A Meta-ethical Excursion of the Bahá'í Writings
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Part I: Background and a First Dive into the Writings

1. Preface

This paper is part of an on-going project of studying the philosophic principles explicitly and implicitly embedded in the Bahá'í Writings and correlating them with other religions and/or philosophies. Shoghi Effendi recognized the necessity of such correlation work as early as 1933,[1] when he wrote,

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth [2]

In this statement, Shoghi Effendi not only asserts the importance of correlating philosophy with the Writings, but also provides a reason why such work is necessary. It is essential to one of the cardinal principles of the Bahá'í Faith viz. the independent investigation of truth, because comparing i.e. finding explicit or implicit similarities and differences is essential to all learning. This, in turn, helps us to understand the Bahá'í Writings in greater depth and also to appreciate how far the Bahá'í teachings extend into other systems of thought and belief. Shoghi Effendi says,

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.[3]

Such correlation work is an important part of bringing the Faith to the world's attention.

When people see that the Writings are highly relevant and applicable to the inner psycho-spiritual and outer economic, socio-political and cultural problems of our time, they will be more open-minded and more inclined to investigate the Writings further. Correlating the Writings to contemporary intellectual and religious currents is a doorway to the Faith. Shoghi Effendi's encouragement of correlation studies is designed to encourage us to open more such doorways:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings[4]

My on-going correlation studies aim at improving our philosophic understanding of the Bahá'í Writings and their relation to other systems of belief and/or thought. A philosophic understanding of the Writings must, of course, base itself on the Writings themselves and take them as the standard of truth. As Bahá'u'lláh says:

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men.[5]

The philosophic approach seeks to understand the Writings on the basis of the philosophic ideas explicitly and implicitly present in the Texts themselves. It also examines the philosophic language and terminology embedded in the Writings. Such understanding seeks to discover what the Writings say or imply about topics such as metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of man, philosophy of history and political and social philosophy. It aims at elucidating the foundational principles which underlie and inform or shape the teachings on these (and other) subjects. The fact that the Writings have so much to say about these subjects encourages this approach.

The first and most obvious advantage of the philosophic approach is that it facilitates in-depth engagement with the divine Texts by training our minds in such essential skills as questioning, analysis, logic, evaluation, drawing inferences and identifying premises. This increases our understanding of the Writings, especially in those frequently encountered passages that are highly philosophical in nature such as 'Abdu'l-Baha's argument for the immortality of the soul[6] which reveals more of its depth when approached philosophically. The philosophical approach also helps us to identify the explicit and hidden connections that shed light on the meaning of a text and allow us to discern more of the underlying unity of the Writings, i.e. their organic, interdependent structure. When these implicit connections become evident we are better prepared to see the wider range of topics to which the Writings are relevant.

Understanding the Writings philosophically draws attention to the enormous importance of reason in the Writings and, thereby, demonstrates that reason and faith are not really in conflict. 'Abdu'l-Baha makes this clear when he states, "Reason is the first faculty of man, and the religion of God is in harmony with it,"[7] and adds that humanity needs to attain "reasoning faith."[8] Furthermore, he states:

If religious belief and doctrine is at variance with reason, it proceeds from the limited mind of man and not from God; therefore, it is unworthy of belief and not deserving of attention; the heart finds no rest in it, and real faith is impossible. How can man believe that which he knows to be opposed to reason? Is this possible? Can the heart accept that which reason denies?[9]

What is especially important here is the connection between reason and the heart, suggesting that to win hearts, we must also win minds. In a similar vein, he asks:

"How can man believe that which he knows to be opposed to reason? Is this possible?"[10]

However, reason is not just necessary for "real faith" in the heart, it is also necessary because "in this age "the peoples of the world need the arguments of reason."[11] This leads to another advantage of a philosophic understanding of the Writings.

Bahá'u'lláh says we should "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age [we] live in, and center [our] deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."[12] As we have seen above, 'Abdu'l-Baha says that people today "need the arguments of reason." A philosophic approach to the Writings helps us fulfill that need by increasing our ability to teach the Faith in a clear and rational manner. Clear, rational explication of the Writings makes them more attractive and persuasive because well-reasoned explications provide facilitate understanding and enhance

credibility, especially in an age inclined to be very critical of religions. Carefully reasoned presentations inspire confidence in the teachings instead of perplexity and confusion.

A philosophic understanding of the Writings also facilitates dialogue with other religions, especially those, that, like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, have well developed philosophical traditions of their own. Without such understanding of the Bahá'í Writings, the opportunities for dialogue with such partners will be limited because they cannot be adequately understood without their philosophic aspects. Exploring philosophical correlations with other religions and/or systems of thought are also important teaching tools because they strengthen Bahá'u'lláh's revelation of the essential oneness of all religions, especially if these correlations go below surface similarities and deal with fundamental philosophic similarities. For example, no religion takes matter simply at face value; all invest the material world with an aspect that is super-natural or extra-material which is not reducible to matter. This fundamental unity shows that all religions are working from the same or similar ontological premises.

Finally, a philosophic understanding of the Writings is also essential for apologetics, for defending the Faith against misrepresentations of the teachings. According to Abdu'l-Baha, "the possessor of knowledge . . . should be the defender of his faith."[13] As the Faith becomes increasingly better known, the importance of a rational, philosophically informed and dignified defense of the teachings will grow.

2: Introduction

Ethics, the analysis and evaluation of the systems of obligations by which people live or should live may be divided into four aspects. The first, called normative ethics, considers how we are obligated to act if we wish to be considered 'moral' according to an ethical code we and/or our society have adopted. Sometimes they are called "theories of obligation."[14] Normative ethics are prescriptive, i.e. they tell us how to behave either by issuing specific injunctions such as 'Do not steal' or by prescribing a principle by which we must judge our behaviors. One form of Kant's categorical imperative, for example, tells us that we must always treat other human beings as ends-in-themselves and must never use them as a means or tool to reach our own goals. While this statement does not impose any specific action, it does provide a standard by which we can judge whether our actions are moral or not. Using it, we can develop a clearer understanding of what we ought to do or what we ought to avoid.

The second aspect of ethics is descriptive ethics which is the empirical study of how different cultures deal with particular ethical issues. For example, while many Western and Far Eastern

cultures regard it as 'moral' to care for aged parents, the Inuit of North America regard it as ethically meritorious to strangle them or abandon them in the snow. Living in one of the harshest environments on earth, they have adopted 'survival ethics' which make group survival the standard of right and wrong. Descriptive ethics remains strictly neutral and never passes judgment about the moral worth of the actions it studies. It all ethical system of equal worth.

The third aspect of ethics is applied ethics which examines ethical issues in regards to specific problems such as civil disobedience, privacy, physician assisted suicide and abortion. Almost all areas of professional studies now involve some examination of ethical problems. For example, doctors and nurses receive courses in medical ethics; teachers in teaching ethics; commerce students in commercial ethics and engineers in engineering ethics. Each of these areas has gradually become a specialty to itself and is often taught separately from philosophy in colleges and universities.

The fourth aspect is meta-ethics which analyzes the nature of ethics itself. Meta-ethics has little or nothing to say about particular moral problems such as the lying or theft. Rather, it is a second-order pursuit, i.e. it philosophizes about ethics by examining the terminology and arguments used by ethicists and by seeking to clarify the pre-suppositions implicit in various moral positions. It explores such questions as:

What is goodness and what are its properties?";

What pre-suppositions are necessary to establish an ethical system?";

Can there be objective moral facts?";

Can moral claims have cross-cultural validity?";

Are moral judgment such as 'good' or 'evil' mind-independent?";

Are moral judgments based on emotions or intellect?";

Can ethics be derived from nature?"

Can ethics be separated from religion?"

Meta-ethics also examines the theories of reality, i.e. the underlying assumptions about human nature and personhood as well as the nature and purpose of society since all of these influence our ethical views. The importance of these questions and issues can be readily illustrated. If, for

example, we assume that humans are only physical processes, then it is difficult to defend free-will and the attendant concepts of moral responsibility for our acts. Without moral responsibility, it is hard to make any sense of the concept of ethics or even justice or social order. Nobody discusses the ethics of cars or sewing machines. They just do what they do without any attributable intent. (Of course a few philosophers espouse 'compatibilism' according to which "human actions can be caused, but still free,"[15] but ethicists tend to agree with Kant that this is "wretched subterfuge"[16] and "word jugglery."[17]) Another example of a meta-ethical question with enormous importance in today's globalized world is the issue of cross-cultural judgments. If we assert that moral claims cannot have any cross-cultural validity, i.e. that moral claims are not universal and only culture-specific, then we cannot pass judgment on – and prohibit – such cultural practices as female genital mutilation, persecution of minority sexual orientations or persecution of certain ethnic or religious groups. As we can see, meta-ethics touches on some of the central issues of personal and collective existence.

Udo Schaefer's magisterial two volume study Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture explores both the normative as well as some of the meta-ethical issues in the Bahá'í Writings. Nonetheless, despite Schaefer's excellent work, there remain various important meta-ethical subjects to be examined and correlated with other ethical views. Consequently, this paper focuses exclusively on the meta-ethical principles embedded in the Writings.

The most obvious reason for doing so is to widen and deepen our understanding of the ethics found in the Writings by making us aware of the principles on which these ethics are based. This, in turn, helps us correlate Bahá'í ethics with other ethical schools and understand how Bahá'í ethics are similar and different. Such knowledge creates opportunities for dialogue with other religions and/or systems of thought in which knowledge of the Faith can be spread. As we have already discussed, such knowledge facilitates teaching work, inter-faith dialogue as well as apologetics.

3: The Religious Foundationalism of Bahá'í Meta-ethics

Any study of Bahá'í meta-ethics must begin with the realization that Bahá'í epistemology – including ethical epistemology – exemplifies strong foundationalism, namely, the view that all knowledge has a two-tier structure: some instances of knowledge and justification are non-inferential or foundational; all other instances thereof are inferential and non-foundational in that they derive ultimately from foundational knowledge or justification . . . radical [strong] foundationalism . . . requires that foundational beliefs be certain and able to guarantee the certainty of the non-foundational beliefs they support. [18]

In other words, knowledge "rests on a foundation of indubitable beliefs from which further propositions can be inferred to produce a superstructure of known truths."[19]

The Writings are foundational insofar as the ethical teachings are not deduced from any preceding human beliefs, premises, experience or experiments but rather, are based the revelation of the Manifestations of God. The Manifestations, of course, are infallible and their teachings are true a priori insofar as they do not depend on human experience or agreement for their truthfulness. Rather, because the Manifestations are on a higher plane of existence, they surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore, Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired -- that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is a divine revelation. [20]

However, this does not mean God's ethical teachings cannot be rationally explained a posteriori by gathering evidence to support them and thereby making them intelligible in different circumstances and cultures by using the "intelligence and reason whereby [man] is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions."[21] Such explanations help to make the ethical teachings more intelligible for humankind; they help some people accept God's will; they strengthen our own faith and facilitate inter-faith dialogue. However, the intrinsic truth of these teachings does not depend on such evidence. Only the Manifestation can guarantee that. Rather, because the Manifestations are on a higher plane of existence, they:

surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore, Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired -- that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is a divine revelation. [22]

The Manifestations have this power because in Bahá'í epistemology, higher beings can 'surround' or 'comprehend' lower ones[23] and Manifestations are obviously higher beings.

Since Their knowledge is a priori and, therefore, is certain. If these truths depended on empirical research and evaluation, i.e. if they were dependent on gathered evidence, the revealed ethical teachings would run into the "induction problem" and, therefore, could not be certain. With induction from empirically gathered evidence we can never attain certainty because there can never be any guarantee that we have collected all the necessary evidence. Furthermore, because the higher ontological position of the Manifestations is structural, i.e. part of the structure of creation, the superiority – and certainty – of Their knowledge is also a structural aspect of creation. This makes foundationalism an integral and inescapable aspect of Bahá'í ethical thinking. Consequently, in the Bahá'í context, ethical thinking necessarily begins with deductions from the principles taught by the Manifestations. We may draw numerous inferences from these foundational principles but must always ensure our inferences are in harmony with the divine

teachings which are the standard by which to judge our conclusions.

Because of their foundationalism, the Bahá'í Writings assert that there are absolute non-relative[24] ethical standards, i.e. the "eternal verities"[25] as Shoghi Effendi calls them, that are not mind-dependent, are given by a transcendental non-human agency, are universal in validity and obligatory on all humans. Consequently, there are ethical truths that are suited to our essential human nature both at the personal and collective level and that correspond to or represent eternal, divine truths.

4. The Three Foundation Stones

Bahá'í meta-ethics are built on three foundation stones: metaphysics or the theory of reality; philosophical anthropology or the theory of human nature; and the nature of the Manifestations. The teachings on these three subjects shape Bahá'í meta-ethics and, thereby, Bahá'í ethics. At some point or another, Bahá'í meta-ethics and ethics are justified by reference to one or all of these three foundations. They are the 'first premises' of any deductions about ethics.

Metaphysics, the theory of reality, concerns itself with such questions as:

What is the nature and structure of reality?

What kinds of things exist?

What is their nature?

How do they relate to each other?

Is matter all there is?

Are there non-material realities?

What is the 'origin' of the universe?

Does the universe have order?

Is the universe teleological in nature or is it random?

Bahá'í metaphysics views reality as originating with God in a process called "emanation" which 'Abdu'l-Bahá likens to "the coming forth of the action from the actor, of the writing from the writer"[26] as well as to the "appearance of the rays from the luminary of the horizons [the sun]."[27] These metaphors are intended to make clear that the action of the actor, the writer's writing and the sun's rays are all absolutely dependent on their source for their existence and are also essentially distinct from their source. We might also think of a magnet and its surrounding magnetic field. Moreover, the source is not diminished by what it emanates or changes its condition in any way.[28] We say "emanates" to distinguish it from 'manifestation' in which "a single thing [the source] appears in infinite forms,"[29] like a seed appearing in branches, leaves and flowers. The impact of this teaching on meta-ethics is clear: because there is an absolute source of creation Bahá'í meta-ethics must be some form of cognitivism which implies that there are objective ethical standards that can be known and constitute moral knowledge. Ethics are not merely subjective.

 Furthermore, reality has three parts. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "The Prophets . . . believe that there is the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of Creation: three things."[30] The ultimate Source of everything is the Divine or supernatural realm which as the absolutely independent origin of all other things, is unaffected by time, space and causality and is absolutely unrestricted His actions. Because no one but Himself can impose limits on Him, the Divine is absolutely free: "He doeth what He pleaseth, and ordaineth what He willeth through the power of His sovereignty."[31] However, because God is absolutely free does not necessarily mean He acts capriciously or without reason (Shoghi Effendi refers to "the rational God."[32]), or does not limit his powers. For example, humans have free will to make moral choices – which means that God does not use His power to compel the right choices even though He could. Obviously, the Writings also assert the existence of non-material realities, the inherent order and teleological nature of creation and the dependence of all things on God.

At the other end of the 'scale' of being is the natural realm in which space, time, causality are operative and, therefore, freedom is limited to the spiritual or supernatural aspects of human nature: "And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh is man's freedom, that through the ideal power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature." [33] The purpose of humans is to free themselves from the influences of the natural and to actualize their spiritual potentialities to the fullest extent possible. Human nature is therefore, teleological, a fact which is reflected in Bahá'í meta-ethics and the normative ethics that grow out of them. It is also important to note that human nature has two aspects:

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone . . . In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his Divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice, one and all being expressions of his higher nature[34] . . .

Humanity's double-nature which implies that to one degree or another, we are always in conflict with ourselves, has tremendous implications for Bahá'í meta-ethics not the least of which is the endorsement of some forms of natural law theory. We shall discuss this in detail below.

Rationality is another essential attribute of human nature which must be taken into consideration in regards to ethics and meta-ethics.

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names -- the human spirit and the rational soul -- designate one thing. [35]

Consequently, all revelations appeal to rationality though to different degrees according to humankind's stage of development in the process of progressive revelation. The extraordinary importance of the "human spirit" or "rational soul" is emphasized by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's declaration that "the spirit of man is the most noble of phenomena . . . the meeting between man and God."[36] This assertion shows the "rational soul" has a special place in phenomenal creation and even a special spiritual status. From this we may infer that rationality, as an essential attribute of the soul, holds an exalted place the gifts bestowed upon humankind. Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi's intriguing reference to the "invisible yet rational God"[37] also points to a close link between religion and reason, though it should be remembered that the 'rationality of God' is not assessable to human thought. We know from Shoghi Effendi that God is rational, but as humans, we do not necessarily understand that rationality.

Bridging the "world of God" and the "world of Creation" or nature is what `Abdu'l-Bahá, calls "the Kingdom" i.e. the realm of the Manifestations of which Bahá'u'lláh says:

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven.[38]

The Manifestations reflect the creative power of God into the world, and, therefore have a two-fold station:

The Holy Manifestations of God possess two stations: one is the physical station, and one the spiritual. In other words, one station is that of a human being, and one, of the Divine Reality. If the Manifestations are subjected to tests, it is in Their human station only, not in the splendour of

Their Divine Reality.[39]

As we proceed through this paper we shall return to various aspects of this three-fold nature of existence which shapes Bahá'í meta-ethics.

5: Meta-ethics and Religion

One of the major questions in meta-ethics is whether or not ethics depends on religion. Those philosophers who call themselves secularists believe ethics is distinct and independent from revelation and can rely on reason alone.[40]Others, however, such as Hume, believe that ethics is based on feeling and community agreement rather than reason, though they still agree that ethics and religion are not intrinsically connected.

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that the ultimate basis for Bahá'í meta-ethics is the supernatural or the transcendent, i.e. God, Who, unlike creation, is not subject to change, time, place or causality, Who is absolutely independent of all other things and Who is absolutely free. The foundations of ethics are not in the evolving empirical world observed by the five senses which, by definition, exclude the non-material or the transcendent as part of its explanations. Such view exclude bothe God and personal soul. However, `Abdu'l-Bahá rejects such total reliance on the empirical world, saying, "the circle and range of perception by the five senses is exceedingly limited,"[41] since "whatever falleth not under the power of the senses is either unreal or doubtful."[42] In the Bahá'í view, ethics cannot be separated from religion without being severely diminished; indeed, ethics depends on religion, as we shall see below, for its sustainability and coherence. Shoghi Effendi supports the connection between religion and ethics by writing:

The other statement reported to have been made by Dr. Einstein to the effect that the ethical behavior of man 'requires no support from religion' is incompatible with the Bahá'í viewpoint which emphatically stresses the fact that no sound ethics can exist and become effective unless based on revealed religion. To dissociate ethics from religion is to render the former not only void of any firm foundation but without the necessary driving power. [43]

It is important to note that Shoghi Effendi does not claim there no ethics at all without revealed religion but rather that "no sound ethics can exist and become effective unless based on revealed religion." Purely man-made ethics such as those offered by Kant, Marx and Sartre are possible but they are ineffective for a variety of reasons that will become apparent through this paper.

There are at least two reasons why ethics depends on revealed religion. First, it is difficult to see how ethics divorced from a belief in God can provide consistent and coherent guidance on the basis of a constantly changing empirical world in which physical, social, economic, cultural and scientific change is ubiquitous. The resulting inconsistent, incoherent and frequently clashing ethical views result in either ethical relativism which claims that ethical rules depend on culture as well as other factors such as economics; or in skepticism in which we can never justify any ethical belief; or in extreme ethical nihilism, i.e. the denial of ethics altogether.[44] Each of these positions undermines its own effectiveness since each makes internal consistency within itself and unity with others difficult to achieve. If, for example, we cannot justify ethical theories such as skepticism or error theory in which all ethical teachings are false (see below), then societal agreement on moral rules will be difficult if not impossible. Once seen as 'arbitrary' ethical rules have severely diminished power or "effectiveness."

Second, it is obvious that reason alone cannot establish the degree of social agreement needed to make an ethical system effective in a society. As `Abdu'l-Bahá says about the rationalist philosophers:

They proved things by reason and held firmly to logical proofs; all their arguments are arguments of reason. Notwithstanding this, they differed greatly, and their opinions were contradictory. They even changed their views[45]

Such lack of consistency undermines the "effectiveness" of ethics. As already noted in regards to basing ethics on empirical data alone, basing it on reason alone leads to problems regarding internal consistency and consequently, social cohesion. This, in turn, undermines its effectiveness in ordering society by influencing human behavior. This lack of a "firm foundation" with reason rules out what Shoghi Effendi calls the "eternal verities on which alone a stable and flourishing civilization can be ultimately established."[46]

5.1 Attempts to Separate Meta-Ethics and Religion

Immanuel Kant is one of the most famous philosophers to maintain that ethics do not depend on religion. In his view, reason alone is a sufficient foundation for ethics.

for its own sake morality does not need religion at all (whether objectively, as regards willing, or subjectively, as regards ability [to act]); by virtue of pure practical reason it is self-sufficient.[47]

He also 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 [48]

Kant takes the view that reason is sufficient to guide us to correct ethical action. In The Critique of Practical Reason he finds a role for God as a "regulative principle" but this role, which makes God 'useful' for morality, does not make ethics depend on religion. Revelation is not necessary as long as people adhere to rationality in their ethical deliberations. Religion may be linked to ethics by fortuitous historical circumstances but there is no necessary, i.e. logical connection between the two. As we have seen above, from a Bahá'í viewpoint, the problem with reliance on reason is highly problematical.

 A highly influential modern philosopher who believes ethics do not rely on religion is the ethicist Peter Singer. [49] For Singer, ethics must be autonomous. One of Singer's (and co-author Hauser's) proofs is that atheists and agnostics share all the central moral principles of the major religion. Therefore, "atheists and agnostics do not believe less morally than religious believers."[50] In short, 'Who needs religion?' Their argument has little to recommend it. No agnostics and atheists have ever lived in a society without religion as the basis for morals. Consequently, they internalized these religious teachings as young children and young adults and retained them as valuable even when they rejected the religious foundations. Having absorbed these teachings from their childhood and seeing them re-enforced in their dealings with other adults explains why the seeming lack of religion does not affect their moral behavior: the ethical teachings of religion have simply become part of their social and mental makeup. It is highly improbable that agnostics and atheists everywhere invented their own moralities which, for the most part, just happened to coincide with society's highest religious teachings.

In seeking to disengage religion from ethics Singer and Hauser also draw attention to the history of religious violence. Religion is so violent that ethics cannot be – or should not be – associated with it. Any association with religion undermines the credibility of ethics. This argument is highly problematic. First, it does not follow that because all wars in the past were fought by people with religion that the wars were about religion. Religious people can and have fought wars for resources necessary for survival; for "lebensraum" and other geographic advantages; or for strategic political reasons, or even just 'glory.' The fact that the combatants were also religious is accidental or fortuitous and not essential to the war itself.[51] Indeed, the number of wars fought specifically over religion is quite small in the five thousand years of recorded warfare. For example, very few if any wars in the ancient world were fought over religion. Even the wars presented in the Old Testament were not simply religious wars: they were wars about

land, i.e. "lebensraum" and security against hostile tribes. Yahweh's role in the Hebrew victories was essential but the wars were not primarily about belief in Yahweh.

Singer and Hauser also try to disengage ethics from religion by stating that moral rules are inherited responses from our evolutionary past. In other words, morality has an evolutionary not religious basis; humans are provided with a "moral faculty that guides our intuitive judgments of right and wrong"[52] on the basis of what has contributed to survival in the past. However, the most obvious question is whether biologically-based responses or instincts are 'ethics.' Instincts are automatic responses, i.e. they do not involve intentions – and the whole purpose of ethics is to train or reform our intentions. The instinct to eat is not an ethical decision – but the issue of when we eat, and what and how much can be ethical issues. Nevertheless, all of these are guided by intentions. Intentions do not affect a mother's biological drive to eat but they do affect her decision to give her food to her child. In effect, the 'evolutionary past' theory of ethics is not really about ethics at all because it leaves out the issue of 'intention' without which any discussion about ethics is moot.

Two giants of twentieth century philosophy, A.J. Ayer and Bertrand Russell reject the view that ethics depends on religion. Ayer states:

I suspect that the widespread assumption that religious belief is necessary for the maintenance of moral standards arises not so much from any assessment of the empirical evidence as from a tacit or explicit acceptance of the proposition that if there is no God there is no reason to be moral.[53]

This, of course, was Dostoyevsky's point when Ivan Karamzov says, "If God does not exist, everything is permitted."[54] (This is the most common paraphrase of the statement) Ayer adds that in the last analysis, "Moral standards can never be justified merely by an appeal to authority."[55] This leaves us with the question of how to justify moral laws.

Bertrand Russell builds his opposition to any connection between ethics and religion on the principle that humans should be autonomous and not subservient to any God or divine revelation. Following divine commands is unworthy of us. He pursues what we might call 'the argument from autonomy' and even 'the argument from pride.' He writes:

In this lies Man's true freedom: in determination to worship only the God created by our own love for the good, to respect only the heaven which inspires the insight of our best moments.[56]

There is no intellectual argument here; rather, there is a ringing declaration of independence and even a suggestion of defiance against the very idea of a 'God' who is not of our manufacture. Only in this way can humans retain autonomy in their ethical lives. The underlying logical problem with Russell's view is that we cannot identify which of the man-made 'Gods' is really the best and most inspirational since there is no non-human, objective standard by which to judge. Further, from a Bahá'í viewpoint, Russell's view that we become the creators of God means that declare ourselves God's equals or superiors and, thereby, "join partners" with Him, something which Bahá'u'lláh explicitly forbids: "Beware, beware, lest thou be led to join partners with the Lord, thy God."[57]

Elsewhere he elaborates:

Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look round for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky but rather to look to our own efforts.[58]

Here, too, Russell insists on human autonomy based on science, "our own hearts" and "our own efforts." But, of course, there are problems with this view as we shall see shortly. The insufficiency of "our own efforts" is precisely one of the reasons why ethics need a religious foundation. The same may be said about reliance on "our own hearts." On this issues, `Abdu'l-Bahá:

Inspirations are the promptings or susceptibilities of the human heart. The promptings of the heart are sometimes satanic. How are we to differentiate them? How are we to tell whether a given statement is an inspiration and prompting of the heart through the merciful assistance or through the satanic agency?[59]

Russell has no answer for this difficult challenge – yet, that is precisely the question that needs to be answered for the heart to be a trustworthy source of ethics and meta-ethics.

Relying on science also has insurmountable difficulties as seen which we shall explore in one of the most recent efforts to make science the basis of ethics, Sam Harris's The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values. According to Harris, 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.[60]

Difficulties arise as soon as we ask how science can do this. In the first place the scientific method, only studies phenomena that are physical/material are susceptible to empirical direct or indirect observation by the humans senses or instruments are measurable or quantifiable are results of repeatable experiments or observations are observer independent are falsifiable, i.e. disprovable by observation and/or experiment.

This brings us to a simple question: 'Can we solve moral questions this way?' How, for example, can we identify what we "should want" as Harris claims? The scientific method is not designed to deal with obligations, duties, prohibitions, good, evil and other values.

Take, for example, the morality of feeding starving children. We can measure necessary calorie and protein intakes; we can measure results in survival rates, we can quantify all this scientific data – but we can never use this method to prove that we are morally obligated to feed these children. 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. The fact that they are starving is an empirical fact but there is nothing in this fact itself that obligates us to do anything for them. Such obligations must come from elsewhere – but the question is, where? Harris frequently refers to brain-scans – which not actually tell us which human brain activity is good or evil. A positive scan may be correlated with acts of kindness – in a Mother Teresa – or with acts of terror – in Dr. Josef Mengele. The scan itself shows no preference. The inescapable conclusion is that moral values are simply not proper scientific objects, i.e. they are not suited to discovery or exploration by the scientific method. In sum, there is no intrinsic and necessary connection between ethics and science.

Curiously enough Harris admits as much: "Science cannot tell us why, scientifically, we should value health."[61] In effect, he concedes that science has nothing to say about moral valuations or obligations and, thereby, he undermines his own thesis. If "scientifically" speaking there is no reason to value something as self-evidently important as health, then the there is not much hope of building an ethical system – with all its complex questions – on science alone. Because science and the scientific method are irrelevant to ethical questions, it is impossible to base meta-ethical principles and ethical rules on them.

To separate ethics from religion, Harris also tries to set aside the 'is-ought' problem, claiming it as "another dismal product of Abrahamic religion."[62] The modern formulation of this difficulty came from David Hume who objected to the way some moral treatises moved from an 'is' or 'is not,' i.e. from a matter of fact to an 'ought' or 'ought' not, i.e. from an empirical fact to

a moral prescription.[63] According to Hume – and numerous other philosophers since then – a description of facts cannot logically lead to moral prescriptions obligating us to accept certain acts as 'good.' Violating the 'is-ought' distinction is precisely the error of social Darwinism which believes that because we observe a struggle for existence in nature, our society, which is embedded in nature, ought to be modeled on this struggle. Yet this supposed obligation to imitate the struggle for existence is not inherent in the facts themselves; rather, it is something we bring or attach to the facts externally.

According to Harris, once the 'is-ought' distinction is removed, science can become a basis of value. In an effort to show the intimate connection between 'is' and 'ought' or facts and values, he says that even a truth-claim about the composition of water appeals "to the values of empiricism and logic."[64] This argument has two problems. First, if, as Harris claims, there is no real distinction between fact and value or 'is' and 'ought,' then the values must be inherent in the facts i.e. they must be empirically discoverable and meet the criteria of being proper objects of scientific study. Values are self-evidently not scientific insofar as they are non-physical and cannot be quantified, are not material or physical, are not objective and cannot be falsified or verified by experimentation. In short, there is no reason to believe in necessary, intrinsic, scientific or logical connections between facts and values. It is we who make the decision to connect them, i.e. it is our judgment, externally applied, that gives them value and nothing else. Hume's 'is-ought' distinction is valid – at least for all non-theistic metaphysics and ontologies.

Second, the scientific or epistemological value assigned by Harris to "empiricism and logic" is obviously a different kind of value from the moral values discussed in meta-ethics and ethics which concern judgments of right and wrong, good and evil, as well as obligations and permissibility. The decision to value scientifically based knowledge bears no significance resemblance to such issues as child abuse or helping the poor to alleviate their condition. Harris is comparing apples and oranges. In what is really a desperate attempt to support his case about against the 'is-ought' disjunction, he quotes Dennett – a fellow believer in basing meta-ethics on science – who writes, "If 'ought' cannot be derived from 'is,' just what can it be derived from?"[65]

Dennett's question is exactly the heart of the problem for empiricists – if the empirical facts of nature cannot logically serve as the foundation of morals, what can?

6. Why Meta-ethics Needs a Religious Foundation

There are at least four major problems with any attempt to establish a strictly empirical meta-ethics. The first of these is the ubiquitous flux of creation. This leads to the old platonic question

applied to meta-ethical principles and the resulting ethics: how can we actually know anything in a world that is totally unstable? Meta-ethical principles must lead us to ethical decisions that are not absolutely time-bound but are applicable consistently throughout the passage of time though it may appear in various external forms. The "golden rule," for example, has a variety of expressions, but the underlying principle remains the same. Such constancy or stability, such "eternal verities on which alone a stable and flourishing civilization can be ultimately established,"[66] are necessary lest humans become ethically confused and lose their sense of value, meaning and purpose and possibly even the wish and/or will to be ethical. Therefore, we must conclude that ethical systems which accept the limits of materialism or empiricism are inherently deficient, i.e. incomplete and not adequately grounded precisely because they cannot provide ethical stability.

The second reason why divorcing ethics from religion is problematical concerns the crucial meta-ethical is issue of authority which in turn affects the "necessary driving power"[67] of a civilization. Without rational and logically coherent answers to questions of authority, no ethical system can be securely grounded. There are two aspects to the authority issue – legitimacy and power. Both are needed, and, as the following discussion shall make clear, no empirical source can supply them.

The first aspect of authority concerns 'legitimacy,' which deals with the questions, 'Who – if anyone – has the legitimacy or the right to lay down moral principles and precepts for the human race? Who or what – if anything – has the knowledge, understanding and 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?' It is virtually self-evident that no human and no collection of human beings inherently possess such legitimacy by virtue of their human nature. The reasons are obvious: humans are fallible, are fickle, have personal interests, lack absolute independence from all things, i.e. are susceptible to outside influence, interference and coercion. Thus, humans cannot guarantee objectivity and justice. They also lack the unlimited knowledge needed to dispense perfect justice, understanding and compassion. Another problem is that strictly empirical knowledge gives no evidence to establish one definitive standard by which to judge various ethical claims. On strictly empirical bases, the only way to establish a decisive standard of ethics is by social or political convention, or by force. However, this is not the ethical legitimacy we seek but rather political, social or legal legitimacy. God, on the other hand, 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. Given His knowledge, it is difficult to imagine who else could have genuine ethical legitimacy since His knowledge is the only reliable guide to 'the good.'

The second aspect of authority is the question of power. Without legitimacy, power is tyranny and forceful enslavement but without power, legitimacy remains purely theoretical, i.e. impotent.

Thus, to see how legitimacy is actually put into practice we must ask 'Who – if anyone – has the power necessary to enable people to follow these rules despite their short-comings and weaknesses?' 'Who – if anyone – has the power to impose His will and His ethical judgments on humankind? Who – if anyone – can impose both obligations or laws and consequences for committed or omitted acts? Here, too, theistic and non-theistic meta-ethical systems part company since the former believe that only God can adequately fulfill that role. God has the power, i.e. is omnipotent and has the legitimacy to rule humankind. God-substitutes such as governments, priesthoods or ideologies lack this power because they are subject to the vicissitudes of ubiquitous change and they lack the legitimacy and the power to make their ethical requirements effective. Inherent human limitations prevent this.

The third aspect of authority is 'universality.' Here, the most fundamental question is, 'Is there such a thing as a universal human nature?' Answering this will tell us whether the limits of authority are defined by time, culture, economics or political ideology. The Bahá'í Writings answer this question affirmatively. Moreover, they show that a universal ethical standard follows from a universal human nature. One of their key principles is the essential oneness of humankind:

When we observe the human world, we find various collective expressions of unity therein. For instance, man is distinguished from the animal by his degree, or kingdom. This comprehensive distinction includes all the posterity of Adam and constitutes one great household or human family, which may be considered the fundamental or physical unity of mankind.[68]

God has created human nature as it is, and the teaching of the oneness of humankind affirms that this nature is universal even though different cultures may actualize different aspects at different times. The teaching of the oneness of humankind starts with the "physical unity of mankind." Furthermore, all humans possess a "human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal [this] is the rational soul, and these two names -- the human spirit and the rational soul -- designate one thing."[69] Regardless of culture, time, place or circumstance, all people share one human nature because they have a rational soul. We also share a higher, spiritual nature and a lower animal nature which the higher nature must control.[70] In addition, we all posses "spiritual susceptibilities"[71] which must be cultivated in order to make spiritual progress possible. Since there is a universal human nature, then it logically follows that a universal ethic is possible, i.e. at least some ethical rules apply to everyone at all times and in all places. Since God is the creator of human nature, no one is better qualified than God to establish what this ethic is. Consequently, there are ethical standards valid across all cultures, places, times and circumstances and that cross-cultural moral judgments are possible. Shoghi Effendi writes:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, restates the eternal verities they enshrine, coordinates their functions, distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the nonessential and spurious in their teachings, separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions, and on this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even

prophecies the inevitability, of their unification, and the consummation of their highest hopes.[72]

The core of this statement is that Bahá'u'lláh "restate[d] the eternal verities" which means (1) that certain truths – including ethical truths – are not bound to one time and (2) that these "verities" which Bahá'u'lláh "restated" are the same as those taught by previous Manifestations in other times and places. In effect, Shoghi Effendi confirms a meta-ethical perennialism for those morals that are not "priest-prompted superstitions" and "nonessential and spurious." His dismissive description of those religious teachings that deviate from the "eternal verities" clearly de-legitimates them. The underlying assumption is that the "eternal verities" are suited to a universal human nature and what is best therein. This suggests an important conclusion: ethical relativism does not apply to the "eternal verities" or "fundamental verities"[73] but it applies to the superstructural cultural adaptations. The former are universal and the latter are particular.

 It is also important to ask, 'Can a man-made ethical system claim to be universally valid for all human beings?' On the basis of the foregoing arguments, the answer is clearly negative: man-made ethical systems lack authority in the form of legitimacy; authority in the form of power and authority in the form of universality.

The latter is inescapably deficient in this regard is because humans only have access to incomplete knowledge conditioned by time, location and circumstances, and, therefore, cannot, even in principle, have the insight into human nature to make their knowledge universal. This limitation is recognized by all systems of meta-ethics and is the source of much debate and controversy. Various types of meta-ethical skepticism and nihilism find their basis here.[74] The fact that this deficiency still causes so much debate suggests that emphatic denials to the contrary, theistic meta-ethics cannot just be ignored.

6.1: Contrary Views About Authority and Universality

Non-theistic meta-ethical systems, of course, reject God and basically set the question of God's authority aside as meaningless, irrelevant or insoluble. Some reject God not on metaphysical grounds but rather, on principle: His very existence as Creator undermines human freedom and with it, the very foundation of morality. One such is Jean-Paul Sartre who argues that if God is the Creator of all things, then our essence precedes our existence. Humans are compared to paper dolls that God cuts out.[75] This means that human nature or essence is pre-given by God, and,

consequently, we are not truly free to make or "define"[76] ourselves by means of our own ethical choices. Hence Sartre adopts his "postulatory atheism"[77] to safeguard absolute human freedom. He states, "if God does not exist then there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence,"[78] i.e. one being who makes himself by his own actions. Sartre believes that our choices are only legitimate for ourselves, have no genuine power over others and are universal only insofar as they exemplify everyone's right to choose for themselves. Our specific personal moral rules and choices apply only to ourselves. In short, the problems of authority and universality are simply denied beyond the individual sphere.

Denying authority i.e. legitimacy, power and universality beyond the individual obviously creates problems in regards to the social aspects of human existence. No society can exist with out at least some minimal universal ethical standards applicable to all. In a constitutional democracy, there is, of course, some room for individual diversity in ethics. Among them are the notoriously hard issues of abortion and physician assisted suicide as well as simple issues like tipping and offering bus seats to pregnant ladies. However, for society to function effectively, there must be certain fundamental ethical injunctions that everyone is expected to obey: honesty in regards to income tax and other legitimate financial obligations; respect for the sanctity of life and other people's bodies as well as truthfulness in our dealings with others. Without general adherence to such rules, moral and legal anarchy will result. The problem with Sartre is the question of who or what will have this authority. If the whole point of his existentialism is that we must make ourselves by our own ethical choices and standards, then there is no legitimate rule that can be applied to everyone. The closest Sartre comes to such a universal rule is the requirement that we must all live in "good faith" i.e. be true to ourselves, ideas and feelings – but this does not solve the authority problem. Many evil things have been done in "good faith." Besides, who arbitrates what "good faith" is for each person? In the last analysis, there is simply no room for a legitimate and universal authority in Sartre's philosophy which fails to recognize that we are not only individuals choosing for ourselves alone but individuals whose identity and well-being is not entirely in our own hands. The challenge for Sartre's existentialism is how to maintain a society in which people refuse to be defined by anything except their own choices. Sartre's later turn to Marxism – generally regarded as poorly integrated with his existentialism – was an attempt to solve this problem.

Communism is probably the most wide-spread man-made meta-ethic in human history even though, since the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and Russia, and its gradual abandonment in China, it is now in eclipse as a practical basis of government and society. The foundation of Marxist meta-ethics is the principle that ethics are no more than the "idealistic superstructure"[79] that arises from the relations of material production. As Marx and Engels say:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material

behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.—real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms.[80]

In other words, ethical beliefs simply reflect the relations of production, i.e. the relations all people must enter to survive in a given economic system, be it slavery, feudalism, capitalism or Communism. These relations shape our consciousness and with it our meta-ethical and ethical views. These views are not grounded in any transcendental power; consequently, there is no transcendental or divine basis for the legitimacy, power and universality of any ethical rules. The aim of Marxist philosophy is:

to explain all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc. etc. and trace their origins and growth from that [material] basis.[81]

Materialist explanations are the only way to free people from being enslaved by their masters who use religious beliefs – "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's"[82] – to oppress them, or better yet, make them willingly subservient. With materialist explanations the spell of religion will be broken. The Communist ethics will prevail and humans shall live in a society that meets their true needs.

In this struggle, the most advanced section of the proletariat is the communist movement "which pushes forward all the others"[83] and which has over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.[84]

In other words, the Communist movement – and later, in Marxist-Leninism and Marxist-Maoism, the Communist Party – has special insight about "the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement," i.e. the future result of the class struggle and its social consequences. Such knowledge may be fairly described as 'extra-empirical.' This 'extra-empirical' knowledge of the ultimate results of the revolution and the "line of march" by which it will get there is Marxism's way of providing legitimacy to the decisions of the communist movement or party. Like God, their decisions about everything from strategy to ethics are legitimated by their superior insight. The problem for Marxism on this issue is that its empiricist materialism notwithstanding, there is more than a 'touch of the transcendental' in its basis for legitimacy. It seems to recognize – albeit it tentatively – that ethical legitimacy requires an 'extra-empirical' foundation. Without such a special foundation, its claim to be the 'vanguard' (later spelled out more fully by Lenin[85]) that "pushes forward all others"[86] is open to counter-claims by

political rivals.

It seems clear that to establish its special legitimacy for leadership – including moral leadership – Communism puts the movement, or later, the Party, into the place of God and the Manifestations. Somebody or something has got to be special to determine what is or is not ethical. In Communism, morality is based on whatever the Party decrees – it decides what is good and bad. This shows that, in the case of Marxism at least, the effort to build ethics on a purely empirical basis fails. Consequently, the example of Marxism re-affirms – albeit by contrast – that meta-ethical principles and the ethical consequences thereof cannot be purely empirical. God, i.e. a final 'extra-empirical' or transcendental foundation for ethics is unavoidable.

In addition to undermining its own self-portrayal as strictly empirical, Marxism has a problem with ethical consistency. If the same act can be good or evil depending on what the movement or the Party decides is best for the struggle against the ruling classes, how can there be any ethical knowledge, how can a society and personal relations function from one day, week or year to the next? Under such circumstances, it is simply impossible for anyone to know right from wrong and good from evil. In fact, such a view inevitably undermines having ethical standards at all and encourages mere adaptation to the latest pronouncements. This cannot be remedied by turning to the underlying meta-ethical principle according to which what is moral is whatever furthers the struggle against the ruling class. That meta-ethical principle is precisely the source of the problem. This view stands in sharp contrast to the Bahá'í ethical teaching that the foundation of religious truth are the unchanging "eternal verities"[87] whose expression and practice may vary from culture to culture or epoch to epoch but whose core principles remain the same. This balances adaptation to fluid situations with stability.

6.2: Kant and the Authority Problem

Unlike Sartre, Kant is not blind to the authority problem. Kant is fully aware of how important it is. That is why in The Critique of Practical Reason, Kant tries to remedy this problem in a way that actually (but inadvertently) supports the Writings by an appeal to a 'postulatory theism.' Since Kant denied we could prove God's existence rationally and, therefore, we must postulate or assume His existence if we are to attain the "summum bonum" i.e. the greatest good for humankind. According to Kant:

the supreme cause of nature, which must be presupposed as a condition of the summum bonum is a being which is the cause of nature by intelligence and will, consequently its author, that is God . . . Therefore, the summum bonum is possible in the world only on the supposition of a Supreme Being having a causality corresponding to moral character . . . the supreme cause of nature, which must be presupposed as a condition of the summum bonum is a being which is

the cause of nature by intelligence and will, consequently its author, that is God. It follows that the postulate of the possibility of the highest derived good (the best world) is likewise the postulate of the reality of a highest original good, that is to say, of the existence of God. Now it was seen to be a duty for us to promote the summum bonum . . . and as this is possible only on condition of the existence of God, it inseparably connects the supposition of this with duty; that is, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God. [88]

Kant states that a morally good life is possible only on the "presupposition" of a "Supreme Being" Who has the legitimacy and the power to be the "supreme cause of nature" and Who also acts morally and is the pre-condition for our moral action. Kant claims that a "postulatory theism" is needed to lead a good life. God – even if He is merely "postulatory" – is necessary for ethical principles to have authority, i.e. legitimacy and power/effectiveness and universality. He recognizes that a viable meta-ethics cannot be built on strictly empirical principles because empiricism offers no way to identify a definitive standard by which to judge competing ethical claims. Without such a definitive standard, all meta-ethical principles and ethical viewpoints are, in effect, equal, i.e. none can be proven or disproven by empirical appeals alone. Only politics, social customs or force can establish one claim over another, but this, of course, only grounds political, not ethical or intellectual, legitimacy. As we saw previously, Marxism tried to solve the same by giving the Party 'extra-empirical' insight and understanding and, thereby, ethical legitimacy and power.

 Interestingly enough, Kant criticizes various Greek philosophers for thinking the 'greatest good' could be achieved strictly by human will and intelligence and without an appeal to God:

From this deduction it is now intelligible why the Greek schools could never attain the solution of their problem of the practical possibility of the summum bonum, because they made the rule of the use which the will of man makes of his freedom the sole and sufficient ground of this possibility, thinking that they had no need for that purpose of the existence of God.[89]

Clearly, like the Bahá'í Writings, Kant recognizes that a purely empirical and humanistic ethic is theoretically and practically untenable. In other words, Kant adopts a deistic meta-ethical foundation for his ethical thinking at least as far as practical reason is concerned. On this matter, he is compatible with the Bahá'í Writings.

7. Divine Command Ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma

The foregoing discussion makes it abundantly clear that the Bahá'í Writings exemplify what is called the "divine command theory of moral goodness,"[90] i.e. a meta-ethical theory in which God or a transcendent power is the origin and foundation of moral truth which may be revealed through special individuals and/or through nature and history. Furthermore:

[w]hat divine command theory holds is that God's will is necessary and sufficient in determining the content of morality – it actually defines it [morality]. Thus, for an act to be "right" it is both necessary and sufficient that the act be performed in compliance with God's will . . . God's will is sufficient in that all that is required for an act to be "right" is that God wills it is right.[91]

God's will is sufficient for ethical "rightness" because as we have seen above, only God as the Creator of all things has the capacity and the legitimacy to legislate for the benefit of His creation. As we shall see below, divine command meta-ethics also commit the Writings to moral realism, a meta-ethical theory according to which "our moral judgments can be true or false"[92] This connects the Writings with other realist meta-ethical theories such as Platonism or Thomism. God's will is not a Platonic Idea but it is equally as real. From this it follows that a realist meta-ethics precludes ethical relativism since an absolute ethical standard exists and, through God's Manifestations, can be known by mankind.

Divine command meta-ethics faces several challenges, the most famous of which is the Euthyphro Dilemma.[93] In Plato's dialogue, Euthyphro, Socrates asks:

The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.[94]

Does God approve certain actions because they are good, or are certain things good because God approves them? This leads to the two horns of the Euthyphro dilemma. On one hand, if God approves them because they are good, then they are good prior to or without God's approval, i.e. their goodness is independent of God. This negates God's universal sovereignty. On the other hand, if actions are good because God approves them then moral good is simply a matter of God's arbitrary approval. This starts a vicious circle: if God's approval is not arbitrary but based on inherent goodness then this goodness is independent of God, but if this goodness is not independent on God, then His approval is arbitrary. Furthermore, if God is omnipotent, any command – or its opposite – could become good or true simply because God says so. This – so it is claimed – undermines the importance of reason in ethics, gives ethics an arbitrary foundation and raises questions about why we are obligated to obey such arbitrary selections.

The Bahá'í Writings' adherence to divine command theory is beyond question. They make it

clear that there are no external constraints on God's absolute will in the oft repeated claim that "of "He doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth what He pleaseth.[95]

There can be no clearer expression of the consequences of meta-ethical divine command theory than the following:

Shouldst Thou [God] regard him who hath broken the fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity had been keeping the fast. And shouldst Thou decree that he who hath observed the fast hath broken it, that person would be numbered with such as have caused the Robe of Thy Revelation to be stained with dust[96]

In the words of Christian philosophers, J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, "God could have willed that cruelty be good and love evil and we should be obliged to hate others and seek to do them harm."[97] Of course, the fact that He could have does not mean that He has or would. These are simply statements about God's power, not about His actions or intentions.

The Euthyphro Dilemma claims that either God has this power and is an omnipotent and arbitrary tyrant or He does not and, therefore is not omnipotent. In neither case is He worthy of worship. The underlying assumption is that we should no worship a tyrant or a God Who is not omnipotent.

There are at least three problems with the Euthyphro Dilemma. First and most obvious is the logical category mistake which confuses and conflates God – the universal creator – with a human tyrant. The 'tyranny of God is not the same kind of thing as the 'tyranny' of a human dictator. Decrees given by the omnipotent and omniscient creator of the universe Who knows all possible outcomes of all possible alternatives cannot be compared with decrees by a tyrant who lacks such knowledge and, therefore, cannot foresee the results of his orders. A tyrant's lack of knowledge undermines his legitimacy and, thereby, his right to claim absolute power. Furthermore, if we add God's inherent goodness to our description of God, the problem is even more apparent. Calling God a "tyrant" because He insists on arranging His creation for the maximum goodness is an arbitrary misuse of the word "tyrant" which is usually defined as a ruler who uses his power in a "cruel and unfair way."[98] This is not the God mentioned by the Manifestations.

Furthermore, there is another category mistake insofar as God cannot be 'measured' or judged by

the same standard as His creations. Given His omniscience, what appears as caprice to our lesser knowledge may be nothing less than reasons we cannot comprehend. To conclude God has no reasons, i.e. His choice is arbitrary is unwarranted just because we humans do not know the reasons. After all He knows all the possibilities and all their outcomes which is a knowledge no contingent being has.

Second, if God is the Creator of all things, there simply are no objects that are inherently good independently of God. Whatever good they have is from God.

Because there are no things that exist and are good independently of God, there are no objects that can compel God's choice in the way outlined by the Euthyphro Dilemma. Thus, from a Bahá'í perspective, the Euthyphro Dilemma is a pseudo-dilemma perhaps based on confusing God as the universal Creator and a pagan 'god' who is not a universal creator and therefore can be confronted by something he did not create. The Euthyphro Dilemma does not apply to God as the Bahá'í Writings understand Him.

Of course, if God did not make all things including their natures, then He is not God – at least as the Bahá'í Writings understand Him – which makes the Euthyphro Dilemma irrelevant to Bahá'í philosophy and Christian, Jewish and Muslim philosophy as well. The Euthyphro Dilemma and the various revelations are discussing two different concepts of God. In the last analysis, it is a pseudo-dilemma based on ambiguous usage of the term 'God.'

7.1 Ideal Observer Theory (IOT)

The divine command theory bears significance resemblances to a contemporary meta-ethical theory known as ideal observer theory.[99] In fact, one might say that the IOT is, in its basic position, a secularized version of divine command theory. Some ethicists such as Shelly Kagan recognize this, saying:

Thus, when presented in theological terms, the ideal observer theory becomes the divine command theory: valid moral rules are valid by virtue of the fact that God commands them.[100]

The convergence of the two meta-ethical theories is evident in the following description:

 an ideal observer must be omniscient; omnipercipient, i.e. having the ability to imagine vividly any possible events or states of affairs, including the experiences and subjective states of others; disinterested, i.e. having no interest or desires that involve essential reference to any particular individuals or things; dispassionate; consistent; and otherwise a "normal" human being.[101]

True ethical propositions, i.e. propositions that are morally legitimate, authoritative and universal can be made by an observer who fits these criteria and is perfectly rational and has all the necessary information.

Ideal Observer Theory asserts that right and wrong are determined by an ideal observer's reaction to a given act. That is, any act X is morally permissible if an ideal observer would approve of X; conversely, any act Y is morally blameworthy if an ideal observer would disapprove of Y.[102]

Of course, for the IOT in its modern secular form as revived by Roderick Firth, God is not the ideal observer, nor need He be. The capacity to make such ideal judgments can be attained by asking ourselves how such an ideal being would judge or by imagining ourselves in the ideal observer's position. This requires mental discipline but it is not impossible. So the IOT claims. From a Bahá'í perspective, however, there is no way for humans to transcend our inherent limitations. No human can possibly meet the standards laid out by Firth and others – omnipercipience, omniscience, pure dispassionate objectivity and so on. If making absolutely just ethical judgments requires these attributes, then IOT itself demonstrates the need for God and the divine command theory. Anything less will merely result in endless clashes of opinions among less than ideal observers. This is, of course, precisely what we wish to avoid since it undermines the entire Bahá'í mission of emphasizing the oneness of humankind and the unification of humanity into one global commonwealth.

7.2: Weak Compatibilism: A Modern Version of Natural Law Meta-Ethics

The Bahá'í Writings harmonize with a contemporary variation of natural law theory known as "weak compatiblism"[103] which holds that:

God would not create a natural or moral order that is opposed to the divine or a human reason that is contradicted by revelation. Yet even though they are not in conflict, revelation . . . may tell us more than reason is able to disclose . . . Although this content does not contradict reason, it does go beyond it.[104]

In other words, God would not create a world in which His reason, mankind's reason, the order of nature and revelation are out of harmony or in conflict with one another. There is no intrinsic conflict between them and whatever conflicts arise are problems with human perception and understanding. Of course, the inherent limits of human reason prevent it from grasping God's reasoning which transcends and exceeds ours. However, the fact that we cannot follow God's reasoning does not mean it does not exist. Science itself suggests this. Everything in nature is orderly and follows rules/laws that can be understood by human reasoning. If such were not the case, science would be impossible.

Consequently, since reason is universally evident in nature, there are no grounds to suppose that God's reason 'suddenly stops' just because it reaches a point at which our understanding ends.

At this point a note of clarification is necessary. In regards to reason, weak compatibilism represents what I have called "moderate rationalism" in several previous papers. [105] Moderate rationalism contrasts with 'extreme' rationalism which asserts that only rational/logical knowledge and empirical knowledge are true knowledge. It also contrasts with irrationalism which says that reason cannot give us any true knowledge, a position held by Nietzsche and the postmodernists. Moderate rationalism lies between these two extremes claiming that reason can give us knowledge up to a point, but after that point it must be augmented by revelation or the guidance of the "spirit of faith." Reason and revelation are not intrinsically in conflict; there are truths that cannot be fully articulated by human reason because the divine reason transcends the human mind. Revelation, therefore, "may tell us more than reason is able to disclose."

Both the Bahá'í Writings and weak compatibilism support their adherence to a natural law meta-ethic with a 'platonic' theory of reality. If the "natural or moral order" is in harmony with the divine reason, then the divine reason is somehow reflected in the natural order which God has created and of which humanity is a part. In short, the spiritual has a presence in the material realm. Metaphysical theories that advocate such a two-part view of a heavenly model reflected in earthly images or shadows are called 'platonic' because Plato is the first known explicator of this view. In Plato's theory of reality, the physical world is a reflection or copy of a non-physical Ideal world which contains models for everything we see in the material realm. This clearly harmonizes with the Bahá'í Writings which state:

The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven.[106]

Elsewhere he says:

For physical things are signs and imprints of spiritual things; every lower thing is an image and counterpart of a higher thing.[107]

When the spiritual has a presence in the material, when there are signs and intimations of a superior world in nature, then nature is obviously functioning in a teleological manner insofar as it encourages our awareness of a transcendental world and our "supernatural vocation." This teleological function of nature encourages us to understand the material in terms of the spiritual. Failure to do so, i.e. interpreting the higher in terms of the lower, as for example understanding love in terms of physical lust, distorts our understanding. This inevitably leads to the animalization of man and the failure to achieve his super-natural destiny. However, we must raise our existence above the material. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "Strive that your high ideals may be realized in the Kingdom of God on earth, as they will be in Heaven."[108]

8. Teleology: the Foundation of Natural Law

Another major issue in studying the meta-ethics of the Bahá'í Writings is the question of whether or not the Writings exemplify or are consistent with a natural law meta-ethic. This study finds that such is, indeed, the case albeit it in a variant version. To explain why, it is necessary to briefly outline the relevant theory and history of natural law meta-ethics.

Teleology is the foundational concept in any natural law meta-ethic. It means that everything, especially all living things, have an innate purpose or final cause that guides their development and that they must actualize in order to be genuinely themselves. This final cause, these inherent goals constitute the nature or essence of every particular being. Moreover, this final cause is the standard by which we judge whether or not a thing " is functioning well or appropriately."[109] Insofar as things fail to actualize their final cause, they are incomplete and not authentically themselves, i.e. not authentically what they are intended to be. Such a deficient condition negatively affects the behavior of any living being, but especially humans, in whom these imperfections inevitably affect their ethical behavior because humans have a spiritual nature that should be actualized.

To begin, natural law, which must be distinguished from man-made positive or conventional law, is "usually understood as involving a superhuman legislator,"[110] i.e. God Who embeds these laws in the intrinsic nature or essence of minerals, vegetables, animals and humans.[111] Each of these essentially different kinds of being has its own "prescribed ways"[112] of being and flourishing. This leads us to the key concept in any natural law meta-ethic: teleology. All beings have an intrinsic goal, a final cause or purpose and can only achieve well-being if they strive

towards these goals. For example, regardless of culture, a human child must learn to communicate and/or understand some language if its well-being is our goal. Tadpoles have no such requirements since they are intrinsically, i.e. essentially, different from humans. In other words, 'the good' for any kind of being consists in fulfilling its goals, its final cause or teleology. The 'good' is self-actualization according to our own particular nature which in humankind includes our spiritual aspect. Any activity that prevents or harms the pursuit of the intrinsic 'good' is evil to that particular being. Because humans have free will, they can also be evil to themselves insofar as they can reject or misuse their teleological nature. This is an important issue because identifying 'the good' is one of the chief functions of any meta-ethical theory.

The earliest known statement about teleology – Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics – is also one of precise and compact:

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim. But a certain difference is found among ends;[113]

This means that every being and every action is for the sake of a particular 'good,'[114] which means that they have a goal, a final cause and are, therefore, teleological in nature. To this, Aristotle adds, "Each animal is thought to have its proper pleasure, as it has a proper function; viz., that which corresponds to its activity."[115] This is its 'good.' For humans, 'good' means acting according to our spiritual potentials i.e. in harmony with the divinely given virtues which exist as capacities or potentials within us. As Aristotle says, "human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue." [116] For the Bahá'í Writings, such virtuous action occurs when we realize our teleological nature. In other words, every kind of creation has its own proper or appropriate happiness based on its essential nature; from this it follows logically that what is appropriate for one kind of being is not necessarily appropriate for another.

Aristotle's statement about living "in accordance with virtue" harmonizes with the Bahá'í Writings for the obvious reason that it locates the basis of true happiness in our spiritual and not our physical nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares:

 As for the spiritual perfections they are man's birthright and belong to him alone of all creation. Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy. This spiritual longing and perception belongs to all men alike."[117]

In this statement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms that this final cause or "spiritual longing" is universal, i.e. intrinsic to human nature – is unique to man and, therefore, defines him and his essence.

St. Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval philosopher and theologian developed the concept of natural law in more detail than any other thinker. He writes:

all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, insofar as, namely, from its being imprinted upon them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a more excellent way, insofar as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the eternal reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end, and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law.[118]

The "proper acts" referred to by Aquinas are those acts which are in harmony with our God-given essential nature, our goal or purpose; they are 'proper' or 'appropriate' to our nature. Moreover, Aquinas's "natural inclinations[s]" correspond to the "spiritual susceptibilities"[119] of the Writings because both incline us to correct moral action but neither can compel it, thereby safe-guarding humankind's free will. Both in the Writings and in Aquinas, these inclinations or susceptibilities are oriented to or 'aimed' at achieving our divinely given final cause, purpose or end or what is known in Catholic philosophy as our "supernatural vocation." [120] This supernatural end is intended to guide our actions in this world and lead to our happiness or well-being.

8.1: Objections to Natural Law Theory

The first and most obvious objection to natural law theory is Hume's 'is-ought' problem according to which we cannot assume that because a certain situation is the factual case that it ought to be the case, i.e. we must not suppose that the facts of nature place a moral obligation on human action.[121] According to Hume, facts and values are two distinct kinds of things and to confuse them is a logical category error that mixes up descriptive statements, which tell us what is the case, with prescriptive statements which tell us what ought to be the case. Besides, no empirical analysis can show us any ethical imperative in living things. Consequently, it is argued, natural law meta-ethics is impossible because nature cannot be claimed as the basis for any prescriptions, i.e. any ethics at all.

One problem with "Hume's Guillotine" as it is sometimes called, is that it only applies to a strictly empiricist and materialist concept of nature in which values have no place. However, it does not apply if nature, i.e. living things and humans, are teleological, and, therefore, have an inherent goal for which they strive. Having such a purpose necessarily means that values are at work in the form of preferences or requirements for optimal development of living things. A

plant must seek water to grow, an animal must reach maturity to reproduce its kind. Some possibilities have greater value than others in reaching optimal results for a living being and, therefore, are more valuable, better, good, natural and so on. At the most basic level, 'good' is what enables a living thing to attain its optimal condition, and, therefore, has utilitarian value. For animals, of course, there is no point in asking if they should strive for optimal development – they have no choice and that is what they just do. Should a human do the same, i.e. is there a moral obligation to do so? In our view, the answer is clear: if the purpose of morality is not to attain optimal well-being, then the concept of 'morality' is meaningless and any discussions about whether or not there is a moral obligation for optimal development are futile.

Moreover, there is a third, unintended consequence to "Hume's Guillotine." If empirical facts can tell us nothing about morals, if 'is' cannot lead to 'ought,' then it follows that science is irrelevant to ethics. There is no way to establish a scientific ethic to guide human kind because values cannot be tested by the scientific method. They do not meet the criteria of being objects for scientific study insofar as they are not physical, cannot be measured, they cannot be predicted and tested for truth or falsity. Sam Harris recognizes this difficulty in his book The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Values, in which he tries to undo Hume's 'is-ought' conundrum by claiming it as "another dismal product of Abrahamic religion."[122] However, pointing out the – in his view – unrespectable origin of the problem does not prove that the problem is unreal. His claim is an example of the genetic fallacy which tries to disprove an idea by referring to allegedly 'unrespectable' origins.[123]

Hume's is-ought problem has one other weakness: it cannot be universally applied but only works with an empirical and materialist view of nature. However, if nature is teleological and, as in 'platonic' theories, there is a spiritual presence in nature, it is not at all difficult to derive an 'ought' from an 'is.' We can see why such is the case in of Bahá'u'lláh statement:

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.[124]

From a Bahá'í perspective, nature is inherently value-laden first, by virtue of its origin with God and second, because each thing reflects the values of God in the material realm. If nature is value-laden, then obviously we can draw conclusions about values, including moral values from it. These values are imperative insofar as they are sanctioned or authorized by God and are obligatory for the kinds of beings to which they pertain. A human, for example, has spiritual capacities that must be developed (unless distortions in our development are to occur) whereas a horse does not.

There is one other famous and often-used argument against natural law meta-ethics. Sartrean existentialism rejects the concept that humans have a 'ready-made' essence or nature given to

them, a view often encapsulated in the phrase "existence precedes essence." In practice, this means that humans make themselves and have no nature or essence given to them 'ready-made' by God or anyone else. As Sartre puts it, "Human freedom precedes essence in man,"[125] meaning, we are not constrained by a pre-established essence and are free to make our own. Simone de Beauvoir, author of the archetypal feminist text, The Second Sex, applies this Sartre's idea to women in her statement "One is not born a woman; one becomes a woman."[126] Some schools of feminism (as well as post-modern philosophy[127]) have also adopted the meta-ethical belief that there is no given human essence or sexuality, and that we personally and/or collectively construct human nature as we find it. Michele M. Schumacher writes, "[A] majority of academic and western feminist assume that whatever nature is, it is not human. There is . . . no such 'thing' as specifically human nature."[128] According to these philosophers, we could re-construct human nature – or sexuality – in some other way if we choose to do so. Our ethics and our nature is in our hands because we have no intrinsic teleological nature.

Part II: Deeper into the Writings

8.2 The Basis for Natural Law Meta-Ethic in the Bahá'í Writings

In our view, the Bahá'í Writings adhere to a variation of a natural law meta-ethic. The convergences with Aristotle's and Aquinas' views are obvious and need no further elaboration. Bahá'u'lláh shows humanity's teleological nature when He affirms:

 It is for thee to direct thyself towards the Ultimate Goal, and the Supreme End, and the Most Sublime Pinnacle, that thou mayest hear and behold what hath been revealed by God, the Lord of the worlds.[129]

This passage shows that in order to fulfill our teleological nature or final cause and "supernatural vocation," we must develop our "spiritual susceptibilities"[130] so we can "hear and behold," i.e. comprehend and follow God's new revelation and harmonize our lives with God's Will. Harmonizing our will with God's Will in daily practice is precisely what ethics is all about.

The Universal House of Justice expressly identifies human nature as teleological and asserts that certain attributes are "intended by God for human nature." These attributes constitute our essence and, thereby, define us as human beings. Any attribute that contradicts our essence is "unnatural":

The Bahá'í concept of human nature is teleological; that is, there are certain qualities intended by God for "human nature", and qualities which do not accord with these are described as "unnatural"[131]

The consequences of this statement are clear: any attributes not in harmony with God's will for human nature are "unnatural" and, thereby, not ethical. This is because going against God's goodness and His good will for us cannot, by definition, be ethically good. Actualizing our God-given teleological nature, i.e. acting on the basis of our spiritual aspects means that we at least strive to act ethically. In other words, what accords with our true spiritual nature and what is ethical are one and the same thing.

As previously noted, because our teleological nature is from God, this "Ultimate Goal" or final cause is real, objective and mind-independent. It is 'the good' towards which we are all striving, either unconsciously or consciously. From this, along with the guidance given by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, it follows logically that some actions are more suited to attaining that "Ultimate Goal" than others i.e. not all actions are equally suited to attaining 'the good.' This suggests that our divinely given human nature establishes an objective standard by which to evaluate and choose our actions from an ethical standpoint. Consequently, moral relativism is negated since it lacks such an objective standard and, therefore, reduces all moral choices to subjective preferences. However, we must also recall that a diversity of appropriate choices may well exist in some cases and that the range of appropriate choices is not necessarily reduced to one. In other words, humanity's teleological nature does not violate the Bahá'í principle of unity in diversity.

Moreover, because these laws originate with God, they are mind-independent and objective and, therefore, they are not determined by human perceptions, wishes or cultural agendas. For example, we can (somewhat) shape the basic communication needs of human beings – as by using sign language – but we cannot eliminate them. They are needs that must be fulfilled. In addition, natural laws are unchangeable because they are based on the intrinsic nature of a being and as long as that particular kind of being exists, the applicable natural laws will also exist. This idea is implicit in the concept of progressive revelation which divides laws into two parts, the temporary and the eternal:

Each of the divine religions embodies two kinds of ordinances. The first is those which concern spiritual susceptibilities, the development of moral principles and the quickening of the conscience of man. These are essential or fundamental, one and the same in all religions, changeless and eternal – reality not subject to transformation . . . The second kind of ordinances . . . relate to the material affairs of mankind.[132]

The "essential or fundamental" laws do not change because human nature does not change; hence, they are "the same in all religions" which, in effect, means the same in all places and at all times. Only the actualization of human potentials changes as we progress spiritually, culturally, economically and so on. Once again, it is important to note that if collective/societal or individual acts coincide with natural law, we may legitimately call it 'just' or morally 'good' and if they do not, the individual act or the positive/conventional law is unjust and "unnatural"[133] and will degrade our well-being. According to natural law theory, man-made, i.e. conventional law must either be based on or at least not be in conflict with natural law if we are to gain true benefit from legislation. In this sense, the theological laws revealed by the Manifestation take precedence over positive man-made law.

At this point, it must be emphasized that references to natural law do not refer to the physical laws of nature or the behavior of animals in nature. Therefore, the Writings explicitly reject the concept that human behavior should model itself on animal behaviors in the natural world. Our ethics are derived from our essential nature and the Bahá'í theory of human nature includes our rational and spiritual aspects which do not exist in animals. This issue is especially relevant in light of vigorous contemporary debate about

homosexuality. For example, the Bahá'í Faith sees homosexual acts as "unnatural"[134] which, of course, is a reference to our God-given rational and spiritual nature. The Bahá'í view cannot be scientifically disproven by cataloging alleged homosexual acts in the animal kingdom and then arguing that the acts found in nature give legitimize the same actions among humans. Bruce Bagemihil famously tried this in his book Natural Exuberance.[135] 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear that what is natural and appropriate for animals is not necessarily so for humans: "the fact that some species eat their young does not mean that it is acceptable for human beings to do so."[136] Actions that violate our higher natures are not appropriate for us and violate our nature.

This is why Bahá'í meta-ethics cannot uncritically accept beliefs that nature is a moral exemplar for us to follow. The aspects of nature that orient us towards 'the good' are in harmony with our essence and, above all, are sanctioned by or in harmony with the Writings themselves. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá often illustrate their teachings with reference to nature – "Doves are of many colors; nevertheless, they live in utmost harmony"[137] – but we must remember that using nature to illustrate a divinely ordained principle is not the same as basing a moral teaching on what we find in nature. The Writings reveal God's teachings and illustrate them with selected examples from nature; the starting point is God, not nature. Nature alone can never be a self-sufficient foundation of our ethical principles which can only have their legitimacy, authority and universality from God. Perhaps the fastest way to illustrate this is to point out some especially horrible habits among animals: dogs packing, chickens pecking a deformed chick to death, or gang rape among dolphins. Naturalist ethical systems avoid examples like this for

obvious reasons. Taoism, European Romanticism, and various modern nature 'spiritualities' are examples of such thinking that look towards the co-operative aspects of nature as a moral model. However, nature also has brutal competition which was the focus of Darwinism and Social Darwinism and their Fascist descendents. Nature alone is not a reliable guide to morals.

We must be very clear in our minds that applying animal behaviors to judge human actions is also irrational for the simple reason that humans are not merely animals; we are, as the Writings teach, essentially different. To behave like something we are not, is irrational because it is against our own best interests. From the perspective of Bahá'í meta-ethics, irrational behavior is deeply problematic because it violates our essential nature as "rational souls" [138] which distinguish us from animals. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names -- the human spirit and the rational soul -- designate one thing. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things . . . But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities.[139]

Here, too, we find convergence between the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle, who said that the highest virtue for humans is the exercise of reason which is "something divine."[140]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement indicates that without the "rational soul" either in actuality or in potential, we are seriously defective as humans. Something that should be there is not or is not functioning as it should. However, the "rational soul" while necessary is not sufficient because to fully actualize ourselves we must "awaken spiritual susceptibilities"[141] to receive inspiration and guidance of the "spirit of faith." Furthermore, humans are constituted by two natures, i.e. a physical, bodily nature and a spiritual nature "born from the bounty to the Holy Spirit."[142] From this it follows that in Bahá'í meta-ethics, ethical decisions must harmonize with both our physical and spiritual natures as well as with our inherent rationality.

Of course, humans also have free will in regards to moral matters and, therefore, can violate their own natures i.e. act irrationally and unnaturally but this results in their own detriment. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for example, regards racial prejudice as "unnatural"[143] which is to say, against our own spiritual and rational natures. Indulging in this irrational and "unnatural" behavior damages us individually and socially.

8.3: Udo Schaefer's Rejection of Natural Law Meta-ethics

On the subject of a natural law meta-ethic in the Bahá'í Writings, it is important to specifically examine Udo Schaefer's discussion of this subject in his Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture. In the discussion below, we shall endeavor to show that alternative understandings of this issue are possible and should also be considered.

In this work, Schaefer accepts that "Insofar as the virtues have a telos, or purpose, that of right being Bahá'í ethics may be called teleological."[144] Despite this statement, he vigorously rejects the concept of a natural law meta-ethics in the Bahá'í Writings. However, the matter may be understood differently than he does. Once we accept teleology, i.e. purposive, goal oriented behavior, it is, in our view, difficult to avoid the conclusion that this goal is a standard by which all action must be judged, and that all 'virtues' are by definition those acts that advance our way to the goal. The necessity of performing these acts to attain the goal constitutes natural law, i.e. the requirements we must meet to actualize our essence. In short, there are desirable and undesirable results that we strive for. This also throws doubt on the deontologic aspects of Bahá'í ethics[145] for the simple reason that commands obeyed for the sake of attaining our teleologic goal or for the love of God cannot be deontologic, i.e. done for their own sake. We shall have more to say about this below.

In regards to teleology, our view is that the Writings seem to follow a middle-path between the outright rejection of natural law meta-ethics in its traditional form and a complete acceptance of the traditional or conventional natural law theory. In other words, there is another, alternative way to understand this topic and its associated issues.

According to Udo Schaefer, "The Bahá'í Faith does not support the idea of an innate, natural law, moral law inscribed by God in human nature;" [146] he adds that "Neither Bahá'í scripture not the Qur'an contain even a hint at natural law."[147] The key point in Schaefer's understanding is the belief that the highest criterion in moral judgment is recourse to God's arbitrary will and to the infallibility of the divine Messenger who mediates this will to humanity . . .

To this will which is arbitrary, absolute, not bound by principles . . . man owes absolute obedience . . .[The moral order] is not anchored in preceding Platonic ideas of good and evil, in eternal truths immanent in nature and identifiable by reason, nor in a rational concept of human nature . . . nor in a rationally recognizable 'nature of things' (rerum natura). Rather morality proceeds from the decisions of God's arbitrary will. . . . His will has no reason to will as he wills other than that he wills it so.[148]

In other words, the basis of Schaefer's rejection is that God's will cannot be limited by anything external to Himself, such as "preceding Platonic ideas of good and evil" that would limit His power of choice in any way. Moreover, God's Will is non-rational and "arbitrary," i.e. He "has no reason to will as he wills." Such is the case because the existence of a preceding idea of the moral good, the existence of a natural moral order, of a natural law , binding upon God would make it 'an associate of his [God's] judgment . . . and would thus limit God's sovereignty.[149]

The view that anything can precede God or limit His Will is, of course, unacceptable according to the Bahá'í Writings. In addition, contrary to the traditional theory of natural law, Schaefer maintains that human reason alone cannot identify these moral values:

[a] basic proposition of all natural law is that moral norms are recognized as such by human reason. The question then arises as to the place assigned to reason in Bahá'í ethics. Can human beings distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and vice by means of reason alone, without the aid of scripture. Is reason an independent, primary or supplementary source of values?[150]

This, of course, brings us to the crucial question of moderate rationalism and what can be known and how. [151] Finally, we should note that natural law is based on the idea that [t]here is an 'eternal and unchangeable law that encompasses all peoples and all ages', a law that is 'in accord with right reason (recta ratio) and shared by all human beings. Thus the rules of conduct are inherent in all human nature and are based upon eternal, rational ideas of justice, upon an imagined apriori nature of the human being and its innate moral sense. According to this philosophy the basic principles of ethics, the magna principia, are recognizable by reason.[152]

Let us examine Schaefer's argument to see if there are alternate ways of understanding the points he raises.

As we have seen, Schaefer outlines and rejects what may be called the 'standard' or traditional view of natural law meta-ethics. We do not deny that this is one way to understand the subject, but we do not believe this is the only way to understand to do so. We shall outline an alternative viewpoint by examining the key issues involved. There are four major issues in natural law meta-ethics: (a) the power of God; (2) teleology; (3) intrinsic moral knowledge. We shall examine these and some of the issues that grow out of them and (d) the role of reason.

First of all, contrary to what Schaefer seems to claim, a natural law meta-ethics does not necessarily limit the power of God by subordinating them to preceding morals that exist independently of God like Platonic Ideas. Such subordination is, of course, one of the horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma we have already discussed. Bahá'í, Jewish, Christian or Muslim versions of natural law meta-ethic reject the concept that anything can precede God because God is the Creator of all things. Such a view is logically absurd. Furthermore, to believe that anything can precede God and exist independently denies God's omnipotence – but such a notion of God is simply not relevant to the Bahá'í Writings. In the last analysis, there is absolutely nothing in the idea of a natural law meta-ethic that denigrates God by requiring Him to choose among pre-existing, independent values for humankind. All that a natural law meta-ethic requires is that moral laws, moral knowledge or moral capacities be intrinsic to human nature and that in some way play a role in our ethical evolution. Consequently, Schaefer's objection on this matter need not hinder the development of an alternative view to natural law ethics in the Writings.

In order to emphasize God's omnipotence and, thereby, sharpen his argument against the slightest hint of pre-existing or Platonic Ideas, Schaefer portrays God as "arbitrary, absolute and not bound by principles: "His will has no reason to will as he wills other than that he wills it so."[153] God's omnipotence is, of course, the basis of a natural-law meta-ethic because without an omnipotent God, humanity and nature could not be universally endowed with their inherent capacities and the values these embody in unactualized, 'embryo' form. However, it is not necessary that God's "arbitrary" Will be understood in the human sense of the word, i.e. random, whimsical or capricious. Nor do we need to claim that He necessarily acts non-rationally, i.e. that He has no reasons to act. In fact, to over-emphasize God's arbitariness not only falls onto one of the horns of the Euthyphro dilemma but seems more aligned with certain interpretations of Protestant Christianity such as Lutheranism and Calvinism.[154]

We do not need to deny God's omnipotent and "arbitrary" power to realize that just because God could act in any way He chooses with or without any reason, it does not necessarily mean that He would act in a capricious and irrational manner. Being all-powerful does not prevent God from choosing to act consistently with reason or His own laws. Indeed, God can even choose to limit the use of His power – as He does in bestowing free will on human beings. He certainly knows when we make a moral mistake, but He limits His power by not interfering. Doing this is logically consistent with the freedom He has given us and avoids the logical contradiction of taking with one hand the freedom He has given with the other. If God constantly interferes with human action to ensure that we make the right moral choice, true moral progress would be impossible because humans would, in effect, not be tested and reduced to robots. Morality itself would be abolished. After all, morality depends on the possibility of free choice. Here, too, we observe that omnipotent God chooses to act in a manner consistent with the laws of reason He created. In that sense he acts like Shoghi Effendi's "rational God." [155]

There are two important caveats on the foregoing discussion. First, it must be emphasized that our discussion does not allow us to conclude that God in His essence is rational. God's essence is simply unknowable to His creations. However, the fact that God's essence is absolutely unknowable does not prevent us from observing that God's Will has revealed itself in way that is consistent with human reason at least in this 'corner of creation.' Furthermore, making the human essence the "rational soul" suggests that we are being 'fitted' or adapted to a creation that is fundamentally rational. Otherwise, the mismatch between the "rational soul" and a capricious creation would make intellectual and moral development impossible. Science would also become impossible in a mismatch between the rational human soul and a non-rational creation. Second, it is important to note that because God chooses to reveal His Will in a way consistent with human reason does not mean that God Himself reasons in the human way. In fact, we cannot know if God 'reasons' at all. All we can say is that in creation, He reveals His Will in manner consistent with our reasoning processes and consequently, there is no intrinsic conflict between reason and religion. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "Reason is the first faculty of man and the religion of God is in harmony with it."[156]

The second and third pillars of natural law meta-ethics are teleology and the existence of inherent moral knowledge. Although distinct in themselves, they are intertwined and so we shall discuss them together. Teleology is the belief that all things, but especially all living things and most especially human beings have an intrinsic purpose that guides their development. Although we have already discussed this above, there is more to say specifically vis-à-vis the Bahá'í Writings and Udo Schaefer's presentation of this issue. We shall begin with a quotation from the Universal House of Justice:

The Bahá'í concept of human nature is teleological; that is, there are certain qualities intended by God for "human nature", and qualities which do not accord with these are described as "unnatural"[157]

This passage confirms humanity's teleological nature – thereby agreeing with the bed-rock principle of natural law meta-ethics as we have seen above. Moreover, the teleological nature or final cause must be within us i.e. within nature, since otherwise it could not be our goal as human beings. Finally, this passage asserts that there are "certain qualities intended by God for 'human nature" which means that certain qualities are deemed by God as good and, therefore, desirable for humanity. If God considers such qualities desirable for human nature, then obviously these qualities are part of human nature because of His endowment. Moreover, among these good qualities is the orientation (or 'vector') towards God Who is "the Desire of all things."[158] The desire for God is in "all things" though "all things" may not be conscious of it as humans should be. Obviously, if God is the goal or "the Desire of all things" then all things, humans included, have an intrinsic teleological nature to seek Him in a way appropriate to their essence. Here, too, we see that these qualities are within human nature, and that there is something in each

individual which orients us towards the good and the true, i.e. our "supernatural vocation." In addition, these qualities "intended by God" are an objective standard by which humans can evaluate whether our actions have lived up God's intentions or not. In other words, we have within us an objective and universal divine standard to judge our conduct. We shall explore this issue further below.

There is additional evidence that mankind's nature is teleological, and specifically oriented towards moral knowledge and the desire for God. The Writings speak of "the universality or perfection of virtues potential in mankind. Therefore, it is said that man has been created in the image and likeness of God."[159] This implies that if these potentials were not present in mankind, we would not be made in God's image which, in effect, means we would not be human. In short, these potentials are part of our essence as human beings. A similar line of argument develops from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's frequent references to the "spiritual susceptibilities"[160] within human beings and his calls on us to "to awaken spiritual susceptibilities in the hearts of mankind."[161] How could one awaken what is not there? If these susceptibilities are to be awakened, then they must exist – at least, in potential – be within us, waiting for actualization by the Manifestation. Indeed, these "spiritual susceptibilities" distinguish humans from animals which are "utterly lacking spiritual susceptibilities, ignorant of divine religion and without knowledge of the Kingdom of God."[162] In our view, these "spiritual susceptibilities" are a moral sense in potentia. The Bahá'í International Community also sees moral potentialities as inherent to humankind:

It not only sees the individual as a spiritual being, a "rational soul", but also insists that the entire enterprise that we call civilization is itself a spiritual process, one in which the human mind and heart have created progressively more complex and efficient means to express their inherent moral and intellectual capacities[163]

What could "express[ing] their inherent moral and intellectual capacities" refer to if not expressing the moral truths and understandings that have been awakened from potentiality by the Manifestation? This, at least, is our understanding of the matter.

We can also observe the intrinsic nature of these qualities. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his

potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life.[164]

It should be pointed out that here, too, that moral virtues are potential within us: "the virtues of the world of humanity [are] latent within [us]." Moreover, our divine qualities" cannot be "awakened," our "perfections [made] visible" and our "potential powers revealed" if they are not within us, i.e. inherent. These inherent attributes – whether in potential or in actuality – are necessary for an natural law meta-ethic. Without them and without a teleological nature, a natural law meta-ethic is impossible.

The existence of potential moral knowledge raises the question of whether or not reason alone can help us discover the virtues entailed in our final cause. Aquinas, for example, accepts that at least some of these ethical precepts can be known by "the light of natural reason alone[165] (although revelation is needed for faith) whereby we discern what is good and what is evil. [166] However, the Bahá'í Writings disagree. 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that reason alone is not sufficient for true knowledge: "But the human spirit [rational soul], unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities."[167] Reason is necessary but not sufficient to awaken our "spiritual susceptibilities" which are a moral sense in potentia. The matter could not be more clear: our spiritual and moral knowledge cannot develop without assistance from "the spirit of faith,"[168] Elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breaths and promptings of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself. Through it the human mind is quickened and fortified into true conclusions and perfect knowledge.[169]

Furthermore, the Writings make it clear that humanity's spiritual and moral evolution cannot occur without the Manifestations; consequently, reason is not sufficient. It requires the aid of the Manifestations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

It is evident that the holy Manifestations and divine dawning points are necessary, for these blessed and glorious Souls are the foremost Teachers and Educators of mankind, and all human souls are developed through Them by the bounty of the Holy Spirit of God.[170]

It is, of course, obvious that if reason alone were sufficient to acquire spiritual and moral knowledge and to carry on humanity's evolution, the Manifestations would not be needed. Indeed, this is exactly what such philosophies as Humanism claim. Humanity is sufficient to itself.[171] Unfortunately, daily experience and history prove otherwise. As Schaefer says:

Human beings cannot recognize the moral order by reason alone; they are dependent on divine revelation on a God-given standard, a hierarchy of supreme values, on fixed point constituting an immovable yardstick and not subject to reason.[172]

However, the fact that reason is not sufficient, does not automatically mean that reason is not necessary for humans to know, understand and apply our moral knowledge in daily life. Reason is unavoidable when dealing with morals. First of all, we must use reason to understand precisely what the divine guidance means, i.e. we must interpret it in a way that does not fall into logical absurdity, into self-contradiction and into contradiction with the rest of the Writings. As Schaefer says, we must interpret it " 'in accord with right reason'." Furthermore, if we find ourselves in a situation in which there is no explicit textual guidance, we must reason our way to a solution on the basis of the Writings. There is not always time or opportunity to consult with others or the Universal House of Justice. Finally, we must evaluate whether or not our actions harmonize with the Writings and why. In other words, God establishes the ideal moral standards and reveals them in a manner consistent with reason but humanity applies them in creation in a rational way within the guidelines of the Writings. We cannot judge God's choices of moral principles but we must understand and apply them rationally. Thus, as we can see, reason is necessary in our moral lives. This, of course, is a modification of traditional natural law meta-ethics.

Such an essential role for reason in our ethical lives is not surprising, given the emphasis on reason in the Writings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

that which is found to be real and conformable to reason must be accepted, and whatever science and reason cannot support must be rejected as imitation and not reality."?[173]

and:

God has endowed man with intelligence and reason whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions . . . If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation.[174]

In addition, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

God has bestowed upon him [man] the power of intellect so that through the attribute of reason, when fortified by the Holy Spirit, he may penetrate and discover ideal realities and become informed of the mysteries of the world of significances.[175]

Reason is even applicable to matters related to faith and knowledge that does not pertain to the

world of matter. Hence 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that:

In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the heritage of tradition and former human experience; nay, rather, we must exercise reason, analyze and logically examine the facts presented so that confidence will be inspired and faith attained.[176]

Further emphasizing the importance of reason in all aspects of human life is the fact that the essential human feature is the "rational soul" which is universal. It distinguishes us from animals. Consequently, there are no good grounds to doubt the applicability of reason to moral issues since we cannot exclude our essential nature from anything we do. If we could, it would no longer be essential.

To emphasize: according to the Writings, the Manifestations are necessary to activate our inherent potentials.[177] However, this does not contradict natural law since natural law does not logically require that our moral knowledge be awakened in any specific way. Recognizing moral laws by reason alone is a Thomistic teaching but the Bahá'í Writings reject this view for the obvious reason that if humankind can recognize the moral laws by itself, there is no reason for the Manifestations to exist. Moreover, the Manifestations are necessary to motivate humanity to do what is right; knowledge alone is not enough, i.e. necessary but not sufficient. This is the great weakness in the Socratic view of ethics, namely, the belief that people will naturally do the right thing once they know what the right thing is. This is a charming delusion. By itself, knowledge does not make people ethical – there must also be motivation or willingness to do the right thing and the strength to do it. Providing willingness and strength is one of the irreplaceable roles of the Manifestation.

According to Schaefer, natural law meta-ethics:

is based on the idea that [t]here is an 'eternal and unchangeable law that encompasses all peoples and all ages', a law that is 'in accord with right reason (recta ratio) and shared by all human beings. Thus the rules of conduct are inherent in all human nature and are based upon eternal, rational ideas of justice, upon an imagined apriori nature of the human being and its innate moral sense. According to this philosophy the basic principles of ethics, the magna principia, are recognizable by reason.[178]

Once again, there are alternative ways of understanding these ideas. In our view, it seems clear that the Bahá'í Writings also advocate an "apriori nature of human being and its innate moral sense" that is "shared by all human beings." Because this issue is so essential to a natural law meta-ethic, a review is worthwhile. In the first place, human nature universally shares the same

final cause – to know and worship God. It is teleological, i.e. it shares the same final cause. Therefore, humankind is not only physically but spiritually one. Shoghi Effendi states that "In origin and intention of creation mankind is one"[179] which is to say, we originate from God and have the same teleological nature of evolving towards God. All human beings, regardless of culture, time, place or historical circumstance share the same essence which is the "rational soul" distinguishing us from animals. The Bahá'í International Community which states, "The rational soul, in the Bahá'í view, is a phenomenon with limitless potentialities: intellectual, spiritual, emotional and moral.[180] Furthermore, all humans have a double nature, a physical 'animal' nature and a spiritual nature which draws them towards God. This human nature is endowed with latent potentials, including moral potentials and "spiritual susceptibilities." Thus, from our perspective, the Writings clearly advocate an identifiable view of a universal human nature.

In addition, in our view the Bahá'í Writings accept that there is, as Schaefer puts it,:

an 'eternal and unchangeable law that encompasses all peoples and all ages', a law that is 'in accord with right reason (recta ratio) and shared by all human beings.[181]

Given the existence of a universal human nature, it is only rational that such a law should exist. Indeed, how else could humanity be essentially one as the Writings teach? How else shall humankind be unified? Without an essentially unchangeable law based on what Shoghi Effendi calls the "eternal verities" passed on from one revelation to another, mankind would remain so badly diversified that conflict would remain inevitable. There would still be adaptations to different cultures – but these adaptations would still embody the "eternal verities." Moral standards would be superficially or accidently different but essentially the same.

9. Motivation: Happiness: Eudaimonian Ethics

One of the key meta-ethical questions concerns motivation, i.e. why we should be good – especially when it is to our advantage not to be?' Are the reasons to be good entirely intrinsic or extrinsic or are they a combination of both? Is personal satisfaction even necessary or can dedication to a greater cause be sufficient? Is such dedication to a greater cause necessary? These are some of the questions that arise.

In regards to the various schools of meta-ethics, the Writings and Aristotle's "eudaimonic ethics" seem to converge. Aristotle's "eudaimonia" which is often translated as "happiness," "well-being" and "flourishing" is also linked to "arête" or personal virtue. In both the Eudemian Ethics and Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle asserts that happiness is the final goal, 'the good' for which all human beings strive, the motivation that energizes them: "Happiness is at once the pleasantest

and the fairest and best of all things whatever."[182] To achieve it, we must strive to exist in the most perfect and complete state possible; in other words, all things strive to self-actualize, to move from potency to act, or, to make their potentials actual. Striving for this 'good' is their true happiness. Aristotle notes that happiness comes in "activities in accordance with our human estate"[183] or nature, and connects actualization with happiness in his claim that "philosophic wisdom"[184] produces happiness by being actualized within a person. This activity actualizes our highest, specifically human, potential and, thereby, cannot help but bring supreme happiness. Both the Bahá'í and Aristotelian concepts of happiness are process concepts of happiness, i.e. happiness is found in the process of drawing nearer to God or the universal "object of desire" and, thereby, actualizing one's potentials.

In our view, the Writings see the deepest motivation is to attain happiness but, as we shall see, the Bahá'í concept of happiness must not be confused with comfort and lazy contentment or immediate, short-term pleasure or avoidance of unpleasant and challenging undertakings. Regarding happiness, Baha'u'llah asserts "whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already been revealed by the Pen of Glory."[185] Elsewhere, He says, "We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations."[186] "Abdu'l-Baha declares:

The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God.[187]

These beliefs are succinctly encapsulated in the assertion that "Bahá'u'lláh has brought you divine happiness."[188] In regards to the individual 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

The purpose of these statements is to make it abundantly clear that the Divine religions, the holy precepts, the heavenly teachings, are the unassailable basis of human happiness, and that the peoples of the world can hope for no real relief or deliverance without this one great remedy.[189]

He also advises individuals to:

Seek ye divine happiness through the hardships and sorrows of this physical world, and behold spiritual well-being in the struggles of this fleeting existence. Distill sugar and honey from the bitter poison of suffering. Recognize the caress of divine favor in the arrows of misfortune.[190]

In other words, the kind of happiness envisaged by the Writings is not the secular happiness of comfort or even calm and contented stasis In fact, every revelation at least to some extent, is

intended to bring a certain amount of 'divine discomfort' and to awaken us from our moral and spiritual complacency and slumbers; to encourage us to make greater efforts to actualize our spiritual potentials, and to attain spiritual happiness even amidst physical and worldly discomfort.[191] Of course, the happiness we seek must be the happiness of our spiritual nature which can only be attained by pursuing 'the good.' In other words, the Writings require the dynamic happiness of growth and developmental struggle and actualizing our intrinsic human nature as we seek 'the good,' i.e. God. In regards to its final cause, such happiness is found in drawing nearer to God. In other words, happiness and well-being lie in the struggle itself. It is not a happiness and well-being that can be achieved once and for all because the effort itself – no matter at what spiritual level – is the happiness we seek. The surest way to lose this happiness is to stop trying.

10: Virtue Ethics

As Udo Schaefer demonstrates in Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture, Volume 2, the Bahá'í Writings espouse a form of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics have a long and rich tradition beginning with Aristotle[192] in the West but also developed in Islamic and Buddhist ethics.[193] In addition, it has a substantial history in Chinese Confucian philosophy.[194] Consequentially, virtue ethics may serve as a bridge from the Bahá'í Writings to other religious and philosophical traditions in various parts of the world. After several centuries of decline in the West, virtue ethics have undergone a growing revival since the last half of the twentieth century, thanks especially to three women philosophers, G.E.M. Anscombe, Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse.[195]

Virtue ethics differ from other meta-ethical systems because of the belief that good, i.e. virtuous, behavior can only be expected from a good character who pursues happiness in the appropriate way.

[I]t is generally agree that virtue ethics maintains that character, human excellences, virtues are the basic mode of evaluation in the theory, as opposed to act evaluations such as "right" and "wrong." It is important to note that many virtue ethicists do not believe the theory to be incompatible with act evaluation at all. Rather, act evaluation is to be understood in terms of character evaluation.[196]

The key to good ethical behavior is for us to acquire the virtues that are suitable to us as human beings, i.e. "rational souls" with both a material and spiritual aspect, whose prime purpose is to "know God and to love Him." In the words of Philippa Foot, one of the modern revivers of virtue ethics:

Natural goodness as I define it, which is attributable only to living things themselves and to their parts, characteristics and operations is intrinsic or 'autonomous' goodness in that it depends directly on the relation of the individual to the 'life form' of its species.[197]

In other words, "natural goodness" is based on how well we actualize the essential attributes of our species, i.e., of the kind of creatures we are. For humans, building a good character who can be relied upon to act virtuously and with the right motivations is thought to be more effective in dealing with a constantly changing world than trying to determine the right action by assessing the greatest good for the greatest number or the applicability of categorical imperatives or developing one's own unique scheme of values. "Not the rule follower, then, but the person disposed by character to be generous, caring, compassionate . . . is the one we will hold up as a moral model."[198] Virtue ethics contrast "with modernist attempts to ground morality in subjective preference or in abstract principles of reason."[199] We know what the necessary virtues are because we know human nature and what it needs to flourish, not only for ourselves alone but as members of society, and, as the Writings would point out, as a spiritual and immortal being made in the image of God. The result of actualizing especially our highest potentials will keep us in harmony with natural law and will bring us the right kind of happiness. In other words, we need only follow our teleological nature.

As the foregoing description shows, the virtue ethics depends on the underlying theory of human nature, and on this score, Bahá'í virtue theory, while similar to Aristotle's in many important respects as we have just seen, also differ from him on a crucial issue of human nature. In fact, on the issue of feeling and sympathy, the Bahá'í view converges with some Confucian Chinese philosophers who put a great emphasis on sympathy and "connectedness with others"[200] and overcoming the false view that we are 'atomic,' i.e. completely separate individuals. Consequently, having a somewhat different view of human nature means that the virtues to be cultivated differs.

There is no need to go into detail about the importance of character in the Bahá'í Writings. The following advice from 'Abdu'l-Bahá urges mothers to train their children "to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all the virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behaviour that would be worthy of blame."[201] Similarly, he says:

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved -- even though he be ignorant -- is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and

good, the result is light upon light.[202]

The issue could not be stated more clearly.

 In our view, there is no point in reviewing Udo Schaefer's magnificent categorization of the Bahá'í virtues in Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture, Volume 2. Given the nature of this survey paper, there is nothing to add at this point. The case for virtue ethics in the Bahá'í Writings could not be made more clearly.

11: Consequentialism and Utilitarianism

Among modern meta-ethical theories, consequentialism and its main representative, utilitarianism also share the Bahá'í Writings' goal of happiness. In this sense, there is a convergence between the Writings and consequentialism and utilitarianism. We shall examine the differences below.

For consequentialism itself, happiness is one possible outcome by which we may evaluate the morality of an action. It is not focused solely on happiness; it is focused on achieving the "right kinds of overall consequences"[203] even if these do not always lead to unadulterated happiness, e.g. a root canal or victory in WW II. The "right kinds of consequences" are those leading to the goals we wish to or need to achieve. Morality is identified with these results. Tom. L Beauchamp adds:

Consequentialism asserts that actions are right or wrong according to their consequences, rather than because of any intrinsic features they may have such as truthfulness or beauty. There are several types of utilitarian theory, but they hold in common that the rightness or wrongness of actions and practices is determined solely by their consequences; what makes an action morally right or wrong is the total good or evil it produces. This contention distinguishes utilitarianism from ethical theories maintaining that the act itself has moral value part from the good or evil produced.[204]

Utilitarianism, on the other hand, is concerned only with the consequence of happiness or pleasure. According to John Stuart Mill, the best known proponent of utilitarianism:

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. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and privation of pleasure.[205]

Mill's idea obviously implies that actions must be judged by their consequences for happiness and unhappiness.

From a Bahá'í perspective, consequentialism and utilitarianism put the cart before the horse: an action is not good because it leads to positive results and/or makes us happy but it leads to positive results and/or makes us happy because God's authority makes it good. The rightness or goodness of moral injunctions is ensured by the inherent legitimacy, authority, universality bestowed by God's commands. These are precisely the "intrinsic features" which make an act good. If moral commands do not exemplify harmony with God's Will, i.e. if they are not based on God's legitimacy, authority and universality, they are not right or good regardless of their seemingly positive consequences and/or happiness to which they lead. (Once again, we recall the "hospital scenario.) In other words, positive, happy consequences alone – even if they benefit a majority – are not sufficient to make a command or an action moral. The moral rightness of an act is not intrinsic to it but comes from God's Will.

Because actions must reflect the intrinsic goodness of God's commands in addition to producing happiness, Bahá'í ethics also avoid the problem of the end justifying the means. No matter how much happiness or supposed positive results an action may bring, it is not moral if it violates God's command. Indeed, there may be actions society considers socially good or acceptable that do not agree with God's commands, and, therefore, even though they appear to bring happiness at least in the short-run, will not bring "the greatest good for the greatest number" in the long run. These seemingly positive actions may be spiritually bad.

This means that from a Bahá'í perspective, the positive social utility or consequences are not sufficient to make an action good. Furthermore, the utilitarian and consequentialist view is incomplete because it only concerns itself with one aspect of human nature and society – namely our material and not our spiritual well-being. However, the Bahá'í Writings indicate such an incomplete understanding of human nature inevitably leads to negative results and/or unhappiness for individuals and societies. Such truncated views of human nature are unrealistic because, in this case, the spiritual nature of man will eventually demand its due and if this is not forthcoming, serious problems will arise. For their part, the Bahá'í Writings recognize that both our material as well as spiritual natures must be satisfied and developed.

Of course, because God's moral commands reflect His love for His creation, they also benefit humankind and bring happiness. However, happiness may not always conform to our pre-

conceptions; positive results make take unexpected forms. This is where the Bahá'í Writings distinguish themselves from utilitarianism in particular: the Writings do not necessarily regard suffering – be it physical or spiritual – as always inherently bad. This puts them at odds with utilitarian ethics which see happiness as the standard for morality. In regards to suffering, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

The labourer cuts up the earth with his plough, and from that earth comes the rich and plentiful harvest. The more a man is chastened, the greater is the harvest of spiritual virtues shown forth by him[206]

As Bahá'u'lláh says:

O Thou Whose tests are a healing medicine to such as are nigh unto Thee, Whose sword is the ardent desire of all them that love Thee . . . I implore Thee, by Thy divine sweetness and by the splendors of the glory of Thy face, to send down upon us from Thy retreats on high that which will enable us to draw nigh unto Thee.[207]

In the Arabic Hidden Words, God states, "My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy."[208] Events that feel bad "outwardly" i.e. in a worldly sense, are not necessarily bad because they lead to positive spiritual results. The negative outward experiences may be the means to a greater, i.e. happier spiritual goal.

A worldly illustration of this is a training camp for a hockey team. Recruits are put through strenuous even 'unfair' physical and psychological suffering but in the process of suffering they actualize and develop their skills, they acquire the discipline of being part of a team and they develop an all important 'team-spirit' necessary for success. Are they happy? Indeed, they are, even when they are uncomfortable – because we should never confuse comfort with happiness. They are happy because they are doing what it is in their nature to do i.e. they have a teleological happiness (despite the distress and anxiety) that is not in the utilitarian world-view. In this sense, they have Aristotle's well-being or eudemonia which is foreign to Bentham and Mill's utilitarianism. A consequentialist might be able to accept such a concept of teleological happiness up to a point – but s/he will not be able to accept the spiritual results which must also count as consequences to be evaluated. In our view, the Bahá'í view of happiness is, theologically speaking, closeness to God and philosophically speaking the fullest possible actualization of our spiritual and physical capacities. This becomes clearer when we distinguish between being comfortable and contented and having growing pains which inevitably move us closer towards completion and maturity.

In the Bahá'í view, there is, ultimately, really only one way to attain happiness in its fullest

measure and that is to fulfill our final cause which is know God and to worship Him as sated by the Noonday Prayer. Without fulfilling our final cause we cannot truly be our true selves, i.e. we cannot fulfill our own purpose and destiny and, therefore, remain deeply alienated from our own lives. In that case, how can we be anything but incomplete, unfulfilled – in a word, unhappy? If we are unhappy at such a fundamental level, it is difficult to see how we can bring genuine happiness to others. Thus, the prime or foundational motivation is intrinsic, i.e. spiritual self-actualization, i.e. knowing and worshipping God, which is the necessary and sufficient condition for carrying out the mandate to help spiritual healing to the world. This second motivation is extrinsic. Both kinds of motivation are necessary and present but the order is architectonic: knowing and worshipping God is the foundation from which other motives must develop. To actualize our final cause we must follow the Manifestation for our age.

12. Kant's Deontology and the Bahá'í Writings

In Groundwork of a Metaphysic of Morals (1797), Immanuel Kant presents his theory of deontological meta-ethics according to which morals must be based solely on a priori reasoning about duty or obligations. He defines duty as "the necessity to act out of reverence for the law."[209] Moreover, in contradiction to consequentialism, utilitarianism or pragmatism, he believes that "Empirical principles are always unfitted to serve as a ground for moral laws"[210] because of ever-changing circumstances. He also wants to avoid any dependence on religious revelation as a basis of ethics. His final position is simple: only when we do our duty for the sake of doing our duty can we be moral. A good act performed out of fear or ambition or even love may be 'right' but it is not moral.[211] Kant writes,

Therefore, nothing but the idea of the law in itself, which admittedly is present on in a rational being . . . can constitute that pre-eminent good which we call moral, a good which is already present in the person acting on this idea and has not to be awaited merely from the result.[212]

A few comments are in order before going further. From a Bahá'í perspective, Kant's meta-ethic is built on poor foundations insofar as the Writings do not regard human reason alone as a sufficient basis for morals. Because of its inherent limitations, reason cannot meet the problems of legitimacy and power that we have explored above. What human being can claim to have the legitimacy, i.e. the complete knowledge, the infallible understanding and the infinite goodness to make absolute judgments about moral acts and to demand our adherence to his/her laws? Moreover, since legitimacy without power is impotent, what human being can claim to have the power to impose his/her moral rules in one way or another by means of consequences?[213] Who has the power necessary to enable people everywhere to follow these rules despite their short-comings and weaknesses? At this point it is already clear that the Bahá'í Writings are at odds with Kant's deontological meta-ethics.

Another reason for the difference between the Writings and Kant's deontology is the teleological foundation of the Bahá'í meta-ethic. The teleological nature of humankind means that our actions are aimed at achieving a certain goal and for this reason alone are not done strictly for the sake of duty itself as required by Kant's ethics. Acting for love of God – as advised in the Noonday Prayer – also prevents acion purely for the sake of duty itself.

At this point it is important to avoid confusing the good will which Kant posits as the foundation of truly moral action and deontologic ethics. According to Kant, "It is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it which can be taken as good without qualification, except a good will."[214] All other virtues depend on good will. In the Arabic Hidden Words, Bahá'u'lláh states:

O SON OF SPIRIT!

My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.[215]

This is the foundation in which our actions and moral reasoning should rest. On this matter the Writings and Kant are in agreement. However, saying that actions must be based on good will and a "pure, kindly and radiant heart" is not the same as saying that an action must be performed for its own sake and not for any other goal, teleologic or otherwise. Basing actions on good will does not lead to a deontologic view of ethics in the Bahá'í case.

Kant's statement about the foundation of good will reveals another deficiency in Kant's meta-ethics. Just how is good will or purity of heart to be attained? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for acquiring it? Kant is silent on this issue – and for that reason his deontological meta-ethic lacks a solid foundation which it cannot explain. The Bahá'í Writings, on the other hand, do not have this problem in as much as good will towards our fellow man is generated by our love for God. [216]

Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect . . . if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy.

It is worth noting that this fits in well with divine command theory which makes God, not humanity, the center and basis of all ethics.

Kant has three rules or categorical imperatives, i.e. rules without exceptions, in order to help us identify what our duty is. We already know that it cannot be the consequences of an act since an action is good in and of itself whatever the consequences might be. In other words,

Certain kinds of acts are intrinsically right and other kinds intrinsically wrong. The rightness or wrongness of any particular act is thus not (or not wholly) determined by the goodness or badness of its consequences.[217]

The first form of the categorical imperative states, "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[218] In everyday language, we appeal to this form of the imperative when we ask about a behavior, 'What if everybody else did that?" The obvious implication is that if an act is not all right for everyone, it is not all right for any individual. As common sense guidance this form of the categorical imperative is good – as long as universal good will remains foundational. From a Bahá'í perspective, the first form of the categorical imperative is not so much 'wrong' as insufficient because it is 'empty,' i.e. it prescribes nothing in particular, and even worse, as a standard for judging moral acts it only rules out hypocrisy. Any action can pass this test as long as we are willing to allow others to do the same. Indeed, like some revolutionaries – Lenin for example, we can convince ourselves that our harsh deeds were examples of good will in the long run. A moral maxim that, in the last analysis, only rules out hypocrisy is not specific enough to genuinely practical. It is just too wishy-washy.

The second for of Kant's categorical imperative states:

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end.[219]

In short, we should not use people only for our own advantage. Of course, we all use people in some way by hiring them to work for us, but by paying them fairly, we also treat them as ends. The second form of the categorical imperative is clearly in agreement with the Writings insofar as everyone is an 'end' and, therefore, innately valuable and to be cherished. This harmonizes with the Bahá'í belief that all humans are made in the image of God, although, of course, Kant does not say so. Moreover, the harmonization with the Writings is clear vis-à-vis treating each individual as an "end," in a way that is conducive to their spiritual growth and actualization of their "spiritual susceptibilities" as well as other gifts.

The third form of the categorical imperative states:

A rational being must always regard himself as making laws in a kingdom of ends which is possible through freedom of the will - whether it be as a member or as a head.[220]

The "kingdom of ends" refers to a mental construct of a kingdom, "a systematic union of rational beings under common objective law"[221] in which members are both means and ends in their relation to one another. In the "kingdom of ends" the three forms of the categorical imperative are the common rational laws by which people judge their own and each others' actions. . From our perspective on the Bahá'í Writings, the concept of the "kingdom of ends" is interesting because it invites people to think of themselves as members of an ideal community and to act as if such were real in the here and now. In short, it helps us to improve or 'idealize' our behavior and speech. This – in our view – is exactly what we strive for in our Bahá'í communities: an idealized community which encourages us to practice speech and action in accordance with the Writings.

In our view, the major problem with Kant's meta-ethical approach is its absolute reliance on reason. The Writings obviously reject the concept that reason alone is a sufficient basis for meta-ethics since that would obviate any need for God or the Manifestations in humanity's ethical life. Another problem is the non-teleological view of human nature. Kant's presentation of his meta-ethical theory in Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals lacks any mention or even hint that humanity has as natural and super-natural vocation, and, therefore, leaves out significant aspects of human nature that must be accounted for in ethics. In short, while Kant's theory is clear and logically coherent, it has a tendency to be a Procrustes' Bed that oversimplifies ethical issues as we have already seen vis-à-vis good will and the first form of the categorical imperative.

13. A Non-Naturalist Meta-ethic

In 1903, G.E. Moore published Principia Ethica, one of the key texts in modern and contemporary ethics. Moore's "mode of inquiry was later to be known as metaethic – the philosophizing about the very terms of ethics and considering the structure of ethics as an object of inquiry."[222] Moore had a startlingly simple suggestion: ethics is ": the general enquiry into what is good."[223] The 'good,' however, turns out to be more difficult to identify than we might think. Moreover, he rejected as "the naturalist fallacy" any attempt to reduce or explain the meaning of 'the good' in such empirical or natural terms as the practical, or the greatest good for the greatest number, or conformity to natural law or any other empirical terms. This because we cannot reduce ethical terms to non-ethical terms without falling into a logical category mistake,

i.e. conflating and confusing two different kinds of things, such as horse shoes and sea cucumbers. Doing so leads to mistaken conclusions. Moore writes:

My point is that good is a simple notion, just as yellow is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to anyone who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is.[224]

The 'good' is a simple fact and cannot be broken down and explained in simpler terms. Like the color yellow, it is either apprehended it is not. No amount of explanation can make a blind man understand what yellow is, and no naturalist, empirical explanation can inform us what the good is. Moore identifies the attempt to offer such empirical accounts of the 'good' as "the naturalistic fallacy."[225] Such accounts are fallacious because they confuse and conflate (1) what is empirical with (2) what is ethical. Like Hume, Moore maintains these two orders or kinds of things are not and cannot be related. Unless we are working in a theistic system 'is' cannot lead to 'ought.' Thus, even though an action has positive consequences, is desirable and/or pragmatic we cannot necessarily conclude that an action is 'good.'

According to Moore, our understanding of 'the good' must come by strictly non-natural, non-empirical means, such as an insight into Platonic Ideas. Moore himself seems to take such a Platonic position, stating:

The Ethics of Plato are distinguished by upholding, far more clearly and consistently than any other system, the view that intrinsic value belongs exclusively to those states of mind which consist in love of what is good or hatred of what is evil.[226]

The Bahá'í Writings both agree and disagree with Moore. The fact that Moore's 'good' transcends empirical knowledge corresponds to the fact that in the Writings God, Who is the good, also transcends empirical knowledge. Because the 'good' is transcendent, it is obvious that no empirical and naturalistic characterizations of it will be adequate. That is why God is essentially unknowable. Moore's intuitionism – the sense of knowing directly without empirical explanation of evidence – finds its counterpart in the Bahá'í teaching that inspiration from the "spirit of faith" is necessary to attain true knowledge. This applies not just to the things we can reason about but to spiritual truths as well. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

But the human spirit [the rational soul], unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities. It is like a mirror which, although clear, polished and brilliant, is still in need of light. Until a ray of the sun reflects upon it, it

cannot discover the heavenly secrets.[227]

Knowledge of 'the good' may be reasonably seen as part of the "divine secrets and the heavenly realities." Until reason is augmented by the spirit of faith, we are "veiled souls"[228] unable to recognize or intuit the good or intuit the good to our fullest capacity. In other words, there comes a point at which humans simply have to recognize or intuit the existence of the good the way they recognize the sun – not by argument but by looking. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says about the immortality of the soul:

if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual hearing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun[229]

Similarly, when our spiritual sight is opened, we will 'see' or intuit the existence of God Who is also the ultimate good. We will do so without benefit of inferential reasoning. Although by different paths, the Bahá'í Writings and Moore's moral intuitionism converge.

However, the Bahá'í position incorporates both Moore's intuitionist view and naturalistic ethics, a position made possible by theism. The created empirical world is totally suffused with the signs and signatures of God's Will which in itself is a sign of 'the good,'

Such is their virtue that not a single atom in the entire universe can be found which doth not declare the evidences of His might, which doth not glorify His holy Name, or is not expressive of the effulgent light of His unity[230]

With such a proliferation of evidence of God's Will, it is hard to resist the conclusion that we also gain some idea of 'the good' by observation and reason. Such conceptions of 'the good' are, of course, limited but they are able to tell us something about 'the good.' However, such knowledge of the good is tentative, incomplete and inadequate for the evolution of humankind. It may be described as a 'lure' to direct our thoughts and feelings in a spiritual direction but in itself, is not adequate as knowledge of 'the good.' For such knowledge, and even better knowledge of the signs of God's Will in nature, our "spiritual susceptibilities" must be awakened and our reasoning must be inspired as we have discussed above.

Several important consequences follow from the foregoing discussion. First, the Bahá'í Writings are able to form a bridge between Moore's non-cognitivist meta-ethics and various moral cognitivist theories. Second, the transcendent nature of 'the good' ensures that this value is

objective and mind-independent in itself; it does not depend on us for its existence or nature and in that sense, it is like a Platonic Idea of which humans only grasp fleeting images. Finally, 'the good' itself is changeless, like the "eternal verities." Of course, our perspective on 'the good' changes – but the change is in us, not in 'the good.'

14. Moral Cognitivism (Ethical Realism) or Non-cognitivism

Perhaps the most basic division in meta-ethics is between cognitive and non-cognitive theories. All ethical theories advocate or tend towards one or the other. Moral cognitivism (or moral realism) refers to:

Ethical theories that hold that there is knowledge of moral facts and that normative ethical judgments can be said to be true or false. Cognitivism includes the majority of traditional ethical theories. In contrast, non-cognitivism, represented by emotivism and prescriptivism, holds that moral statements do not possess truth-values and cannot be known.[231]

Another way of approaching this subject is to ask:

Is there moral knowledge? (And also, do moral statements make knowledge claims?) [as well as] Is there moral truth? (And also, do moral judgments make truth claims?)[232]

In both of these descriptions of cognitive meta-ethics the key issue is whether or not moral truths exist mind-independently, or whether all moral statements are merely subjective opinions with no objective content. If such truths are objective, then they are obviously mind-independent and their essences not determined by human observers. (Human observers may have different perspectives on such truths but that does not affect the essence or nature of the truth itself.) As Andrew Fisher says, "To be a moral realist is to think that moral properties are real and that these properties are in some sense independent of what people think."[233] Neither individual thought nor collective cultural beliefs can make or negate objective moral truths. Furthermore, cognitivism holds there are objectively real moral properties, qualities or attributes that we can associate with such terms as 'good,' 'evil,' 'true' or 'false.' This, of course, is at odds with G.E. Moore's central claim that 'the good' cannot be related to anything else. Finally, according to moral cognitivism, moral judgments can be true or false, which means that moral judgments can assert truth claims.

In the Bahá'í Writings, it is clear that humans are not the creators of their own morals. We

receive our morals from God, which, of course, makes them completely mind-independent as well as ontologically real and objective. In this sense, the Bahá'í Writings converge with Plato's theory that 'goodness' or 'the good' has objective existence in the supersensible world of Ideas just as the moral teachings revealed by the Manifestations reflects God's knowledge about what is ethically good for humankind. What God knows to be true and best for us (as revealed by the Manifestations) cannot help but be real and objective, i.e. cannot help but exist independently from human perception, belief and judgment. How could we rely on ourselves to invent morals when we inherently lack the divine omnipotence which enables God to know what moral standards are best suited to the human nature He has created?

In sharp contrast to cognitivism, non-cognitivism rejects all of the foregoing assertions. Non-cognitivism maintains that the truth (or falsity) of moral propositions is mind-dependent, i.e. depends on the individual or collective making the proposition. Truth or falsity are not objective and cannot be proven true or untrue. There are no real i.e. mind-independent moral qualities or attributes that can be used to prove or disprove a moral judgment. One of the most famous non-cognitive meta-ethical theories is A. J. Ayer's emotivism according to which ethical statements do not describe anything, i.e. they do not tell us what something is like and they do not prescribe anything i.e. they do not show us any obligation. According to Ayer's emotivism, moral 'statements' really only express feelings. "Murder is bad" really means nothing more than "Murder – Boo! Hiss!" Obviously such statements cannot be judged as either true or false because there is no way to verify them, they are purely subjective i.e. mind-dependent, and have no real moral content. All they tell us is that someone disapproves of murder – which is not in itself an ethical statement. There is no possibility here of identifying good and evil in the acts themselves because such moral content must be extraneously by us. Clearly, the meaning of 'good' has been reduced to an exclamation without any intellectual content about the nature of 'good' or its distinction from 'evil.'

In our view, Bahá'í meta-ethics exemplify ethical cognitivism. `Abdu'l-Bahá   points out that:

[e]ach of the divine religions embodies two kinds of ordinances. The first is those which concern spiritual susceptibilities, the development of moral principles and the quickening of the conscience of man. These are essential or fundamental, one and the same in all religions, changeless and eternal -- reality not subject to transformation[234]

Nothing here suggests that humans create or invent these fundamental moral values on their own or, indeed, have any kind of influence on them. They are 'platonic' insofar as they transcend the phenomenal realm although they should not be understood as Platonic Ideas present in their own realm. However, there is no question that they are mind-independent, are real and objective and have real content in and of themselves.

`Abdu'l-Bahá declares that the first of two kinds of ordinances:

constitute essential, or spiritual, teachings of the Word of God. These are faith in God, the acquirement of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities, the acquisition of the bestowals and bounties emanating from the divine effulgences -- in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. [235]

It should be noted that `Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the virtues we need as "the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. [236] These, he tells us, come from God. Moreover, to attain "perfect manhood" – a concept which also implies an objective standard by which to judge – we must acquire certain attributes and ethical qualities. The key is that we must acquire them from the "Word of God," not that we should invent or choose them for themselves. Humans have no role in deciding the nature of "perfect manhood" or of "praiseworthy moralities." `Abdu'l-Bahá also makes it clear that humanity is completely dependent on the Manifestations for our knowledge of ethics. They are the "divine Educators"[237] of humankind.

The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life. These holy Manifestations of God are the Educators and Trainers of the world of existence, the Teachers of the world of humanity. They liberate man from the darkness of the world of nature, deliver him from despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities. They clothe him in the garment of perfections and exalted virtue . . . Man is base, treacherous and mean; the Manifestations of God uplift him into dignity, nobility and loftiness.[238]

The values brought by the Manifestations are remedies for our "despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities," i.e. it is the Manifestations and not human beings who bring these values. The fact that "[m]an is base, treacherous and mean" shows that we lack the ability to identify, awaken, actualize and establish the values that are appropriate for us. That is why the Manifestations are necessary. This, too, shows that humans do not invent their fundamental values.

For his part, Shoghi Effendi also refers to objective, mind-independent ethics when he writes, "But when true religion is combined with true ethics, then moral progress becomes a possibility and not a mere ideal."[239] He also says, "We should take our stand on a higher plane of moral

and spiritual life and, setting for them the true example, urge them up to our level."[240] Here, too, we observe both directly and by implication that there are, indeed, moral truths and even a hierarchy of moral development about which we can have genuine knowledge.

These and other statements make it clear that humans are not the creators of their own morals. We receive our morals from God, which, of course, makes them completely mind-independent as well as ontologically real and objective. In this sense, the Bahá'í Writings converge with Plato's theory that 'goodness' or 'the good' has objective existence in the supersensible world of Ideas just as the moral teachings revealed by the Manifestations reflects God's knowledge about what is ethically good for humankind. What God knows to be true and best for us (as revealed by the Manifestations) cannot help but be real and objective, i.e. cannot help but exist independently from human perception, belief and judgment. How could we rely on ourselves to invent morals when we inherently lack the divine omnipotence which enables God to know what moral standards are best suited to the human nature He has created?

14.1 Subjectivity and Relativism

It may be argued that subjectivity and, in that sense, non-cognitivism enters Bahá'í ethics insofar as people are entitled to their own understanding of the Manifestation's moral pronouncements or the declarations of His authorized interpreters. Everyone has a right to such personal understanding and no individual has the right to insist on the acceptance of his or her viewpoints. However, it is just as important to remember that having rights does not make our opinions immune from analysis or critique as indicated by `Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions."[241] In other words, while we all have the right to our own understandings, there is no necessary expectation to exemption from respectful analysis. Moreover, having a right to a certain understandings does not guarantee that all understandings are equally well supported by the Writings or equally well reasoned or equally relevant to a passage. [242] In other words, the Writings do not forbid clashing opinions but they do forbid an insistence that others must accept our views. Finally, it should be noted that not all understandings are cognitive – some may be emotive or may express attitudes instead of making declarative propositions about ethics or the world. Since such understandings or interpretations are not cognitive, they cannot be declared to be true or false.

The right to hold our own understandings is a de jure right belonging to the person and not to the argument s/he is making. This should not be confused with relativism which asserts that all view are true or must be regarded as true from some perspective and that we have no standard by which to judge moral actions. If that were the case, we would have to reject `Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "we must train the immature to proper or true moral standards: Some have unworthy morals; we must train them toward the standard of true morality."[243] There are objective, "changeless and eternal"[244] moral rights and wrongs, i.e. the "eternal verities"

which the Manifestations provide for our use. Declaring some people to be "immature" in a moral sense also implies that there exists an object, mind-independent standard by which to make a judgment. The existence of "true" morals is a claim that negates any notion that all moral positions can be considered correct from some particular point of view. If values had no objective and real status and could not be known with some degree of accuracy, then the Writings would be useless in providing moral guidance since all such guidance would be reduced to conflicting opinions that would only revive the tower of Babel. [245]

From the foregoing, it seems clear that we should not confuse the right to personal opinion about the Writings with relativism which is position about the truth-value of our opinions. The first is unchallengeable insofar as it grows out of the independent search for truth while the second is a logically dubious position that makes ethical knowledge and unity impossible and, as we have seen, is flatly contradicted by the Writings. In ethics, relativism is especially dangerous because it abolishes the difference between servants to humanity such as Mother Teresa and servants of evil ideologies such as Dr. Mengele – a problem also present in non-cognitivist ethics where ethics are simply feelings or attitudes. The idea that the differences between them are only a matter of perspective seems perverse. Such a confusion is incompatible with the whole purpose of the Writings which is to lift our morality above those of Josef Mengele.

To conclude: the meta-ethics of Writings exemplify a foundational cognitivism although there is some room for subjectivity in the interpretation of moral guidance.

14.2 Two Opponents to Bahá'í Cognitivism

Naturally, there are various non-cognitive or antirealist meta-ethical theories that disagree with the Bahá'í Writings about the truth and falsity of ethical propositions. One of these is the influential meta-ethical view known as "error theory"[246] which asserts that without exception all ethical propositions, judgments and injunctions are false. They report nothing about the world, i.e. they are not knowledge, and, therefore, have no truth value. They can neither be falsified nor confirmed. J.L. Mackie, the main proponents of error theory writes:

But the denial of objective values will have to be put forward . . . as an 'error theory,' a theory that although most people in making moral judgments implicitly claim . . . to be pointing to something objectively descriptive, these claims are all false. It is this that makes 'moral scepticism' appropriate. [247]

The most obvious consequence of J.L. Mackie's statements is that if moral propositions and

judgments "are all false," then ethics ceases to exist as a subject. There is simply no point in pursuing such so-called 'knowledge' and there is no validity in trying to teach these judgments to others. Since error theory is unable to say that any action is either moral or immoral, some writers have identified it as a form of ethical nihilism,[248] a viewpoint with which we concur. Of course, this does not mean that error theorists or ethical nihilists cannot judge whether an action is socially useful, or pleasure-giving or convenient in a utilitarian sense but those judgments would have to be made on non-ethical grounds, and, therefore, are not really ethical in nature. For example, we can say 'Feeding the poor is good' for ethical reasons because it is morally positive to treat God's children well, or, we can say it is 'good' for law-and-order reasons because it prevents food riots. The first statement is untenable for Mackie, the second, non-ethical statement is acceptable.

Error theory negates the purpose of the Manifestations to teach us how to distinguish good from evil. Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to "Forsake all evil, hold fast that which is good."[249] – an impossible task if good and evil did not have objective existence and if we cannot distinguish the two. The same can be said of the statement that "the choice of good or evil belongs to the man himself."[250] Indeed, if there were no objective distinctions between good and evil, why would humans need a Manifestation to reveal ethical rules to help our individual and collective progress? How could we even believe in ethical progress, i.e. advancement from lower to higher moral development? There could be no "eternal verities"[251] for successive Manifestations to reaffirm. In short, meta-ethical error theory negates the very foundations of Bahá'í ethical teachings and cannot be harmonized with them. Even of error theory were to allow the Manifestations a special kind of ethical knowledge, error theory still has to maintain that the way humans interpret these exceptional pronouncements is inherently false. Consequently, practicing ethics is impossible.

Postmodernism, in all its various forms, is another philosophical movement that rejects the ethical cognitivism and realism found in the Bahá'í Writings.[252] In general terms, this philosophy represents:

an anti-(or post) epistemological standpoint; anti-essentialism; anti-foundationalism; opposition to transcendental arguments and transcendental standpoints; rejection of the picture of knowledge as accurate representation; rejection of truth as correspondence to reality; rejection of the very idea of canonical descriptions, rejection of final vocabularies, i.e. rejection of principles, distinctions, and descriptions that are thought to be unconditionally binding for all times, persons, and places; and a suspicion of grand narratives, meta narratives of the sort perhaps best illustrated by dialectical materialism.[253]

This description shows why postmodernism is not compatible with the Bahá'í Writings except in accidental features. [254] Their positions on various fundamental issues are antithetical and,

therefore, any similarities are coincidental rather than the products of harmonious basic principles. The teleological view of humanity and the definition of the human spirit as the "rational soul" show that, postmodernism to the contrary, the Writings clearly espouse essentialism, as does the natural law meta-ethic. The Writings have a well-developed theory of man. The Manifestations are not only privileged knowers but also introduce "transcendental standpoints" into our ethical discourse. The "eternal verities" and the "changeless and eternal" guidance from the Manifestations is – postmodernism notwithstanding – "binding for all times, persons, and places." Furthermore, 'progressive revelation' is exactly the kind of grand or metanarrative that postmodernism rejects. Furthermore, the tremendous emphasis on reason and the rationality of religion and science in the Writings both in empirical and spiritual matters has no counterpart in postmodern literature. Finally, the Bahá'í Writings are committed to finding the truth which corresponds to reality as seen in the following declaration:

It means that man must forget all hearsay and examine truth himself, for he does not know whether statements he hears are in accordance with reality or not. Wherever he finds truth or reality, he must hold to it, forsaking, discarding all else; for outside of reality there is naught but superstition and imagination.[255]

Elsewhere, he says, "we "discover the realities of all things,"[256] which means that our discoveries correspond to what is 'out there.' In addition, he asserts, "He has endowed him [man] with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and that which he finds real and true he must accept."[257] The very purpose of reason is the discovery of truth: "God has created man in order that he may perceive the verity of existence and endowed him with mind or reason to discover truth."[258]

Discovering the truth in the Writings includes discovering the truth about ethics. This is precisely what Richard Rorty, one of the quintessential postmodern philosophers, rejects. He sees no value in objectivity which he dismisses as wanting a "sky-hook provided by some contemporary yet-to-be-developed science"[259] to free us from the biases of being culture-bound because he does not think we can ever escape being imprisoned in our cultures. Therefore:

[t]hose who wish to reduce objectivity to solidarity – call them "pragmatists" – do not require either a metaphysics or an epistemology. They view truths as, in William James' phrase, what is good for us to believe. So they do not need an account of a relation between beliefs and objects called 'correspondence' nor an account of human cognitive abilities which ensures that our species is capable of entering into that relation . . .For   pragmatists, the desire for objectivity is not the desire to escape the limitations of one's community but simply the desire to for as much intersubjective agreement as possible [260]

When the idea of replacing the quest for truth in ethics is replaced with the quest for solidarity – which is not an ethical category but a political one, we have, perhaps reached the end of ethics. In short, politics is to replace ethics since there is really nothing to know – only a consensus to negotiate. On Rorty's view, philosophy cannot be a quest for 'truth' or 'true understanding' since the most we can do is redescribe things to our individual and/or collective liking and converse about our various descriptions. In other words, the purpose of philosophy is to be edifying: "I shall is 'edification' to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting more fruitful ways of speaking."[261] Edifying philosophy "takes its point of departure from suspicion about the pretensions of epistemology,"[262] i.e., edifying philosophy is not longer interested in attaining truth.[263] Thus, rather than take part in an inquiry for the 'knowledge,' "we just might be saying something"[264] simply in order to "keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth."[265] This, for Rorty is "a sufficient aim of philosophy."[266]

The concept that ethics is merely "edifying" conversation that just goes on – until we attain, for now, anyway – solidarity, is wholly incompatible with the serious business of ethics as seen in the Bahá'í Writings. The problem is that it is incredibly dangerous. As people who have lived under the most brutal dictatorships of the last century know, sometimes solidarity with crowd is treason to humanity. Sometimes solidarity with injustice is the last thing we want and is simply unethical to the roots. Yet, by Rorty's standards, we cannot know which choice to make. Transforming the epistemological and ethical into the political is not only a huge logical category mistake, it is also a huge ethical mistake because it assumes that ethics can be negotiated and bargained with in order to achieve some compromise satisfactory to all. This kind of 'solidarity' should not be mistaken for the 'unity' taught by the Writings which is based on commitment and obedience to God's law and guidance instead of a quest for an edifying conversation.

15: Conclusion

Our survey of the major meta-ethical theories makes it clear that Bahá'í meta-ethics form a logically coherent and consistent whole. While there is doubtlessly much more to be added as all kinds of implications and inferences are pursued, the outlines of Bahá'í meta-ethics are plainly visible. These ally the Writings with foundationalism, natural law meta-ethics, non-consequentialism, virtue ethics, ethical realism and objectivism, divine command theory, eudaimonian ethics, cognitivism and non-relativism.

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Footnotes

[1] 6 August 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer in Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, Science and Technology, http://bahai-library.com/compilation_science_technology

[2] Compilations, *Bahá'í Scholarship,* p. 17.

[3] Letter to an individual believer, 21 October, 1943 in Compilations, *Bahá'í Scholarship,* p. 4.

[4] 5 July, 1947 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer in Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, Science and Technology, http://bahai-library.com/compilation_science_technology; emphasis added.

[5] Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 128.

[6] 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 238.

[7] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 231.

[8] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 321.

[9] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 231; emphasis added.

[10] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 231.

[11] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 7.

[12] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVI, p. 213.

[13] 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization,* p. 39.

[14] Carl Wellman, *Morals and Ethics*, p. 30.

[15] Nicholas Bunnin, Jiyuan Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy,* p. 123.

[16] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Thomas Kingswill Abbott, p. 74.

[17] Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason,* trans. by Thomas Kingswill Abbott, p. 74.

[18] Robert Audi, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy,* p. 321.

[19] Ted Honerich editor*, The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 289; emphasis added.

[20] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.

[21] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 181.

[22] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.

[23] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 114; Some Answered Questions, p. 146.

[24] This does not contradict Shoghi Effendi's statement that "religious truth is not absolute but relative." (*The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 57.) The context of Shoghi Effendi's assertion is progressive revelation according to which religious truth changes its outward presentation depending on time and place without sacrificing the "eternal verities" (*The Promised Day is Come,* p. 108) which are absolute and taught by all Manifestations.

[25] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 108.

[26] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 205.

[27] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 202.

[28] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 205.

[29] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 294.

[30] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 295.

[31] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 102.

[32] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 112.

[33] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to the Hague,* p. 7.

[34] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks,* p. 60.

[35] 'Abdu'l-Bahá *Some Answered Questions,* p. 208; emphasis added.

[36] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 239.

[37] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah,* p. 112.

[38] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* XXVII, p. 65.

[39] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 55.

[40] Louis P Pojman, *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong*, p. 202.

[41] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 63; emphasis added.

[42] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel,* p. 7.

[43] From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 6, 1939 in Compilations, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 505; emphasis added.

[44] Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality,* p. 11.

[45] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Question,* p. 296.

[46] Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 125.

[47] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Preface to the First Edition. http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/religion/religion-within-reason.htm

[48] 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

[49] Marc Hauser and Peter Singer, "Morality Without Religion." *Op-ed in Free Inquiry,* http://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/HauserSinger.pdf

[50] Marc Hauser and Peter Singer, "Morality Without Religion." *Op-ed in Free Inquiry*,

[51]The number of wars fought specifically over religion are quite small in the 5,000 year history of human warfare. In the West there are the Crusades (off and on from 1095 – 1272); the Albigensian Crusades (1208 – 1241); the Northern Crusades (off and on from 1147 – 1290) and the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648). These were overtly religious wars largely, though not entirely, always about religion since politics and was not separate from religion. Since 1648, no war anywhere has been chiefly motivated by religion and issues of faith with the possible of the Taiping Rebellion (1850 – 1864) in China.

[52] Marc Hauser and Peter Singer, "Morality Without Religion." *Op-ed in Free Inquiry*. http://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/HauserSinger.pdf

[53] A.J.Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy,* p. 225.

[54] Fyodor Dosteyevskiy *The Brothe's Karamzov*, p. 272. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/28054/28054-h/28054-h.html

[55] A.J.Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy*, p. 226.

[56] Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship" in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell,* p. 68.

[57] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* XCIV, p. 192.

[58] Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not a Christian" in *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell,* p. 598.

[59] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 254.

[60] Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, p. 28;

original emphasis

[61] Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*, p. 37; original emphasis

[62] Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values,* p. 38. This is a strange accusation against David Hume, the founding figure of modern empiricism who also did not think that ethics have a religious basis.

[63] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III, Part I, Section 1.

[64] Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values,* p. 203.

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

[66] Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith,* p. 125.

[67] From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 6, 1939 in Compilations, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 505.

[68] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 190; emphasis added.

[69] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.

[70] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 118.

[71] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 339.

[72] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 107; emphasis added.

[73] Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world Ridvan 1966. Compilations, *Lights of Guidance,* p. 594)

[74] Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality,* p. 11.

[75] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, p. 35.

[76] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism,* p. 35.

[77] James Collins, *The Existentialists*, p. 40.

[78] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*, p. 35.

[79] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology,* p. 6.

[80] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 47.

[81] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 58.

[82] Matthew, 22:21.

[83] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto,* Chp. II.
http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/61/pg61.html

[84] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Chp. II, (emphasis added).

[85] In Vladimir Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*

[86] Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Chp. II.

[87] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come,* p. 108.

[88] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason,* Chp. II, V; emphasis added.

[89] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Chp. II, V; emphasis added.

[90] Lawrence M Hinman, *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory*, p. 86.

[91] Julia Driver, *Ethics: The Fundamentals*, p. 25.

[92] Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction,* p. 77.

[93] Plato, *Euthyphro.* http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyfro.html

[94] Plato, *Euthyphro,* Trans by Benjamin Jowett.

[95] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,* p. 67.

[96] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 67.

[97] J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations of a Christian Worldview*, p. 530; emphasis added.

[98] *Miriam-Webster Dictionary*, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tyrant

[99] Roderick Firth is generally recognized as the contemporary originator of ideal observer theory although its roots lie with Adam Smith.

[100] Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics,* p. 279.

[101] Robert Audi, general editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 415. See also

Karri-Jaakko Liikkanen, Ideal Observer Theory, University of Helsinki, Master's Thesis, 2013. https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/40964/Liikkanen%20Masters%20Thesis.pdf?sequence=2

[102] Nancy Rankin, "A Substantive Revision of Firth's Ideal Observer Theory" in *Stance*, Vol. 3, April 2010, http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/virtualpress/stance/2010_spring/idealobservertheory.pdf

[103] Lawrence M. Hinman, *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory,* p. 106.

[104] Lawrence M. Hinman, *Ethics: A Pluralistic Approach to Moral Theory,* p. 106.

[105] See for example Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings"; "Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance"; "Some Answered Questions: A Philosophic Perspective," all published in the *Lights of Irfan* series.

[106]*The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 10; emphasis added. See also 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London 46.

[107] 'Abdu'l-Bahá , *Tablet of the Universe*; emphasis added. Original Tablet in Makatib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá , vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous provisional translation. http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih.html

[108] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 43.

[109] Douglas Rasmussen in Henry B Veatch, *Rational Man*, p. xi.

[110] Robert Audi, general editor , *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy,* p. 599.

[111] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity,* p. 48. Again, we

[112] Louis J Pojman, *Ethics*, p. 45.

[113] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, 1, 1094a; emphasis added.

[114] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book I, 1094a.

[115] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book I, 1097a,b.

[116] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, 7, 1098a.

[117] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 72; emphasis added.

[118] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I – II Q 90 A1; emphasis added.

[119] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 7.

[120] Frederick Copleston, S.J.,A History of Philosophy, Vol. 2, Part 1, p. 272. Also Joseph Constanzo S.J., "Papal Magisterium, Natural Law and Humanae Vitae," http://www.ewtn.com/library/DOCTRINE/PMHV.TXT

[121] David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature,* III, 1, part 1.

[122] Sam Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values,* p. 38.

[123] For a full discussion of Harris' book, see Ian Kluge, "Ethics Based on Science Alone?" in *Journal of Bahá'í Philosophy*; forthcoming

[124] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.

[125] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Bring and Nothingnes*s, p. 30.

[126] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* quoted in ""The Nature `of Nature in Feminism Old and New" in Women in Christ ed. by Michele Schumacher, p.23.

[127] See Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings" in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 9, 2008.

[128] Michelle M. Schumacher, "The Nature `of Nature in Feminism Old and New" in *Women in Christ* ed. by Michele M. Schumacher, p. 26.

[129] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,* p. 115.; emphasis added.

[130] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 7.

[131] The Universal House of Justice, 1993 Jun 05, Homosexuality, p. 2; emphasis added.

[132] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 106; emphasis added.

[133] The Universal House of Justice, 1993 June 05, Homosexuality, p. 2.

[134] The Universal House of Justice, 1993 June 05, Homosexuality, p. 1.

[135] The main criticism of Bagemihil's book is that he mistakes dominance behaviors in animals – which often involve mounting the submissive one – for sexual in nature. Anyone who has lived on a farm and seen a 'boss cow' "bulling" other cows will see this behavior is not sexual in nature. Bagemihil's flawed analysis of dominance behaviors severely undermines the value of his book.

[136] The Universal House of Justice, 1993 June 05, Homosexuality, p. 2.

[137] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 45.

[138] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 208 – 209.

[139] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 208 – 209.

[140] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* Book X, 7, 1178a.

[141] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 7.

[142] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 118.

[143] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 287.

[144] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction,* Vol. II, p. 2; original emphasis. .

[145] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction*, Vol. II, p. 2.

[146] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction,* Vol. I, p. 151.

[147] Udo Schaefer*, Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction,* Vol. I, p. 151.

[148] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction,* Vol. I, p. 148 – 149; emphasis added.

[149] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction*, Vol. I, p. 152; emphasis added.

[150] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction,* Vol. I, p. 152.

[151] See Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings," forthcoming publication in the *Lights of Irfan* series.

[152] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction*, Vol. I, p. 144' emphasis added.

[153] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction*, Vol. I, p. 148 – 149.

[154] Alister MacGrath, "McGrath's Intellectual Origins," Part
1. http://threehierarchies.blogspot.ca/2005/08/mcgraths-intellectual-origins-part-i.html

[155] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 112.

[156] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 231.

[157] The Universal House of Justice, 1993 Jun 05, Homosexuality, p. 2; emphasis added.

[158] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 58.

[159] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 69; emphasis added.

[160] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 240. Also Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. 2. p. 286.

[161] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 7; see also 339.

[162] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 177.

[163] *Bahá'í International Community*, 1999 Feb, Who is Writing the Future?

[164] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 465; emphasis added.

[165] The truths of faith such as the Trinity must come from revelation.

[166] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* Question 91, article 2. http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2091.htm#article2

[167] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 208.

[168] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.

[169] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 22.

[170] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 330; emphasis added.

[171] Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism*; Corliss Lamont, *Philosophy of Humanism.*

[172] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction*, Vol. I, p. 153; emphasis added.

[173], 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 175.

[174] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 181.

[175] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 303; emphasis added.

[176] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.327; emphasis added.

[177] This, too, confirms one of Aristotle's insights into the nature of reality: only actualized things can awaken ,activate or actualize a potential. See Ian Kluge, "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 4, 2003.

[178] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction,* Vol. I, p. 144' emphasis added.

[179] Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice,* p. 37.

[180] *Bahá'í International Community,* 1989 Feb 09, Right to Development; emphasis added.

[181] Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics In Light of Scripture: An Introduction,* Vol. I, p. 144' emphasis added.

[182] Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 1, 1214a. Unlike the better known Nicomachean Ethics, the Eudemian Ethics are more religious in nature.

[183] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 8, 1178a.

[184] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 13, 1144a.

[185] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 220.

[186] Bahá'u'lláh, *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, n.p.

[187] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization,* p. 60.

[188] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* p. 188.

[189] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 98; emphasis added.

[190] Compilations, *Bahá'í Scriptures,* 439; emphasis added.

[191] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace p*. 341.

[192] See Aristotle's *Nicohomachean Ethics.*

[193] Richard Wade, "Bridging Christianity, Islam and Buddhism with Virtue Ethics," http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-9260-2_19#page-2

[194] Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Virtue Ethics and the Chinese Confucian Tradition," in Daniel C. Russell, editor, *The Cambridge Companion toVirtue Ethics*, p 49-69.

[195] Timothy Chappell, "Virtue Ethics in the Twentieth Century," in Daniel C. Russell, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics.*

[196] Julia Driver, *Ethics,* p. 137.

[197] Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness,* p. 27.

[198] Tom Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics,* p. 227.

[199] Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, second edition, p. 961.

[200] Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Virtue Ethics and the Chinese Confucian Tradition," in Daniel C. Russell, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics,* p 58.

[201] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 124; emphasis added.

[202] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,* p. 135; emphasis added.

[203] Consequentialism in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* http://www.iep.utm.edu/conseque/

[204] Tom L. Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics,* p. 129 – 130; emphasis added

[205] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism in The Ethical Life* ed. by Russ Shafer-Landau, p. 17; emphasis added.

[206] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 51.

[207] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 220.

[208] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, # 51; emphasis added.

[209] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton, p. 68.

[210] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton, p. 109.

[211] Tom Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics,* p. 179.

[212] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton, p. 69; emphasis added.

[213] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* CXII, p. 218: "The structure of world stability and order hath been reared upon, and will continue to be sustained by, the twin pillars of reward and punishment."

[214] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton, p. 61.

[215] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words,* # 1; emphasis added.

[216] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 92.

[217] *Concise Rutledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 202.

[218] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. by H.J. Paton, p. 88.

[219] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton, p. 96.

[220] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by H.J. Paton, p. 101.

[221] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. by H.J. Paton, p. 101.

[222] Louis P. Pojman, *Ethics,* p. 213.

[223] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chpt. I, Section 2. http://fair-use.org/g-e-moore/principia-ethica

[224] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chpt. I Section 7.

[225] G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chpt. I, Section 10.

[226] G.E. Moore*, Principia Ethica,* Chpt. V, Section 107.

[227] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 208; emphasis added.

[228] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 239.

[229] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* p. 225; emphasis added.

[230] Bahá'u'lláh,, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* XXVI, p. 60.

[231] Nicholas Bunnin and Jiyuan Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, p. 117.

[232] Tom L Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, p. 101.

[233] Andrew Fisher, *Metaethics: An Introduction*, p. 55.

[234] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 106.

[235] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 403; emphasis added.

[236] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 403; emphasis added.

[237] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 345.

[238] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 465; emphasis added.

[239] Shoghi Effendi, From a letter Written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 17, 1926, Bahá'í Youth, pp. 8-9) in Compilations, *Lights of Guidance,* p. 630; emphasis added.

[240] Shoghi Effendi, Letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, October 26, 1932: Bahá'í Youth, pp. 4-5 in Compilations, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 632; emphasis added.

[241] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá,* p. 87.

[242] See Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan*, forthcoming.

[243] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 66; emphasis added.

[244] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 106.

[245] Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan,* Vol. 9, 2008. Postmodernism tries to make a virtue of this problem.

[246] Julia Driver, *Ethics,* p. 170.

[247] J.L. Mackie, from *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong,* in Beauchamp, *Philosophical Ethics*, p. 42.

[248] Julia Driver, *Ethics,* p. 171.

[249] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 138.

[250] `Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 249.

[251] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 108.

[252] Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan,* Vol. 9, 2008.

[253] Robert Audi, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy.*

[254] Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan,* forthcoming.

[255] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 62; emphasis added.

[256] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p.264.

[257] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p.291; emphasis added.

[258] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.287; emphasis added.

[259] Richard Rorty, "Introduction" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth,* p.13.

[260] Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth,* p. 22 – 23.

[261] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p.360.

[262] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* p.366.

[263] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* p.370.

[264] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* p.371.

[265] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* p.377.

[266] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p.378.