Locke promoted ideal race relations by

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62. Alain Locke, *World View on Race and Democracy*, p. 18.

63. Baha'u'llah, quoted in Locke, "Gospel for the Twentieth Century," p. 42, indirectly citing J. E. Esslemont, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era: An Introduction to the Baha'i Faith*, 5th rev. ed. (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980, 1998 printing), pp. 39–40. This oft-quoted statement was first published by Edward Granville Browne, Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic, Cambridge University, interview with Baha'u'llah, Acre, Palestine, on Wednesday, April 16, 1890, in 'Abdu'-Baha, *A Traveller's Narrative Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab*, ed. and trans. Browne, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1891) pp. xxxix–xl.

emphasizing the mutual benefits that true reciprocity would foster:

> If they will but see it, because of their complementary qualities, the two racial groups have great spiritual need, one of the other. It would truly be significant in the history of human culture, if two races so diverse should so happily collaborate, and the one return for the gift of a great civilization the reciprocal gift of the spiritual cross-fertilization of a great and distinctive national culture.[64]

**World democracy:** Democracy, ideally, is collective self-destiny. On a world scale, democracy is global self-governance. Locke's universalism is most evident in his discussion of world democracy, for which "internationalism" appears to be a synonym. World democracy is really the logical and pragmatic expansion of the democratic principle, from a national to truly international level. "[W]orld democracy," writes Locke, "presupposes the recognition of the essential equality of all peoples and the potential parity of all cultures."[65] On a radio program, "Woman's Page of the Air," with Adelaide Hawley, broadcast 6 August 1944 while World War II was at its height, Locke said: "Just as the foundation of democracy as a national principle made necessary the declaration of the basic equality of persons, so the founding of *international* democracy must guarantee the basic equality of human *groups*."[66]

Accordingly, Locke noted, "we must find common human denominators of liberty, equality, and fraternity for humanity at large."[67] In the quest to universalize democracy, "color becomes the acid test of our fundamental honesty in putting into practice the democracy we preach."[68]

Exploring the relationship between America and world democracy, Locke postulated that "World leadership [. . .] must be moral leadership in democratic concert with humanity at large."[69] In so doing, America must perforce "abandon racial and cultural prejudice."[70] "A **world democracy**," wrote Locke, "cannot possibly tolerate what a national

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64. Alain Locke, *The Negro in America* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1933), p. 50.

65. Alain Locke, *World View on Race and Democracy*, p. 14.

66. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-105, Folder 33: [re: America's position in world affairs in relation to race.] Speech over station KMYR, Denver. 6 August 1944, p. 6.

67. Locke, "The Unfinished Business of Democracy," p. 455.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 456.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

70. *Ibid.*

democracy has countenanced too long." [71] This is an unmistakable allusion to America and racism.

**Conclusions:** Alain Locke's philosophy of democracy is unfinished, for the simple reason that he did not systematize it, much less apply it. Superficially, if one accepts the multidimensional nature of Locke's theory of democracy, it appears, at best, to be *descriptive*. Yet there is a *prescriptive* element as well. This aspect of Locke's thinking has yet to be fully developed. If one reads his writings closely, the prescriptive element falls into focus. To sharpen the focus, let us take the following statement from "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace," as a point of departure for the formulaic prescriptive application of Locke's theory of democracy on a systematic, yet theoretically practical level:

> [T]hree working principles seem to be derivable for a more objective and scientific understanding of human cultures and for the more reasonable control of their interrelationships. They are:
>
> 1. The principle of *cultural equivalence*, under which we would more wisely press the search for functional similarities in our analyses and comparisons of human cultures . . . . Such functional equivalences, which we might term "*culture-cognates*" or "*culture-correlates*," discovered underneath deceptive but superficial institutional divergence, would provide objective but soundly neutral common denominators for intercultural understanding and cooperation;
>
> 2. The principle of *cultural reciprocity*, which, by a general recognition of the reciprocal character of all contacts between cultures and of the fact that all modern cultures are highly composite ones, would . . . [provide] scientific, point-by-point comparisons with their correspondingly limited, specific, and objectively verifiable superiorities or inferiorities;
>
> 3. The principle of *limited cultural convertibility*, that, since culture elements, though widely interchangeable, are so separable, the institutional forms from their values and the values from their institutional forms, the organic selectivity and assimilative capacity of a borrowing culture becomes a limiting criterion for cultural exchange.[72]

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71. Locke, "Democracy Faces a World Order," p. 128.

72. Alain Locke, "Cultural Relativism and Ideological Peace," in *The Works of Alain Locke*, ed. Charles Molesworth (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), pp. 548–54 (550–551).

In simpler terms, Locke's prescriptive paradigm proposes a three-step process: (1) Correlate (by a method of formal <u>comparison</u>, identify "functional equivalences" as possible "common denominators"); (2) Confirm (by objectively making "point-by-point comparisons," verify the reciprocal character of such "culture-correlates," thereby reaching a common <u>understanding</u>); and (3) Convert (by justifying mutual acceptance of comparable values, promote intercultural exchange and <u>collaboration</u>). The result would be as follows:

> Through functional [1] <u>comparison</u> a much more constructive phase of cultural relativism seems to be developing, promising the discovery of some less arbitrary and more objective norms. Upon them, perhaps we can build sounder intercultural [2] <u>understanding</u> and promote a more equitable [3] <u>collaboration</u> between cultures.[73]

What Locke calls for is "an objective comparative analysis on a world scale of our major culture values."[74] This can be done dimension-by-dimension – in local, moral, political, economic, cultural, interracial, social, spiritual, global, intellectual, natural, practical, and creative contexts. Locke's proposed method has never been rigorously tested. This quest for intercultural exchange, recognition and cooperation is part and parcel of what Locke called "reciprocity." In and of itself, reciprocity is not a method of conflict resolution *per se*, but is a means of cultural diplomacy that promotes peaceful interchange.

In fine, Locke's formula for ideal intercommunal relations (with a democracy) intercultural relations (between democracies) is: (1) <u>comparison</u>; (2) <u>understanding</u>; (3) <u>collaboration</u>. In a dynamic mode, Locke advocates that philosophers (and other leaders of thought) compare, understand and collaborate.

Alain Locke's philosophy of democracy does not end with his dimensional paradigm and comparative method for identifying equivalent cross-cultural values and their concomitant moral imperatives. Locke famously wrote:

> All philosophies, it seems to me, are in ultimate derivation philosophies of life and not of abstract, disembodied "objective" reality; products of time, place and situation, and thus systems of timed history rather than timeless eternity. . . . In de-throning our

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73. *Ibid.*, p. 552 (bracketed numbers and emphasis added).
74. *Ibid.*, p. 553.

absolutes, we must take care not to exile our imperatives, for after all, we live by them."[75]

Locke's Bahá'í-inspired vision incorporates the three "basic corporate ideas" of nation, race and religion, of which Locke speaks in his paper, "Moral Imperatives for World Order" (1944).[76] Alain Locke's prophetic words remain true today: "The moral imperatives of a new world order are an internationally limited idea of national sovereignty, a non-monopolistic and culturally tolerant concept of race and religious loyalties freed of sectarian bigotry." In "Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy" (1942), Locke wrote that: "The intellectual core of the problems of the peace… will be the discovery of the necessary common denominators and the basic equivalences involved in a democratic world order or democracy on a world scale."[77] A world democracy is a world order established on both legal and social foundations that command universal assent.

Locke inwardly felt that what America really needed was to embrace Bahá'í principles (and not necessarily the Bahá'í Faith itself). "Dr. Alain Locke of Washington, D.C., speaking on the subject, 'America's Part in World Peace'," according to a news report, "pointed out the priceless value and the great necessity of a good example if America is to perform a real service to the world." Locke proclaimed:

> America's democracy must begin at home with a spiritual fusion of all her constituent peoples in brotherhood, and in an actual mutuality of life. Until democracy is worked out in the vital small scale of practical human relations, it can never, except as an empty formula, prevail on the national or international basis. Until it establishes itself in human hearts, it can never institutionally flourish. Moreover, America's reputation and moral influence in the world depends on the successful achievement of this vital spiritual democracy within the lifetime of the present generation.

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75. Alain Locke, "Values and Imperatives," in *The Works of Alain Locke*, pp. 451–64 (451, 452).

76. Alain Locke, "The Moral Imperatives for World Order," *Summary of Proceedings, Institute of International Relations, Mills College, Oakland, CA, June 18–28, 1944*, pp. 19–20. Reprinted in Leonard Harris, ed., *The Philosophy of Alain Locke* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 143, 151–52.

77. Alain Locke. "Pluralism and Intellectual Democracy." *Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, Second Symposium* (New York: Conference on Science, Philosophy and Religion, 1942), p. 196–212. Reprinted in *The Philosophy of Alain Locke*, pp. 51–66 (62).

> (Material civilization alone does not safeguard the progress of a nation.) Bahá'í Principles and the leavening of our national life with their power, is to be regarded as the salvation of democracy. In this way only can the fine professions of American ideals be realized.[78]

Here, Locke says that Baha'i principles can contribute to the full realization of the American ideals of democracy, which Locke characterizes as the "salvation of democracy."

Locke's philosophy of democracy, in essence, was to "Americanize Americans" – to realize America's ideals in all its dimensions – locally, morally, politically, economically, culturally, interracially, socially, spiritually, globally, intellectually, naturally, practically, and creatively – in order to further democratize democracy. "[B]ut now, it seems to me," Locke told an audience of social workers in 1938, "the soundest, wisest and most appropriate slogan, – if we must have a slogan [–] is to [A]mericanize Americans in their social attitudes and behavior, to establish democracy in the heart of our social relations."[79] Once that happens, America could have the requisite moral authority to adopt its "world role."[80]

Locke's philosophy of democracy was his signal contribution to the "salvation of democracy," from race relations to international relations, in connecting economic values with human values, and in predicating all other dimensions of democracy on the health and vitality of "spiritual democracy," which Baha'i teachings enrich with its wealth of principles of unity,[81] from family relations to international relations, and from local democracy to world democracy.

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78. Harlan Ober, "The Baha'i Congress at Green Acre," *Star of the West* 16, no. 1 (April 1925): 525, on the occasion of the "The Seventeenth Annual Convention and Baha'i Congress," where Alain Locke delivered an invited presentation.

79. Alain Locke Papers, MSRC, Box 164-124, Folder 15 ("The Preservation of the Democratic Ideal"), p. 5.

80. Alain Locke, "Democracy Faces a World Order," p. 126.

81. See Christopher Buck, "Fifty Baha'i Principles of Unity: A Paradigm of Social Salvation." *Baha'i Studies Review* 18 (2012): 3–44 (published June 2015). http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/bsr.18.3/1. http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/intellect/bsr/2012/00000018/00000001/art00 001. See also http://bahai-library.com/buck_unity_social_salvation. Accessed 2 August 2015. For a different configuration, see *idem*, "50 Baha'i Principles of Unity: From Individual to International Relations," BahaiTeachings.org (June 10, 2014), at http://bahaiteachings.org/50-bahai-principles-of-unity-from-individual-to-international-relations (accessed 12 Sept. 2015).

Locke's philosophy of democracy is no mere taxonomy, for it implicates a corresponding teleology. In fine, Locke's teleology is his moral imperative calling on philosophers (and other leaders of thought) prove worthy of their philosophical salt by endeavoring to (1) find "common denominators" (2) to reach common ground (3) to achieve a common purpose, i.e. for the commonweal, or greater good, of humanity. Grounded in values, Locke's philosophy expands notions of democracy as a predicate for cosmopolitan social principles. Simply put, Locke's call to compare, concur, and collaborate is another of Locke's "Moral Imperatives for World Order" (to borrow the title of the essay cited in Note 76, *supra*). This process dynamically links "Values and Imperatives" (to invoke the title of the essay cited in Note 75, *supra*), for "for after all, we live by them."

*Independent Scholar (formerly, Michigan State University)*

MIKHAIL SERGEEV (Philadelphia, PA, USA)

# THESES ON MODERNITY AND THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH[*]

The Bahá'í Faith is a modern religious movement that was initiated in nineteenth-century Persia and as such it should be compared not only to traditional religions but also to the ideology of modern societies. Modernity, and more specifically the Enlightenment, marks a watershed in the social evolution of Western civilization whose influence, as it seems, will eventually extend to all of humanity. The Enlightenment thinkers formulated a rationalist worldview that aimed at social reforms on the grounds of human liberty, equality, and justice. Democratic elections, multi-party political system, separation of the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches of power, along with the separation of church and state constitute some of the major hallmarks of Enlightenment-type societies.

Traditional religions produced a twofold reaction to the challenge of modernity. It consisted of the orthodox (conservative) and the reformist (liberal) responses to the ideology of the Enlightenment. The first rejects its social teachings in favor of fundamentalism and isolationism; the second embraces its egalitarian spirit while promoting ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.

Unlike traditional faiths whose scriptural canons had been formed and sealed long before the advent of modern times, new religious movements have the advantage and even the obligation to respond to modernity in a different way. Every spiritual tradition has a unique point of attraction, and the attraction of modern spirituality must take into account the successes and failures of the project of the Enlightenment. Simple rejection would make those movements reactionary and equate them with a return to the Middle Ages. Simple acceptance would mean that their gods are no smarter than Thomas Jefferson and could offer nothing more worthwhile than he did. Both positions, quite satisfactory for traditional religions, would be self-defeating for new religious movements, and while leading to impressive short-term advances would, in the long run,

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eliminate all chance of successful competition with the traditional, established faiths.

To sum up, the validity and potentials of new religious movements depend on their relation to and evaluation of modernity along with their ability to add some positive revelatory features to the accomplishments of human reason. That is why the comparison between the Bahá'í Faith and modernity is crucial for the evaluation of this religion and its prospective successes on the world stage.

**First Thesis: Cycles of Religion**

Religion is an organic system and as any organism it develops in quality. It is also a semantic structure, which is based on the interplay between sacred scriptures and sacred tradition whose dynamic correlation provides for the organic growth of the system. Thus, the teachings of the founders of faith represent the nucleus or the seed that potentially contains all of its later modifications. Various interpretations of those teachings produce different confessions and denominations within a religion that correspond to a number of common stages of its evolution. Overall, in the course of its development, religion passes through six such phases, namely, the formative, orthodox, classical, reformist, critical, and post-critical.

Also, in the course of its evolution, religion undergoes two types of crises. The structural crisis of religion poses a challenge to its sacred tradition or system of interpretation and is usually resolved with the appearance of new branches of the same faith that develop their own distinct modes of scriptural understanding. The systemic crisis, in its turn, challenges the very foundations of the religious system by questioning its sacred scriptures. Such a crisis is usually overcome by the birth of new religious movements in the midst of their mother-faiths. After giving rise to new spiritual traditions, old religions continue to thrive in their post-critical phase, often successfully competing with their younger rivals.

**Second Thesis: The Project of Modernity**

Modernity, as it is expressed in the ideology of the Enlightenment, questions the validity of Christian scriptures and so from the perspective of the theory of religious cycles, represents a systemic crisis of Christianity. Since modernity exerted its influence all over the planet and affected major world religions, it can be characterized as a global crisis of religious consciousness and spirituality.

The rise of secularism and the rapid deterioration of traditional morality are among the most dangerous negative results of modernity. The establishment of democratic political states characterized by the de-

absolutization of power and the rule of law are among the most important positive aspects of modernity.

### Third Thesis: Culture vs. Civilization

Culture (from the word "cult") originates in religion and entails a set of beliefs that operate from within the individual. Civilization consists of rules that regulate the external behavior of individuals in society. Since the inner and the outer are intimately connected, and the external is the expression of the internal, culture and civilization are also interrelated and the first can produce various forms of the second. Christianity, for example, gave rise to a number of civilizations, including Medieval, Renaissance, and modern societies.

From this point of view, it is not completely appropriate to compare modernity to the Bahá'í Faith. Modernity represents a specific type of civilization that developed from Christian cultural roots, while the Bahá'í Faith lays the foundation for its own distinct culture that may evolve into a variety of different civilizations in the future. It's like comparing the blossom of one flower with the root of another.

Bahá'ís believe in the Lesser and Most Great Peace, which entail a similar distinction. The Lesser Peace may eventually come as the culmination of the Enlightenment project, and it will consist of the external political unification of humanity on a global scale. The Most Great Peace represents the ideal goal of the inner spiritualization and unity of humankind, which could involve various socio-political arrangements.

### Fourth Thesis: The Bahá'í Extension of Modernity

Bahá'í ideology in many significant ways represents an extension of the modern worldview. Bahá'ís sanctify – by re-affirming them in a different religious context – most of the principles of the Enlightenment, including the freedom of consciousness and expression, the freedom of association, the rule of law, the equality of men and women, the importance of scientific and technological progress, the advancement of human rights, and so on.

Bahá'í teachings also apply the modern concept of limitation of power in the organizational structures of religion. As a result, the Bahá'í Administrative Order is built upon the separation of the activities of interpretation, administration, and worship, and follows democratic electoral practices as well as consultative and majority voting decision-making.

**Fifth Thesis: The Bahá'í Departure from Modernity**

There are a number of Bahá'í doctrines that are either incompatible with or represent an apparent step backward from the Enlightenment worldview. These are the doctrines of infallibility and the conflation of religion and state, the prohibition of organized dissent and homosexuality, and the ineligibility of women to serve in the Universal House of Justice.

Generally speaking, with respect to those five controversial issues, Bahá'í teachings fall somewhere in between modernity and traditional religions. They are more advanced, say, than the Catholic tradition but are not nearly as liberal as the ideology of the Enlightenment. More specifically, Bahá'í doctrines on infallibility, organized dissent, and the conflation of religion and state aim to sustain the organizational unity of the religion, whose institutions, they propose, will eventually participate in the government activities in the distant future.

**Sixth Thesis: Separation of Religion and State**

Formally speaking, religion can never be fully separated from the state because both of those institutions serve the same purpose of human education and training in virtue. Religion exercises this function by appealing to heavenly rewards, while the state does so by delivering earthly punishments. Historically, though, the principle of the separation of church and state was formulated and put into practice in order to free religions from state control and thus make them more spiritually advanced and tolerant of each other.

Practically, the separation entails at least two things. First, the state should not legislate on matters of religion, and religious affiliation or lack thereof should not serve as qualification for holding public office. Second, religion, while it can still have a place in public discourse, should not take part in civil legislation. The rapid deterioration of traditional morality has become, perhaps, one of the most significant downsides of the separation of church and state.

The Bahá'í Faith endorses the principle of separation as a necessary prerequisite for the successful dissemination of its teachings. It also embraces some of its most important aspects such as the encouragement of religious tolerance and the rejection of using violence and compulsion to spread religious teachings.

Being itself firmly separated from political affairs – Bahá'ís in the West, for instance, are forbidden from being involved in party politics – the Bahá'í Faith nevertheless envisions the participation of the elected Houses of Justice in state governance in the distant future. In my opinion, such involvement would be best served if accompanied by mutual checks and balances on the part of both religion and state.

In conclusion, although some of the features of the Bahá'í worldview may seem like a step backward from the project of the Enlightenment, a systematic comparison between the two demonstrates the progressive nature of the first over the second. First, Bahá'í doctrines display spiritual depth, which is lacking in the Enlightenment ideology that relies purely on reason and external social reforms. Second, Bahá'í teachings re-affirm most of the Enlightenment principles in a different religious setting thus making them more deeply rooted in the human psyche and consciousness. Third, the Bahá'í ideology takes into consideration the disproportionate development of various nations on the planet by modifying and adjusting some of the Enlightenment principles to better fit the whole of humanity.

Overall the Bahá'í Faith represents a religious tradition that is neither anti-modern nor simply modern or even postmodern, but instead truly post-modern in the sense that it regards the Enlightenment as a ski-jump for its own development that will eventually supersede it. Such a position, with regard to modernity in general and the Enlightenment in particular, gives the Bahá'í Faith a unique attraction and an advantage over both the older and the more recent religious movements – an advantage that, if properly understood and appreciated, would reveal its high long-term potential.

*The University of the Arts*

# BOOK REVIEW

Mikhail Sergeev, *Theory of Religious Cycles: Tradition, Modernity, and the Bahá'í Faith*. Leiden - Boston: Brill | Rodopi, 2015.

The author of this volume, a professor of religion and philosophy, has set himself an ambitious goal: to provide a comprehensive analysis of a pattern that he has observed in the lifetime of organized religions. This pattern is what Sergeev calls his "theory of religious cycles," as he concludes that all the major religions go through a distinct set of cycles or phases: formative, orthodox, classical, reformist, critical, and post-critical. The author argues – convincingly, in this reviewer's opinion – that traditional religions including Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, go through an essentially identical process, moving through all six stages over their long periods of evolution.

In Sergeev's view, a religion moves through these phases because of two types of developmental crises. The first is what he calls "structural crises," noting that these are crises that "challenge sacred tradition" and are "usually resolved by the appearance of new branches or divisions within the existing religions" (8). This leads to what is conventionally termed "denominations" in a particular religion, such as Catholic and Protestant Christianities. The second type is "systemic crises" – these set a religion into a pattern of change because "the foundation of the system itself" is challenged. This can lead, argues the author, to new religions, with Christianity arising from Judaism, Buddhism and Jainism from Hinduism, and the Bahá'í Faith from Islam.

The book does not present these crises as simply arising internally, but rather places them in the context of intellectual culture. Thus, for example, the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century created the systemic crisis for the Christian faith. The presentation of this model of religious cycles occupies the first part of the book. The author is careful and systematic in both explaining and delimiting this model: he deals only with religions that are built upon written scriptures. This is a key point, because the author argues that such scriptures are a "semantic system" that shifts or evolves through time, particularly through the process of interpretation. The texts in these religions the author classifies as their "revelatory" elements, and thus they are sacred, even with the passage of time. However, the "interpretive elements" change, and thus there is a shifting interchange between the "sacred scriptures" and the "sacred traditions", since the latter is all about interpretation, practice, and so on, and thus subject to social and other forces.

This model is both historically accurate, and, in this reviewer's view, powerful in its explanatory ability. Too often the view as to the rise and

fall of religions is broken up into two simplistic paths: religions arise in "primitive" societies because of a lack of intellectual or technological sophistication, and then further spread because the belief systems provide methods of social control or align themselves with existing powers (e.g., Catholicism and the Roman Empire). In turn, religions are said to fall because of a general cultural decadence, creeping atheism, or some of kind Nietzschean catastrophe. In this book, Sergeev is much more thorough in describing what actually happens to religions, and notes that even the crises that belief systems encounter are events that have both very particular conditions and consequences. The graphs of the cyclical phases and the tables of religions and their belief systems are a very useful component to this book, and they help convince the reader as to the basic soundness of Sergeev's model, as well as demonstrate its clarity.

The book is divided into two main parts, but really there are three key sections here. First, the author presents what this reviewer finds most compelling, which is the model of religious cycles as a whole, and then how it plays out in Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. For many readers, the section on the splits in the Islamic faith will be very enlightening in terms of understanding a religion currently in the midst of a particularly turbulent phase of the cyclical model. But the author makes clear through his parallel structure here that all of these religions pass through these phases, even if those phases occur at different times. The second key section of this book is entitled "The Project of Modernity"; it describes at length both a proper definition of the term, and then how the "absolutization of reason that characterizes the spirit of European Enlightenment runs parallel to skepticism toward organized religion" (42). This, of course, sets up a major change – as the author writes: "[T]he project of the Enlightenment initiated the systemic crisis of the Christian faith and spirituality in general" (52).

At the end of this second section, the author alludes to where he is going with his argument, and a reader might wish for more here. Sergeev states that this kind of

> crisis could be overcome only by the rise of new religious systems with their own, independent revelatory texts. If my theory is correct, then a post-modern religion must exist that responds to the challenge and has the potential to resolve the crisis (52).

One would like to know more about this term – "post-modern religion" – in terms of a precise definition. Sergeev goes on to say the following:

> In contrast to pre-modern religions, religious systems that were established after the Enlightenment have the advantage of addressing modern political and social issues in their scriptural texts, thus erecting a new absolute foundation that supersedes modernity. It is among those religious traditions that we should look for a possible post-modern religion. . . A careful study of their doctrines led me to believe that the best match for my theory would be the Bahá'í Faith, to the discussion of which we now proceed (53).

The presentation of the cyclical model and its application to the major world religions is sufficient for a very interesting book. However, the author then chooses to devote the final third part – actually, roughly half of the book – to examining the Bahá'í Faith. This may puzzle the average reader, since that faith is certainly less well known than Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Moreover, it is a relatively modern religion, and thus has not gone through all of the phases outlined above, particularly the crisis of scrutiny by Enlightenment rationalists. However, the author argues that Bahá'í has engaged Enlightenment ideas directly, and that it "is the only modern religious tradition" that addresses "contemporary social issues", doing so "by providing an alternative social and political vision that goes significantly beyond modernity" (60). This religion, then, serves as a kind of "test case" for the author's cyclical model, and he examines it through various perspectives, including modernity; the question of traditional religions versus the Bahá'í Faith; the organization of the religion itself; how the religion deals with dissent; and finally the Bahá'í idea of religion essentially serving as the foundation of the State.

That last point forms a rather lengthy section of the text. The author's purpose here is to take fundamental Bahá'í teachings and compare them with ideas and doctrines formulated in the Enlightenment. This connects with Sergeev's main theme of cyclical patterns in a religion's development in a particular sense. Modernity, the author notes, is characterized in the field of politics by the separation of religion and the state, and this concept has its origins in the Enlightenment. The Bahá'í Faith has a very particular position regarding religion and state, which thus merits this long analysis.

The author argues that the Bahá'í religion incorporates certain aspects of modernity, such as democratic elections. He also argues that the religion appears retrograde in other respects, such as its "repudiation of organized dissent". However, Sergeev concludes that despite apparently "regressive" tendencies, the religion has grappled with modernity in the

sense that the Bahá'í Faith has the ultimate progressive goal of assuring the "continuous progress of humankind" (104). In this sense, then, the extensive discussion of the Bahá'í Faith can be said to fit logically in this book, and the "Conclusions" section of the work attempts to tie all this together. Indeed, there the author asserts that the "most important conclusion of my analysis of religious evolution consists in the assertion that we cannot fully understand the events of twentieth-century history. . . without recourse to Bahá'u'lláh and Bahá'í thought" (105).

The final arguments raised some questions in the mind of the reviewer, although they certainly are presented reasonably clearly. Sergeev states that

> although some of the features of the Bahá'í worldview may seem like a step backward from the project of the Enlightenment, a systematic comparison between the two demonstrates the progressive nature of the first over the second . . . Bahá'í doctrines display spiritual depth, which is lacking in the Enlightenment ideology that relies purely on reason and external social reforms (117-18).

Perhaps – but one could argue that the Enlightenment project is not over, and that the period we are living in is actually an odd conflation of Enlightenment thinking (with secular reason being the current foundation of most Western countries' political systems, for example), modernism (the dominance of science and technology in our society), and postmodernism (our increasing cynicism and narcissism). In short, one could say that the "post-religious" phase has not had time to settle and present itself with a clear identity. In turn, this may mean that the "Bahá'í worldview" may in fact *not* be as "progressive" (to use the author's term) as some kind of thoughtful, rational modernity that will appear, and which will succeed in transcending both the rigidity of the Enlightenment and the despair of postmodernism. Also, it is not totally clear that Enlightenment thinking – or any system that is based on reason – will lack "spiritual depth". Buddhism, for example, is deeply spiritual but at the same time profoundly rational and pragmatic.

Sergeev seems to be arguing that the Bahá'í Faith is the "post-modern religion" that he has alluded to earlier. The reviewer was not completely convinced as to this claim, but readers may analyze the material for themselves, and see how all this fits with the author's cyclical model. In the "Postscript" of the book, Sergeev writes about the "potential" of the Bahá'í Faith, and explores the issue further.

Regardless, this is an extremely important book in understanding that religions change or evolve according to a precise system of phases.

Sergeev has argued clearly, too, that this evolution comes not from a simplistic "decline in faith", but from a highly complex series of interactions between texts, traditions, and believers, and the forces of modernity and cultural change.

*Benjamin B. Olshin*                          *The University of the Arts*

# JOURNALS DEVOTED TO SLAVIC AND EAST EUROPEAN CULTURE