

Neoplatonism 1 and the Bahá'í Writings

by Ian

Kluge KK Edited

Irfan Colloquium, October 8 – 11, 2009
Louhelen Baha'i School

Published in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 11, 2010

1. Preface: What This Paper Is and Is Not

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Writings belongs to a family of philosophies generally referred to as 'Neoplatonism' which originated in the 3rd century CE with The Enneads of Plotinus. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to show that there are (a) foundational principles and ideas on which the Writings and The Enneads agree; (b) significant convergences between the Writings and Neoplatonic thought even when there is not always outright apparent agreement; and (c) harmonious adaptations or, from a faith point of view, corrections of Plotinian ideas in Bahá'í Writings. Such evidence would show enough resemblances to The Enneads to allow the philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Writings to be classified as a type or variation of Neoplatonism.

We hasten to clarify that our goal is not an influence study, i.e. a historical study of how particular Neoplatonic ideas may have become part of the Bahá'í Writings. Such studies are a task for historians whereas our task is to show that the philosophical principles and ideas embedded in the Bahá'í Writings fit into the family of philosophies inspired by The Enneads. The provenance of these ideas and principles and/or how they arrived there is not material to our concern with the actual fact of their presence. Their presence alone is what establishes that the philosophy implicit in the Writings belongs to the Neoplatonic family of world-views.

For some Bahá'ís, such claims are troublesome because they seem to imply that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings are derivative. However, a little reflection shows that this is a pseudo-problem, at least from the perspective of this study. When Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá assert a particular idea – whether it is original with them or selected from elsewhere – they are, in effect, putting their imprimatur on it. The idea is certified as infallibly correct by their choice whether it is original with them or selected from a stock of pre-existing ideas. It is this infallible certification – which only they can make – which is crucial to committed Bahá'ís, not the origin of the ideas themselves. Thus, finding that the Writings fit into a certain philosophic family in no way undermines their validity. The most we can say is that such a family resemblance is a indication that Bahá'ís should be paying special attention to this tradition in the development of philosophies based on the Writings.

It may be objected that Neoplatonism and the Writings has already been studied by Mark Foster's "Neo-Platonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Ontology," Nima Hazini's "Neoplatonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Metaphysics" and to some extent by Juan Cole's "The Concept of the Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings." Valuable as these contributions are, they do not, as we shall see, go nearly far enough in exploring the extent of the agreements and convergences between the Writings and The Enneads. Nor do these essays show how Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have corrected or adapted some of Plotinus' fundamental ontological teachings. This means there is still plenty of room for more scholarship on this subject, especially given the current strong revival in Neoplatonic studies during the last quarter century.

The value of a comparative study like this is its ability to help locate the philosophy and theology embedded in the Bahá'í Writings among all other philosophical systems by identifying its relationship to other systems of thought. Such comparative studies show that the Writings have more foundational agreements with some kinds of philosophy than others. For example, we cannot put them into the family of materialist philosophies even though there may be some superficial or accidental agreements on some issues. The understanding gained from such comparative studies of the Writings deepens our understanding of the essential nature of the Bahá'í Writings and, thereby, helps us to think about them clearly and coherently. This, in turn, facilitates teaching and explication as well as apologetics and dialogue with other philosophies and philosophically sophisticated religions. As a result of such comparative studies, we shall also see that the Writings are not merely an eclectic assemblage of ontological, epistemological, ethical, social and religious principles but are in fact, an inter-connected coherent system based on certain fundamental principles which are applied to a variety of issues.

2. Ontology

Broadly put, ontology studies the nature of reality, i.e. the nature, constitution and structure of reality as a whole. It concerns such questions as what is real; what are the kinds or categories of

things (e.g. sensible realities, intelligible realities); what attributes must all existing things have; and the assumptions about reality underlying various philosophies, world-views and even the sciences.[1] Ontology differs from the sciences insofar as the sciences focus on one special aspect of physical reality such as living organisms or stars, whereas ontology is concerned with the universal framework or context in which all specific beings are found. Thus, ontology deals with the broadest and most fundamental aspects of reality and for this reason, understanding any system of thought requires insight into its explicit or implicit ontological beliefs.

3. The One and Its Essential Attributes

In the philosophy of Plotinus, the foundational concept is that of the One, or, as it is often called, the Good, which is the source and sustainer of all that exists. For the Bahá'í Writings, the One or the Good, is, of course, known as God, Who is “the Creator of all,”[2] from Whom “all creation sprang into existence”[3] and Who is “the Sustainer”[4] of the being of all things.

The One or God is fundamental to Neoplatonic and Bahá'í thought because most if not all subsequent ideas and teachings are directly and/or indirectly related to the existence and nature of the Divine. Moreover, both the Bahá'í Writings and Neoplatonism describe the One in identical terms. These are so closely inter-related that it is virtually impossible to discuss one without at least some passing reference to others. They are, in a word, organically connected.

One of the most important similar foundational premises concerns the relationship of God or the One – we shall use these terms interchangeably – to its essential attributes. It is important to note that the One or ‘the Good’ as Plotinus calls it does not have ‘goodness’ as an attribute but rather is goodness itself. If the One possessed goodness as an attribute, it would already be divided into two – itself and the attribute it possess[5] and would no longer be an absolute unity. Some Answered Questions makes the same point about God’s unity with His attributes:

the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension. If the attributes are not identical with the Essence, there must also be a multiplicity of preexistences, and differences between the attributes and the Essence must also exist; and as Preexistence is necessary, therefore, the sequence of preexistences would become infinite. This is an evident error.[6]

God’s unity would be compromised by if there were a difference between His essential attributes and His Essence, and, of course God would be dependent on these attributes which are other than

Himself, i.e. these attributes would be “preexistences” just as God is the “Preexistent”[7] and the attributes must exist with Him. There must also be an infinite number of such attributes since God is without limits. However, there would have to be an infinite sequence of “preexistences”, i.e. pre-existing attributes between God-in-Himself and His own attributes. Not only does such a division make God multiple, but it is also impossible because according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there can be no actual infinite regress.[8] (A theoretical infinite regress of abstract numbers is possible, but the number of actual things is always some definite number). Thus, in the Writings, God, like the One is an absolute unity. Plotinus also tells us that the One is one with its activity[9] and its own will.[10] Although the Bahá'í Writings contain no explicit statement on these points, they are logically implied by the teaching of the absolute unity and simplicity of God and the statement that God is identical with His “essential names and attributes.”

As noted above, if God were not one with His essential attributes, i.e. if His essential attributes were separate from Him, then He would be dependent on them for His nature to be what it is. This is not feasible. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out, “God is absolutely independent;”[11] Bahá'u'lláh states that the existence of all things is contingent and not an absolute existence, inasmuch as the former is preceded by a cause, whilst the latter is independent thereof. Absolute existence is strictly confined to God . . .[12]

The reason God cannot be dependent on anything else is that He is the reason why all other things exist, He is the cause of their being, and therefore, He cannot depend on them. In other words:

God, or the One has ontological priority. If He were dependent on anything, this priority would be lost. Plotinus sates, “There must be something simple that is before all things, and must be other than all the things which derive from it.”[13] If the One is first, it cannot be dependent on anything.

Another way of saying that the One is absolutely independent is say it is self-sufficient.: This self-sufficiency is the essence of its [the One's] unity. Something there must be Supremely adequate, autonomous, all-transcending, most utterly without need . . .Any manifold [phenomena], anything beneath the Unity is dependent.[14]

Plotinus refers to the unity of the One because the One's condition of absolute unity requires it to be completely independent of anything else; if it were not, its unity would be a 'hostage' to other things, and, therefore, not absolute. Bahá'u'lláh states categorically that "God is Self-Sufficient, above any need of His creatures,"[15] an idea that is re-enforced by also referring to God as "Self-subsistent." [16] In other words, God's existence is completely independent of anything else. The One is absolutely self-sufficient, having no need of anything else and exists, so to speak, in and through itself.[17] Moreover, God, or the One, is His own good i.e. goodness Itself and has no higher good to which to aspire: He is "self-related and self-tending,"[18] i.e. tending toward Himself which is, in effect, an affirmation of self-unity. This accords with the Writings' reference to "the Oneness and unity of God." [19] This in turn leads us to be aware of the simplicity, i.e. non-composite nature of God, i.e. the simplicity of God which is one of the reasons God is eternal, not subject to decay: "compositions are destructible"[20] while simple things like God or the One or the rational soul are not. By definition they have no parts into which they can decay.

The fact that the One is also beyond being[21] is another way of pointing to its unity and self-sufficiency. The One cannot be identified with 'being' because the One is the necessary precondition for all 'being,'[22] which requires a dyad of matter and form and the resulting multiplicity. Such multiplicity is incompatible with the One. 'Being' is what the One bestows upon its emanations; it is what humans experience but is not appropriate to the One. "It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from it; in order that Being may be brought about, the source must be no Being but Being's generator." [23] 'Being' as we shall see later is established by the Nous which is the first hypostasis to emanate from the One.

4. The Uniqueness of the One

This unity of God makes God ontologically unique, since all other things besides God are composites. This is especially evident in material creation in which all things are composites of atoms.[24] Indeed, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá all things are composites of four causes: the existence of everything depends upon four causes-- the efficient cause, the matter, the form and the final cause . . . Therefore, this chair is essentially phenomenal, for It is preceded by a cause, and Its existence depends upon causes.[25]

This analysis, clearly confirming Aristotle's theory of four-fold causality, cannot possibly apply to God or the One, Who has no causes at all; He is not the result of any process of any kind. More specifically, He has no efficient or final cause bringing Him into being for otherwise He would not be the "Preexistent" but secondary to His cause. Plotinus says that the One is its own cause[26] which, in effect, is to say, the One has no cause at all since a literal interpretation

would mean that the One is divided into cause and effect – which violates its unity. Such a claim also violates logic for to bring itself into existence the One would have to exist before it exists!

Because it has no pre-existing cause, the One exists necessarily, i.e. is a being Who cannot not exist. Unlike phenomenal or contingent beings, God or “Essential pre-existence [God] is an existence which is not preceded by a cause,”[27] which is to say that God is not a contingent but a necessary being. The same idea is found in Plotinus’ statement that “There must be something simple before all things, and this must be other than all the things which come after it. . .”[28] Because the One’s existence is not dependent on a preceding cause, its existence is not a mere possibility but a necessity. To argue that God may simply be a ‘potential’ or ‘possible’ is, in effect, to argue that a cause precedes the One to bring it into being which both the Writings and the Enneads reject.

God also lacks the inherent limitations of matter and form. God is not matter because if He were, He would be divided (and composite) as matter is, and He is not form because form by definition requires exclusion or limitation[29] to be something identifiable, definite and definable. That clashes with His unlimited nature. As Plotinus says, “The Unity is without shape, even shape intellectual.”[30] `Abdu'l-Bahá, tells us that “God is unlimited,”[31] in any way, which implicitly contains the idea that God is not limited by ‘form.’ If God were material (a stoic concept rejected by Plotinus) He would also be subject to the limitations of time and space and this is impossible for the being whose existence is the necessary pre-condition for they very existence of space and time.

Another way in which God’s unity makes Him unique is that, in the words of Plotinus:

“The First remains intact even when other entities spring from it.”[32] As `Abdu'l-Bahá says, of God, “The Real Speaker, the Essence of Unity, has always been in one condition, which neither changes nor alters, has neither transformation nor vicissitude.”[33] In other words, creation neither diminishes nor changes the Creator and is, therefore, eternal – which lays the ontological foundation for the belief that there has always been a creation of one kind or another: “The Creator always had a creation; the rays have always shone and gleamed from the reality of the sun, for without the rays the sun would be opaque darkness.”[34] Furthermore, divine unity lays the foundations for the doctrine of emanation, which, as we shall see, both Plotinus and the Writings share. God or the One cannot be diminished by creation since that would compromise His unity by being ‘dissoluble’ into separable parts, a method of creation which `Abdu'l-Bahá refers to as “manifestation.” Such diminishment would also undermine the simplicity of the One which would scatter into parts. `Abdu'l-Bahá clearly contrasts ‘manifestation’ with “emanation” [35] In the latter, the creator and the created are related like “action from the actor, [or] the writing from the writer,”[36] which is to say the writing is not a separable aspect of the writer.

We shall discuss this in more detail later.

5. The Question of Creation

The unity of the One and the question of the One's diminishment in creation inevitably raises the issue of how the One can create without undergoing change itself. Any alteration in God introduces the idea of multiplicity – and that is not acceptable. `Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that “Changes and transformations are not applicable to that eternal reality [God]. Transformation from condition to condition is the attribute of contingent realities.”[37] According to Plotinus, the One does not change.[38] That being the case, how can we explain the undiminished, i.e. unchanged condition of God? Plotinus' answer is that he distinguishes between (a) the act of a thing and (b) the act from a thing. As noted Plotinus scholar John Deck says:

There is heat of fire which is the same as the fire itself, and a heat that derives from fire. When the fire, by remaining just what It is, exercises the heat within Itself which is the Same as Itself, then the heat 'towards the external' . . . has already necessarily come to be.[39]

In other words, the fire itself is unchanged even though other things around it are heated. More technically, the One “exercises its own co-subsistent act which is itself.”[40] In short, the act of the thing is the thing itself and the act from the thing is towards something else. The first refers to the One's unity, the latter to the One's creativity. The act emanating from the One is distinct from the act of being the One, and therefore, emanation does not change the One.

In keeping with this theme, we might also say that the One acts merely by being, by its presence in the same way that a magnet creates a magnetic field around itself simply by its presence. The field diminishes the magnet in any way and, like creation, is a dependent correlate of the magnet. Thus, the One's existence is identical to its activity, a fact which yet again emphasises the absolute unity of the One.

Yet another consequence of God's unity and simplicity is that He has no external relations. Bahá'u'lláh says that 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 . . .[41]

Plotinus says the One is “unrelated to all”[42] and adds, “We cannot think of the First as moving towards any other; He holds his own manner of being before any other was; even Being we withhold and therefore all relation to beings.”[43] “[M]oving towards another” refers to entering relations which is made explicit in the second half of the quote. The reason the One or God has no external relations is that such relations would limit God’s independence since the relation would ‘tie’ Him to something lesser than Himself; this would also compromise His freedom and ontological pre-eminence. Finally, it would also limit God, i.e. deny His essential ontological nature such as self-sufficiency: “This self-sufficing is the essence of its unity. Something there must be supremely adequate, autonomous, all-transcending, most utterly without need.”[44] God, or the One, is radically transcendent.

This lack of external relations is an important matter because it is the basis not only for Plotinus’ philosophy of emanationism and intermediary hypostases of the One, but is also the basis for the Bahá’í teaching that an intermediary or Manifestation is necessary:

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.[45]

In other words, the existence of the Manifestation (or Plotinus’ Nous and Soul) are not arbitrary, external impositions on philosophy and theology but are inner logical necessities mandated by the nature of God. For Bahá’ís it is the first indication that the Manifestation is more than a human being divinely elected and is, instead, a Being ontologically different from humanity in essential respects.

Another aspect of the One’s radical transcendence is its complete freedom from external constraint. Plotinus tells us that the One (sometimes called the First) is only “determined by its uniqueness and not in any sense of being under compulsion; compulsion did not co-exist with the Supreme but has place only among secondaries. . .”[46] The “secondaries” are those things that God created, and, therefore, come after Him ontologically speaking. However, according to Plotinus and the Writings, the “secondaries” have no power over God. In Bahá’í terms He is the “the One, the All-Powerful, the Almighty, the Unconstrained.”[47] From God’s absolute freedom, we may also deduce His omnipresence, since to be truly “All-Powerful” He must be

present everywhere, i.e. unconstrained by limits of time and space. According to Plotinus, the One is “everywhere yet nowhere.”[48] God, or the One is, of course, “nowhere” because He is unlike ordinary things which are definitely located in time and space. He is everywhere insofar as He is the necessary pre-condition for the existence of time and space and thus ‘is’ wherever time and space are found. It should be noted that being a necessary pre-condition for time and space means that the One cannot be identical to them.

6. God Contains All

One of the key features of God or The One is that God ‘contains’ everything. This, of course, explains why He ‘is everywhere.’ Plotinus writes:

Everything brought into being under some principle not itself is contained either within its maker or, if there is an intermediate, within that; having a prior essential to its being it needs that prior always, otherwise it would not be contained at all.[49]

In other words, a being is ‘in’ some other entity if it depends on that entity for its existence. It is virtually within its source, i.e. is present in its source qua the (emanative) action of that source just as `Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that the action is virtually present within the speaker, or the writing within the writer.[50] The idea of containment is also present in the Bahá'í Writings. Bahá'u'lláh writes, “Likewise hath the eternal King spoken: "No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it.”[51] This idea in turn serves to provide ontological foundations for God’s omnipresence, for if God is before, after and in everything, then He is obviously present everywhere, i.e. omnipresent as we have noted previously.

At this point a clarification is necessary. Saying that God contains everything because of their dependence on Him does not introduce multiplicity into God Himself. This ‘containment’ is simply the result of God’s ontological position as the apex, i.e. the most inclusive form of being and the source and foundation of all other beings. Moreover, He is the necessary and sufficient condition of their existence and in this sense ‘contains’ them simply by virtue of His being. We might also say that God contains through His powers or names such as “the Creator.” Bahá'u'lláh says, “His name, the Creator, presupposeth a creation, even as His title, the Lord of Men, must involve the existence of a servant”[52] The virtual containment of things ‘within’ God or His names is the ‘presupposition’ of their existence in the name of ‘Creator.’

However, because the One contains all things does not mean that Plotinus or the Writings advocate some form of pantheism which identifies God and His creation. Plotinus makes it clear that the One transcends all and though it contains all things it is not any of these things: “All in that region [of creation] is the One and not the One – nothing else because deriving thence, yet not that because the One is giving it forth is not merged into it.”[53] Things ‘are’ the One because they are the signs of its creative power, but they are not the One because the One cannot be limited by any of the conditions to which created things are subject. This is precisely `Abdu'l-Bahá’s point:

the superior reality does not descend nor abase itself to inferior states; then how could it be that the Universal Reality of God, which is freed from all descriptions and qualifications, notwithstanding its absolute sanctity and purity, should resolve itself into the forms of the realities of the creatures, which are the source of imperfections? This is a pure imagination which one cannot conceive.[54]

Supporting pantheism would, in effect, be an admission that God is not a simple, noncomposite unity but rather is dispersed throughout creation – a belief that `Abdu'l-Bahá describes as “manifestation.”[55] From this doctrine we can also deduce why the Writings reject the Christian concept of the incarnation: God cannot diminish Himself and descend into a phenomenal being. It violates His very nature to do so.

The One is omnipresent not only as an efficient cause bringing all things into being, it is also present as their final cause. As Plotinus says, The Good [the One] is that on which all else depends, towards which all Existences aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other, the measure and Term of all . . .[56]

The One, God, is both the efficient and final cause of all existence, i.e. the source and ground of their being as well as the goal for which they strive, each in a manner appropriate to their nature.

`Abdu'l-Bahá says, “The Creator of all is One God. From this same God all creation sprang into existence, and He is the one goal, towards which everything in nature yearns,”[57] Bahá'u'lláh describes God as the “Desire of all created things.”[58] By being the ‘Great Attractor’ and drawing all things towards Him, God, the One is the final cause which will complete their being for in the process of evolving towards God, they will attain their own highest perfection. The precise nature of this perfection depends on the nature of the evolving being: for an atom it may be motion, for an animal the life of instinct for a human being, a life dedicated to the spirit.

The belief that God is the final cause of all things also indicates that creation, the universe, is teleological in its deepest nature, i.e. goal oriented. This, in turn, suggests that the development of nature is not purely a matter of chance, i.e. “is not a fortuitous composition and arrangement.”[59] Consequently, any cosmological explanations that ignore teleology must be intrinsically incomplete, a viewpoint that obviously has enormous implications for the Bahá’í teachings about the harmony of science and religion. Science rejects teleological explanations and this position will be difficult to reconcile with the teleological views of the Writings.

7. The Knowledge of the One

One of Plotinus’ most surprising statements is that the One does not have knowledge - at least not knowledge in the human sense which depends on a division between subject and object. If the One possess this kind of knowledge, then knowledge and the One are distinct, and this in turn implies a division in the One. Thus, it cannot have objects of knowledge .

The One, as transcending Intellect [Nous, the “First Mind”] transcends knowing; above All need, it is above the need of knowing which pertains solely to the Secondary Nature [Nous] . . . The Transcendent, thus, neither knows itself nor is known in itself.[60]

If God or the One had objects of thought, He would no longer be independent since He would need these objects in order to know them. Knowledge, after all, requires a subject and an object.

This would also compromise the unity of God, since the act of thinking about things creates a division within the thinker, i.e. between the thinker himself and the object of thought. Insofar as God does not have knowledge or think as we do, God is beyond knowledge and thought, i.e. He includes and transcends them. Oddly enough, as Plotinus points out, this means that God does not know Himself as an object of knowledge – although of course He may know Himself in ways that transcend the human mode of knowledge. The Good does not need self-consciousness.[61]

Furthermore, God, the One, is not limited by ‘intellection’, i.e. rational discursive thought conditioned by the subject/object division and the matter/form distinction[62] which characterizes created beings. As Plotinus says, “intellection and the Intellectual-Principle [Nous] must be characteristics of beings coming later.”[63] Elsewhere Plotinus says:

In sum this intellection of the Good is impossible: I do not mean that it is impossible to have intellection of the Good – we may admit that possibility – but there can be no intellection by the Good itself, for this would be to include the inferior with the good. . . . Anyone making the Good at once Thinker and Thought identifies it with Being . . . [64]

According to Plotinus, “intellection seems to have been given as an aid to the diviner but weaker beings, an eye to the blind.”[65] Humans are among these “diviner” beings who possess intellection.

The Bahá'í Writings confirm Plotinus' basic teachings on this issue of the absolutely unique nature of God's knowledge. `Abdu'l-Bahá says:

The Prophets say, The Knowledge of God has no need of the existence of beings, but the knowledge of the creature needs the existence of things known; if the Knowledge of God had need of any other thing, then it would be the knowledge of the creature, and not that of God. For the Preexistent is different from the phenomenal, and the phenomenal is opposed to the Preexistent; that which we attribute to the creature--that is, the necessities of the contingent beings--we deny for God. . . . The phenomenal knowledge has need of things known; the Preexistent Knowledge is independent of their existence[66]

In other words, God does not require objects of knowledge to know. While such knowing is inconceivable to human beings, the necessity of this attribute can be logically deduced from God's unity and simplicity. The other characteristics of God's knowing as outlined by Plotinus – the lack of the subject/object and matter/form division, the absence of self-consciousness as we experience it and the lack of ratiocursive intellection – all can be logically deduced from `Abdu'l-Bahá's foregoing statement. To the best of my knowledge, the Writings do not contain explicit statements on these issues, but they are implicitly present in other teachings about God not requiring an object of knowledge.

This difference between human and divine knowledge brings us to a fundamental principle of ontology and epistemology in the Enneads and the Writings. In both of them, ontology and epistemology, i.e. the nature of reality and our position in it and what we can or cannot know are closely inter-related. What we are able to know depends on our ontological degree or condition. `Abdu'l-Bahá states:

Difference of condition is an obstacle to knowledge; the inferior degree cannot comprehend the superior degree. How then can the phenomenal reality comprehend the Preexistent Reality? Knowing God, therefore, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His Reality.[67]

In other words, beings which stand lower in the hierarchy of being cannot comprehend or understand the nature of those beings above them. “The mineral cannot imagine the growing power of the plant. The tree cannot understand the power of movement in the animal,”[68] says `Abdu'l-Bahá and adds, “All superior kingdoms are incomprehensible to the inferior; how therefore could It be possible that the creature, man, should understand the almighty Creator of all?”[69]

Humankind cannot adequately understand God because “That which contains is superior to that which is contained.”[70] We have already noted that ‘contained’ in this context means ‘dependent on.’ By being ‘dependent on’ the One, all things are inferior or secondary to it both in the order of being (ontology) and in the order of logic , i.e. the One is the logical pre-condition for the others. Because God occupies the supreme ontological position, “the essential knowledge of God surrounds, in the same way, the realities of things.”[71] That is why God has perfect understanding of them. We, however, cannot form an adequate or complete conception of the One because it is not limited by any of the conditions of existence that limit us. We hasten to add that this does not necessarily mean that all our conceptions are false. Logically, incompleteness and falsity are not the same things since the latter refers to a defect in the content of a statement while the former does not.

It should be noted that in the Bahá'í Writings, the use of the word “comprehend” combines the meanings of ‘contain’ and ‘understand,’ i.e. combines the ontological and epistemological meanings of the word. For example, “Minds are powerless to comprehend God”[72] exhibits both meanings: minds cannot contain God, i.e. be independent of God, and therefore, they cannot understand Him more than their ontological position allows. “For the phenomenal reality can comprehend the Preexistent attributes only to the extent of the human capacity.”[73] In a statement that explicitly shows both meanings simultaneously, he says, For comprehension is the result of encompassing--embracing must be, so that comprehension may be--and the Essence of Unity surrounds all and is not surrounded.[74]

Thus, we can see how in the Writings, ontology and epistemology are closely correlated and cannot be understood apart from each other. The same is true in the Enneads: the One which is the pre-condition for all existence and which transcends all particular existences cannot be

adequately known by what it emanates.

8. Knowledge About God

This, of course, raises a serious issue: how can we learn about the One or God? The idea that God is completely unknowable in anyway whatsoever is untenable for, among other reasons, such a statement even refutes itself. To say that God is unknowable is already to say that we know at least one thing about Him. Fortunately, the Bahá'í Writings do not make this mistake:

Knowing God, therefore, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His Reality. This knowledge of the attributes is also proportioned to the capacity and power of man; it is not absolute. Philosophy consists in comprehending the reality of things as they exist, according to the capacity and the power of man.[75]

In other words, we know as much as human capacity allows about God's attributes or names but not about God-in-Himself. Moreover we do not learn directly about God but rather through the reliable instruction of the Manifestation.

Plotinus agrees that the One-in-itself is unknowable:

Certainly the Absolute is none of the things of which it is the source – its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of it – not existence, not essence, not life – since it is that which transcends all these.[76]

Elsewhere he says, “nothing can be affirmed of it [the One];”[77] the One is ineffable, it cannot be written or spoken. [78]

We do not, it is true grasp it by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly void of it ; we hold it not so as to state it, but so as to be able to speak about it. And we can and do state what it is not, while we are silent as to what it is: we are, in fact, speaking of it in light of its sequels [79]

Thus, we can deny imperfections to the One, and we can talk ‘about’ it in our limited human terms derived from our experience from created things, i.e. “its sequels.” As Dominic O’Meara says:

When we speak ‘about’ the One, saying that it is the cause, we are in fact speaking about ourselves, saying that we are casually dependent and expressing what we experience in this condition of dependence . . . In this way the One remains ineffable in itself, even though we speak about it. [80]

We can only speak of the One in our terms, not its terms. For their part, the Bahá’í Writings also agree that God, the One, is unknowable in Himself and knowable in our terms. `Abdu'l-Bahá says that “it is certain that the Divine Reality is unknown with regard to its essence and is known with regard to its attributes.”[81] In other words, knowledge about (not of) God is available, but we must understand the term ‘knowledge’ correctly:

Nevertheless, we speak of the names and attributes of the Divine Reality, and we praise Him by attributing to Him sight, hearing, power, life and knowledge. We affirm these names and attributes, not to prove the perfections of God, but to deny that He is capable of imperfections . . . It is not that we can comprehend His knowledge, His sight, His power and life, for it is beyond our comprehension; for the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension.[82]

Here, too, we observe that when we speak of God – as we cannot avoid doing – then our speech must be understood in a certain way, as a denial of imperfection rather than as an attribution of perfections. This is precisely what Plotinus says: “we can and do state what it is not, while we are silent as to what it is.”[83] The one thing God or the One cannot be is imperfect. For Bahá’ís however, reliable knowledge of God comes from the Manifestation of the age.

The knowledge of the Reality of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable, but the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is the knowledge of God, for the bounties, splendors and divine attributes are apparent in Them. Therefore, if man attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God, he will attain to the knowledge of God; and if he be neglectful of the knowledge of the Holy Manifestations, he will be bereft of the knowledge of God.[84]

Elsewhere `Abdu'l-Bahá says:

with reference to this plane of existence, every statement and elucidation is defective, all praise and all description are unworthy, every conception is vain, and every meditation is futile. But for this Essence of the essences, this Truth of truths, this Mystery of mysteries, there are reflections, auroras, appearances and resplendencies in the world of existence. The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these

manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God. All the perfections, the bounties, the splendors which come from God are visible and evident in the Reality of the Holy Manifestations[85]

This means that for Bahá'ís, there is a reliable source of knowledge appropriately adapted to human capacity and that all discourse about God is not necessarily futile if guided by the Manifestations. Naturally, humans need to undergo spiritual exercises to prepare themselves to accept this knowledge (all receive this knowledge but not all choose to accept it) of God, but the fact remains it is available for those who choose to accept it. Nonetheless, in the Bahá'í view, our personal efforts while necessary are not sufficient to attain this knowledge: “Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross.”[86]

When the lamp of search, effort, longing, fervor, love, rapture, attraction and devotion is enkindled in the heart, and the breeze of love blows forth from the direction of unity, the darkness of error, doubt and uncertainty will be dispelled and the lights of knowledge and assurance will encompass all the pillars of existence. Then the ideal Herald will dawn as the true morn from the Divine City, with spiritual glad tidings, and awaken the heart, soul and spirit from the sleep of negligence with the trumpet of knowledge.[87]

Making an effort on our own is the necessary pre-condition for the completion of the quest for knowledge by the holy spirit or ‘ideal Herald.’ With Plotinus, however, there is no counterpart to the holy spirit or the “ideal Herald” to fully actualize our quest for knowledge of the One. Nor is there in the Enneads any guarantor of the knowledge we receive by our own efforts, whereas in the case of the Writings, there is. In the Enneads, we are completely left to our own spiritual efforts in the quest for knowledge of the One.

9. The One and Emanation

Having found numerous and far-reaching agreements between Plotinus’ and the Bahá'í Writings’ concept of God or the One, we shall now turn our attention to the issue of how the One creates, i.e. to the issue of emanation. It should be noted that the issue some controversy. Dominic O’Meara for example, prefers the word “derivation”[88] since ‘emanation’ has too many problematical connotations. Llyod P Gerson challenges the applicability of the very concept of ‘emanation’ as traditionally understood in studying Plotinus.[89] However, this paper shall retain the traditional term ‘emanation’ not only because it is used in the Bahá'í Writings but also

because it is the term most commonly used terms in discussions of Neoplatonism.

Perhaps the best way to understand the concept of ‘emanation’ is to examine one of the most frequently used images of emanation both in Plotinus and in the Writings. Speaking of the One in relationship to its creations, Plotinus says:

The only reasonable explanation of [creative] act flowing from it lies in the analogy of light from the sun. The entire intellectual order [a lower level of creation] may be figured as a kind of light with the One in repose at its summit as its King: but this manifestation is not cast out from it [the sun] . . . but the One shines eternally, resting upon the Intellectual Realm [Nous]; this [Intellectual Realm] not identical with its source . . . [90]

We observe important aspects of emanationism in this selection: creation as a ‘light’ or efflux from the sun; the unchanged and unchanging sun as the source of the light; the source lasts eternally; the distinction between the light and the sun. (Readers must, of course, bear in mind that it was generally believed until relatively recent times that the sun was unchanged and undiminished by the process of giving light.) Noteworthy, too, is the ontological distinction between the Creator, “source” and what is created, (the Nous).

Elsewhere, Plotinus writes that the relationship between the One and its creation must be a circumradiation – produced from the Supreme but from the Supreme unaltering – and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance.[91]

Here, too, we observe the sun image with its emphasis on the unchanging, and, by implication, undiminished being of the sun as well as the surrounding. The fact that the sun radiates “ceaselessly” also suggests another Neoplatonic and Bahá’í teaching, viz. the eternity of the created world, i.e. that there has always been a creation.

The Bahá’í Writings also compare God to the sun and creation to the ‘circumradiant’ light.

‘Abdu'l-Bahá informs us that “Creation is like the sunlight; God is the sun. This light comes forth from the sun; that does not mean that the sun has become the light. The light emanates from

the sun.”[92] Here, too, we observe the ontological distinction between the sun (God) and the light (creation) and that sun itself is not dispersed into the light. `Abdu'l-Bahá describes such a dispersal as ‘manifestation’ which he clearly distinguishes from emanation:

But the appearance through manifestation is the manifestation of the branches, leaves, blossoms and fruit from the seed; for the seed in its own essence becomes branches and fruits, and its reality enters into the branches, the leaves and fruits. This appearance through manifestation would be for God, the Most High, simple imperfection; and this is quite impossible, for the implication would be that the Absolute Preexistent is qualified with phenomenal attributes. But if this were so, pure independence would become mere poverty, and true existence would become nonexistence, and this is impossible.[93]

God, the sun, does not manifest Himself because to do so would not only disperse God into phenomenal parts and, thereby, demote Him to the level of His creations, but also would diminish God Himself. The concept of emanation is intended precisely to avoid such suggestions. The importance of this point cannot be overstressed because it is the very fact of nondispersal that distinguishes emanationism from all forms of pantheism. `Abdu'l-Bahá, categorically rejects pantheism when he says, “[T]he sun does not descend and does not abase itself,”[94] a position with which Plotinus agrees.

It should be mentioned in passing that although Plotinus uses other images to illustrate the nature of the One and its emanations, the underlying implications are always those cited above. “Imagine a spring that has no source outside itself; it gives itself to all the rivers, yet is never exhausted by what they take, but remains always integrally as it was,”[95] he says, and then adds:

think of the Life coursing throughout some mighty tree while yet it is the stationary Principle of the whole, in no sense scattered over all that extent but, as it were, vested in the root: it is the giver of the entire and manifold life of the tree, but remains unmoved itself, not manifold but the Principle of that manifold life. And this surprises no one: though it is in fact astonishing how all that varied vitality springs from the unvarying, and how that very manifoldness [multiplicity] could not be unless before the multiplicity there were something all singleness; for, the Principle is not broken into parts to make the total; on the contrary, such partition would destroy both; nothing would come into being if its cause, thus broken up, changed character.[96]

This passage also shows the Plotinian principle that multiplicity must be preceded by oneness, something emphasised when he writes, “Standing before all things, there must exist a Simplex [the One] differing from all its sequel, self-gathered not interblended with the forms that rise

from it.”[97] Dominic O’Meara calls this the “principle of Prior Simplicity.”[98] According to him, this idea is common both to Neoplatonism and science, which both seek to explain the present state of the universe by reference to a simpler state, i.e. deriving the complex from the simple, or, in the terms of ancient philosophy, the many from the one. “Something all singleness” must precede the creation of many. `Abdu'l-Bahá, confirms the same principle in various applications when he states:

it is necessary, therefore, that we should know what each of the important existences was in the beginning-- for there is no doubt that in the beginning the origin was one: the origin of all numbers is one and not two. Then it is evident that in the beginning matter was one, and that one matter appeared in different aspects in each element . . . This composition and arrangement, through the wisdom of God and His preexistent might, were produced from one natural organization . . .[99]

Applied to ontology or metaphysics, the “principle of Prior Simplicity” inevitably leads to postulating a single source for the entire universe, a concept that in physics may be termed a ‘singularity’ while in ontology the same idea is expressed as ‘the One’ or ‘God.’ The significance of this principle is that it highlights an underlying similarity between science both in theory and practice and the philosophy inherent in Plotinus and the Bahá’í Writings.

10. Why Emanation?

If the One exists, why does it create? Trouble-free as it might appear, this question, as we shall see, can lead to some difficult considerations about necessity and free will. According to Plotinus, the One “is perfect and, in our metaphor has overflowed, and its exuberance has produced the new.”[100] In *Enneads* V, 4, Plotinus explicates the universal principle that underlies the concept of emanation:

If The First is perfect, utterly perfect above all, and is the beginning of all power, it must be the most powerful of all that is, and all other powers must act in some partial imitation of it. Now other beings, coming to perfection, are observed to generate; they are unable to remain self-closed; they produce: and this is true not merely of beings endowed with will, but of growing things where there is no will; even lifeless objects impart something of themselves, as far as they may; fire warms . . . How then could the most perfect remain self-set- the First Good, the Power towards all, how could it grudge or be powerless to give of itself, and how at that would it still be the Source?[101]

The principle that ‘perfection generates beyond itself’ is modelled by the One and imitated by all other things, each in its own degree.[102] The One sets this example, and to do otherwise, i.e. to be ‘grudging’ of its inexhaustible power would be less than perfect by the standard the One itself has set for itself. Such superabundant generosity is the only appropriate attribute to its infinite nature.

The Bahá’í Writings have a similar explanation for the principle underlying God’s creation. The most succinct statement comes from Gleanings: “His name, the Creator, presupposeth a creation, even as His title, the Lord of Men, must involve the existence of a servant.”[103] In a more detailed explanation, `Abdu'l-Bahá states:

the reality of Divinity is characterized by certain names and attributes. Among these names are Creator, Resuscitator, Provider, the All-Present, Almighty, Omniscient and Giver. These names and attributes of Divinity are eternal and not accidental. This is a very subtle point which demands close attention. Their existence is proved and necessitated by the appearance of phenomena. For example, Creator presupposes creation, Resuscitator implies resuscitation, Provider necessitates provision; otherwise, these would be empty and impossible names. Merciful evidences an object upon which mercy is bestowed. If mercy were not manifest, this attribute of God would not be realized . . . Therefore, the divine names and attributes presuppose the existence of phenomena implied by those names and attributes . . . [104]

First, we should note that these attributes are “not accidental,” i.e. they are essential, i.e. attributes identical with God’s Essence.[105] This is how God wills Himself to be. Second, the name of “Provider” calls to mind Plotinus’ belief that the One must be generous, not grudging; must have an abundance from which to provide willingly. The same idea is implicit in the names “Giver,” “All-Mighty,” and “Creator.” In other words, the idea that God, the One, the “All-Possessing”[106] creates out of generosity and inherent wealth. Third, the passage indicates that these creations are necessary because otherwise these “attribute[s] of God would not be realized.” This leads to a serious issue, namely, the freedom of God, or the One.

Plotinus asserts the One’s freedom, when he writes:

It [the One] is, therefore, in a sense determined – determined, I mean by its uniqueness and not in any sense being under compulsion; compulsion did not coexist with the Supreme but has place only among the secondaries this uniqueness [of the One] is not from outside.[107]

This means that freedom of will is established whenever we act without pressure from external

compulsions that force us to do one thing or another. In the case of the One, which is free of all external relations – as is God in the Bahá'í view as we recall – there obviously cannot be any external compulsion acting on the One. Thus, the actions of the One are entirely its own; if it exercises will, it is pure self-will. The One's generosity is free. The Bahá'í Writings lead us to the identical conclusion. God is the “All-Powerful,”[108] which clearly tells that there is nothing external to God which can exercise compulsion on Him. That being the case, His actions are self-evidently free.

What about `Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that if there were no recipients of mercy, God's name of the Merciful “would not be realized?”[109] Does this not suggest compulsion, i.e. requirements being exercised on God insofar as there is a standard that He must meet? To answer this, we must distinguish between verbal and logical necessity. For example, saying that God must create beings for His mercy to be revealed is an example of verbal necessity; the wording – “must” – appears to suggest that God is being externally compelled, but in actual fact, He is not so. God's unique nature and will have willed the situation to be such that the revelation of His mercy includes the greatest number of beings. Logically, He cannot be compelled by external forces and so, any ‘compulsion’ must come from within Him – but that is the very definition of freedom. The only constraints on the One or God are ‘constraints’ of its own nature, which are not distinct from it but rather, identical with it.

11. The Emanative Order in the Enneads and the Bahá'í Writings

Before we turn our attention to the specific emanations of God, or the One, it should be noted that the Bahá'í Writings, while harmonizing with Plotinus on significant points on the emanative order, also adapt them. In capsule form, our view is as follows: the first of the Manifestation's three ontological stations[110] i.e. the “divine appearance and heavenly splendour . . . [which is also] “the Word of God, the Eternal Beauty, the Holy Spirit”[111] embraces the first two emanations in the system of Plotinus i.e. Nous and Soul. The Manifestation's other two stations, the physical and the rational[112] represent the nature which is an emanation of the Plotinian Soul. The three-fold structure of reality remains the same: in the Enneads we have the One, the Nous and the Soul/nature and in the Writings we have “the world of God, the world of the Kingdom, and the world of Creation.”[113] The “world of the Kingdom” is the world of the Manifestation and corresponds to the Plotinian Nous and the Soul. It is obvious that the Bahá'í schema makes the Manifestation an ontologically unique being with the central position in the structure of the reality. In other words, the Manifestation is far more than an ethical-spiritual teacher.

It should be added that the Writings often refer to Baha'u'llah as the "Blessed Beauty." [114] This, too, agrees with the Ennead:

And Beauty, this Beauty which is also the Good, must be posed as The First: directly deriving from this First is the Intellectual-Principle which is pre-eminently the manifestation of Beauty . . . [115]

The Manifestation is the appearance of the beauty of the One or Good in the world emanated by the One, and thus represents the divine or "blessed" beauty in creation. It is through Him that we come to know the divine beauty.

There is no doubt that the Bahá'í Writings advocate emanation as the means of creating and structuring reality. For this reason, `Abdu'l-Bahá in Chapter 53 of Some Answered Questions, expends considerable effort in explaining the difference between emanation and manifestation. In manifestation the seed in its own essence becomes branches and fruits, and its reality enters into the branches, the leaves and fruits. This appearance through manifestation would be for God, the Most High, simple imperfection; and this is quite impossible, for the implication would be that the Absolute Preexistent is qualified with phenomenal attributes. [116]

The seed develops into the branches and leaves and is thus ontologically one with them. In contrast, light emanates from the sun; the sun is not changed or diminished and remains ontologically distinct from the sun. Therefore, "Therefore, all creatures emanate from God." [117]

With this presentation `Abdu'l-Bahá has already shown how Bahá'í cosmology shares an emanationist foundation with the Enneads, a fact which by itself suffices to place the Writings in the Neoplatonic family of philosophies. However, the similarities run further. He says:

all creatures emanate from God--that is to say, it is by God that all things are realized, and by Him that all beings have attained to existence. The first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the "First Mind, " and which the people of Bahá call the "First Will." This emanation, in that which concerns its action in the world of God, is not limited by time or place; it is without beginning or end--beginning and end in relation

to God are one . . . Though the "First Mind" is without beginning, it does not become a sharer in the preexistence of God, for the existence of the universal reality in relation to the existence of God is nothingness, and it has not the power to become an associate of God and like unto Him in preexistence.[118]

Here we observe complete confirmation of Plotinus' statement that Nous or "Mind" or "First Mind" is the first level of emanation from the One, or God. The "philosophers" to whom `Abdu'l-Bahá refers are obviously the Neoplatonists, i.e. followers of Plotinus or at least those influenced by Plotinus who have adopted his emanationist schema. Further, we note that Nous or "First Mind" is not constrained by time or space, just as it is not in Plotinus, according to whom, time and space are part of nature as an emanation of the Soul.[119] In other words, Nous is ontologically superior to time and space. For Plotinus, as for the Writings, Nous has always existed but, unlike God, or the One, it is not its own precondition for existence, i.e. does not have "the preexistence of God." Thus it remains ontologically inferior to the One, because in both systems, it is derived from the One and, therefore, dependent on it.

Here is how Plotinus describes the emanation of the Nous, sometimes translated as 'Spirit,'[120] the Intellect, "the Intellectual Principle" or "the Divine Mind." [121]

Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, in our metaphor, has overflowed, and its exuberance has produced the new; this product has turned again to its begetter and been filled and has become its contemplator and so an Intellectual-Principle.[122]

The first product of the One's superabundance is the Nous, which represents a new, secondary and lower level of reality, insofar as the Nous depends on the One. Indeed, the Nous is the beginning of Being, for as Plotinus says, "the source [the One] must be no Being but Being's generator . . . [the Nous] establishes Being." [123] In other words, the One, or God Himself is above Being because He is the necessary (and sufficient) pre-condition for Being itself, i.e. "Being's generator." If He were not, then He would, in a significant way, be of the same ontological kind as His creations and the Nous. This negates the absolute uniqueness of the One or God and is an impossible state of affairs for Plotinus and the Writings.

Plotinus also mentions that like all existing things, the Nous represents “in image the engendering archetype,”[124] i.e. the Nous reflects its archetype, the One. However, because “all that is fully achieved engenders”[125], i.e. ‘creates’ or emanates a subsequent, ontologically lower level of being, the Nous reflects the attributes of the One into the still lower, i.e. more dependent levels of being that emanate from Nous itself. In the Plotinian schema, this means that the Nous emanates the Soul and with the Soul, we have nature. Of course the Nous can only do this because it is turned or oriented towards the One since the “offspring must seek and love the begetter.”[126]

This latter point is worth exploring: the Nous fulfills its own being by turning towards the One, i.e. by reflecting the light of the One like a perfect mirror. This theme of turning towards the One runs through the *Enneads* and the Bahá'í Writings; in the latter, for example, the Manifestations are described as:

Primal Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles. By the revelation of these Gems of Divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty, and grace, are made manifest.[127]

The assertion that the “Primal Mirrors” are “expressions” of God, recalls `Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that “The proceeding through emanation is like the coming forth of the action from the actor, of the writing from the writer.”[128] The “action” and the “writing” are expressions of the actor or writer; they come from the actor or writer but are not the same. In short, they emanate from their source. Thus, to say that the “Primal Mirrors” are an “expression” of God is to say that They are emanations but, of course, emanations with ontological priority over lower levels of reality.

The dawning-place of these splendors, the place of these reflections, and the appearance of these manifestations are the Holy Dawning-places, the Universal Realities and the Divine Beings, Who are the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God.[129]

Unlike all other things which, in their own way and indirectly by way of the Manifestation, also reflect God's light, the “Universal Realities” reflect God's light or creative power directly; that is why They are “the true mirrors of the sanctified Essence of God.” The word “universal” also suggests that they affect all of reality and not only the aspects of reality known to us. The Writings also say, “In the Manifestation of God, the perfectly polished mirror, appear the qualities of the Divine in a form that man is capable of comprehending.”[130] In other words, the

“Primal Mirrors,” the Manifestations make the “names and attributes of God” apparent or “manifest,” in a form comprehensible to lower levels of creation. Here we observe how the Manifestations fulfill the major function of the Plotinian Nous in the way outlined above as well as that of the Plotinian Soul.

However, it is important to note that turning towards God is not limited to the Manifestations. All beings do, and for humankind this is particularly important because that is the only way to realise our unique spiritual potential as humans. In many places throughout the Writings, we are reminded to turn our minds and hearts to God. `Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that the Manifestations:

must so educate the human reality that it may become the center of the divine appearance, to such a degree that the attributes and the names of God shall be resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man, and the holy verse "We will make man in Our image and likeness" shall be realized.[131]

In Plotinian terms, only if we turn to our “begetter” will we reflect the divine names and powers, and, thereby, make the most of our potentials and be ‘most ourselves.’ This theme is supported by the various exhortations to “polish the mirrors of our hearts”[132] which implicitly contains the idea of turning towards God since otherwise, the mirror will not reflect God’s light. Our spiritual task is to reflect God’s image, as Soul and nature reflect the image of the Nous and the Nous reflects the image and light of the One.

12. The Principle of ‘Turning Towards God’

Clearly, in the Enneads and the Bahá’í Writings, the principle of ‘turning toward the source’ is established at both the ontological and spiritual-ethical level. Indeed, the two levels are related insofar as the highest ontological ‘being,’ i.e. the One or God, is also the highest spiritual and ethical good. Ontology thus determines ethics; the actual structure of the universe determines the hierarchy of goods we are intended to pursue with God at the apex and matter at the nadir. The order or scale of being establishes the scale of values. The two order of being and value are therefore correlated. As William Inge writes:

the hierarchies of existence and of value must ultimately be found to correspond . . . it follows that that order of phenomena which has the lowest degree of reality in the existential scale must have the lowest degree of value in the ethical or spiritual scale.[133]

The implications of this correlation between the ontological and ethical are profound. For example, it means that ethics have an objective basis and are not only matters of personal choice. The correlation between the ontological and ethical orders allows us to assert that at least some ethical choices are objectively right or wrong precisely because they agree or conflict with the scale of being. Such choices are ‘unnatural’ because they violate the order of nature as established by the One. The most obvious illustration of this is the categorical Bahá’í rejection of materialism, at the ontological, scientific and social/consumer levels. Making matter the foundation of ontological and/or scientific explanation and the highest goal of human aspiration is wrong because doing so literally turns the “hierarchy of existence” on its head by giving priority to that which is last. Such an inversion is, in the deepest sense, ‘unnatural,’ i.e. contradicts the divinely established scale of being or “hierarchy of existence.”

Consequently, both the Bahá’í Writings and the Enneads adhere to a concept of natural law – based on the scale of being – as binding on human beings. ‘Natural law,’ of course, does not mean that humans model themselves on nature as found on the material nature; rather, it means that we model ourselves on our essential, spiritual nature as reflected in the “hierarchy of existence”: “Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy.”[134] Many arguments against ‘natural law theory’ fail on this ground: they assume that ‘nature’ means ‘physical nature’ – and then point to animal behaviors in nature as a way of justifying similar behaviors in humans. “Natural law’ in the sense of the Writings or the Enneads does not agree with this. In their view, certain behaviors are rejected because they are inappropriate to humankind’s spiritual nature or essence based on its high place in the “hierarchy of existence.”[135] These behaviors are inappropriate because they show our lower animal aspects dominating our higher spiritual aspects,[136] which is ‘unnatural’ precisely because it gives the lower precedence over the higher. It inverts the “hierarchy of existence.”

The Plotinian and Bahá’í view of ethics may also be described as ‘essentialist’ insofar as right and wrong are based on a creature’s place in the scale of being. This should not be confused with ethical relativism since in the essentialist view, there are objective standards by which to evaluate our actions. Differences in standards arise from differences in place in the scale of being, not from our personal viewpoints or preferences. However, beings that share the same essence, e.g. humankind, are subject to the same standard. Needless to say, ‘essentialist ethics’ put both Bahá’í and Plotinian ethics profoundly out of step with a considerable portion of secular

ethical thinking today.

Already at this point, it becomes apparent that the Writings often display what may carefully be called a ‘Plotinian turn of thought,’ i.e. they establish a vision of the structure and functioning of reality that confirms many Plotinian insights and leads to lines of thought that harmonize with Plotinus’ emanationism. For example, the Nous contains all lower levels of reality because they depend on it (and ultimately on the One). Therefore, the Nous is cognizant of all that pertains to these lower levels because it contains them virtually and knows them “self-reflexively[137]; it does not think discursively and inferentially on the basis of the subject/object distinction. In human terms, the Nous is infallible. Lloyd Gerson informs us that “Plotinus is among the philosophers who hold that knowing thus implies infallibility.”[138]

A similar line of reasoning applies to the Writings. If, as we have suggested, the Manifestation in His highest station combines the functions of Nous and the Soul, then the Manifestation virtually contains the lower levels of reality, and, thereby has infallible knowledge of them. Thus, `Abdu'l-Bahá tells us:

Since the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God, 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.[139]

This knowledge is infallible because both Nous and Soul are not subject to time and place and not limited by restrictions such as ‘future,’ ‘past,’ ‘here’ or ‘there.’ Furthermore, they are not just beyond physical space, but also beyond phenomenological space such as ‘within,’ ‘outside,’ ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity.’ Therefore, all possible knowledge is present to them. The same is true of the Manifestation in His highest or heavenly station; He has “essential infallibility.”[140]

It is clear, therefore, that “essential infallibility” is not simply an arbitrary attribution to the Manifestation; nor is it merely a token of respect or exaggerated or even irrational religious veneration. Rather, it is a direct logical consequence of the Manifestation’s place in the scale of being, i.e. a consequence of the emanationist world-view espoused by the Writings. There is no need to accept this teaching on ‘blind faith’ contrary to reason.[141]

13. The ‘Ideas’ or ‘Names of God’

There is yet another important issue to discuss regarding the Nous and the Bahá’í Writings, namely, the issue of intelligibles, or archetypes or as Plato called them, Ideas. According to J.M.

Rist, “[Nous] however comprises the World of intelligible objects.”[142]

if the Intellectual-Principle [Nous] is to be the maker of All, it cannot make by looking outside itself to what does not yet exist. The Authentic Beings [Ideas] must, then, exist before this All, no copies made on a model but themselves archetypes, primals, and the essence of the Intellectual-Principle.[143]

Elsewhere Plotinus says, “the Intellectual-Principle [Nous] is the authentic existences and contains them all – not as in a place but as possessing itself and being one thing with this content.”[144] The “intelligible objects” or the “Authentic Beings” are, in effect, Plato’s Ideas, i.e. models for nature, a lower level of reality, to aspire to and imitate in concrete individual examples. (They imitate these timeless models in the process of time to which nature is subject, a fact which allows Platonic theory and evolution to be combined. As Plato says, “Time [evolution] is the moving image of eternity.”[145]) The Ideas exist in the Nous which reflects them into the Soul which in turn reflects them into the world of physical nature where they appear as the embodied physical forms of things. However, this still leaves us with the question of whether or not the Bahá’í Writings contain anything that confirms Plotinus’ teaching on this issue.

In our view, the Bahá’í Writings do, in fact, confirm Plotinus’ insight albeit from a new perspective. First, we should note `Abdu'l-Bahá’s statement that “the earth is the mirror of the Kingdom; the material world corresponds to the spiritual world.”[146] In other words, what we observe on earth are the images of higher realities in the spiritual world. There is a correspondence between the lower and higher. A similar idea is expressed in the following statement by `Abdu'l-Bahá:

Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out. A shadow hath no life of its own; its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water, and seeming as pictures to the eye.[147]

Here, too, we observe the contrast between the “real world” of the Kingdom of which this material world is only an imitation, a mirror image, or a shadow. This clearly implies that the ‘models’ or ‘archetypes’ or, as Plato called them, the ‘Ideas’ are in the Kingdom, which as we shall see is the world of the Manifestation. The idea of a correspondence between the earth and the Kingdom is re-emphasized from an ethical perspective when he says that “the nether world [should] become the mirror of the Kingdom,”[148] i.e. the earth should reflect what is already found in perfect form in the Kingdom. William Inge calls this view real-idealism in which the world is “an actual but imperfect copy of the perfect archetype.”[149] He adds, “The sensible

world is a reflexion of the spiritual world in the mirror of Matter.”[150]

The unavoidable implication of these and similar statements is that the Kingdom contains models – or Plato’s ‘Ideas’ – which the world should strive to emulate. Yet, strong as the implication may be, such models are nowhere mentioned in the Writings, at least, not by that name. However, it is our contention that the Platonic ‘Ideas’ or Plotinian “authentic existences” contained by the Nous correspond to the Bahá’í concept of the names of God. For example, the Writings assign the following names to God: “the Fashioner” “the Creator,” “the Almighty” and the “Omniscient.” In our view, these names virtually contain within them the archetypes or potentials of everything that can exist. For example, Bahá'u'lláh states:

through the mere revelation of the word "Fashioner," issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind, such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. This, verily, is a certain truth. No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected.[151]

God, the Speaker utters the word “Fashioner” and thereby sets into motion the generative, creative and energizing powers that culminate in the existence of new things in the ontologically lower levels of being. In other words, these processes realize the potentials they virtually contain. If there were no potential for order in the names of God, then the processes they unleash would be chaotic instead of creative, i.e. would not result in the creation of an ordered world. God reveals these names and attributes first through the Manifestation, Who then reflects them into the natural world in general and specifically, into the “reality of man”[152] where they best develop under the education of the Manifestation.

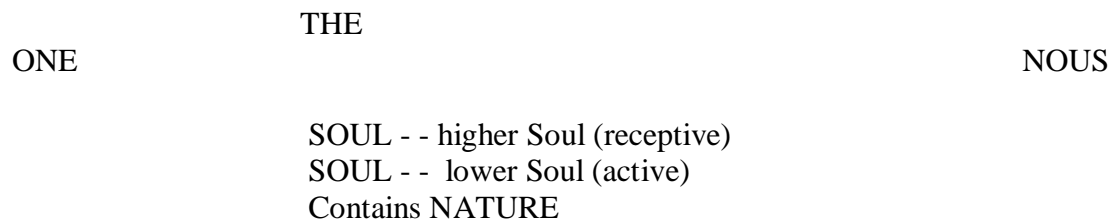
Instead of thinking of the names of God as specific and static Platonic Ideas abiding in the “First Mind,” it is advantageous, in our view to think of the names of God as dynamic, as actions from God into the lower levels of reality. To call God “the Creator” presupposes creative action in one form or another; to call Him “the Omnipotent” requires that He actually shows His power; to call Him “the Most Generous” or “the Sustainer” presupposes actions that demonstrate those traits; “Resuscitator implies resuscitation, Provider necessitates provision.” [153] “The Merciful” presupposes the action of showing mercy, and “Lord” requires the exercise of power as well as subjects. A little reflection indicates that the existence of all the objects of these actions is presupposed within the actions themselves. In other words, the Platonic Ideas that exist as entities within Plotinus’ Nous, exist virtually as potentials within the actions that emanate from God.

This solution also has the advantage of avoiding conflict with the previously-discussed nature of God which does not require objects of knowledge, i.e. which is not subject to the subject/object

dichotomy in knowing. If there are specific Platonic Ideas such as those of humans, roses or gold, it is difficult to see how they could exist without becoming objects of knowledge. However, if humans and roses are implicates of God's essential name of Creator – which is identical with God Himself – then no subject/object dichotomy arises. This does not change even if we think of the names as dynamic actions. These are the actions from God.

14: Bahá'í Correction to Plotinus

Abdu'l-Bahá's statements about the "First Mind" or Nous, raises the question of why he does not mention the second emanation, i.e. the Plotinian Soul. In our view this is not an omission but rather the logical consequence of the Bahá'í adaptation of the Plotinian emanative schema which may be diagrammed as follows:



Briefly, the One emanates the Nous, which contemplates the One and becomes an image of it. It is important to bear in mind that in Plotinus, contemplation is itself a form of creation/emanation and thus the Nous emanates the Soul which is itself an image of the Nous[154], and through the Nous, which is an image of the One. However, at this point, things become more complicated. The Soul reflects the Nous but the Soul itself has two aspects. First, there is a higher or "pure"[155] aspect which reflects the Ideas, or names of God and is the Soul-in-itself and is sometimes described as the "intelligible world." [156] Second, there is also an active 'lower aspect' which emanates nature itself. As Plotinus says, "soul has a double efficacy, its act within itself and its act from within outwards towards the new production." [157] To explain why soul creates the natural world, Plotinus asserts:

In the absence of body, soul could not have gone forth, since there is no other place to which its nature would allow it to descend. Since go forth it must, it will generate a place for itself; at once, body also exists.[158]

The Soul sees the darkness beneath it – the light of God has reached its emanative limit or lowest level of ontologically possible being.[159] Then the Soul "by seeing [contemplating] brings to shape [form]" [160] creates the ordered universe we know. Dominic O'Meara tells us that "nature is not a reality separate from soul in the same way that soul is a reality separate from intellect [Nous]." [161] Nature receives only the faintest hints of this forming activity, but it is enough to make an image of the One present in all things. As the Bahá'í Writings say:

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist.[162]

Even the light imagery here is consistent with the Enneads. In the Plotinian sense of 'dependence' Soul contains nature; therefore, "The Soul bears it up, and it lies within, no fragment of it unsharing." [163] No aspect of nature is outside of or beyond Soul which gives life to the natural world.

If the Bahá'í Manifestation has, in addition to His role as the Nous or "Primal Mirror" also has the role of the Soul, what evidence do we see of this in the Writings? Perhaps one of the strongest indications is the following statement:

And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished, and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. Nay, all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of Their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of Their grace.[164]

Here Bahá'u'lláh categorically asserts that "all besides these Manifestations" live by the Will of the Manifestations, Who, in this sense have precisely the function of the Plotinian World Soul. It is by the Manifestations that all things "have their being," i.e. have their existence, or are brought into existence. This is exactly what the Soul does for everything in nature. However, to do this, the Manifestation in this station must, like Plotinus' Soul, emanate matter in which God's names and life can appear. "Soul contemplates [Nous] and creates matter." [165] Low as it is on the ontological scale of being, matter enables God's names and life to appear as concrete individuals.

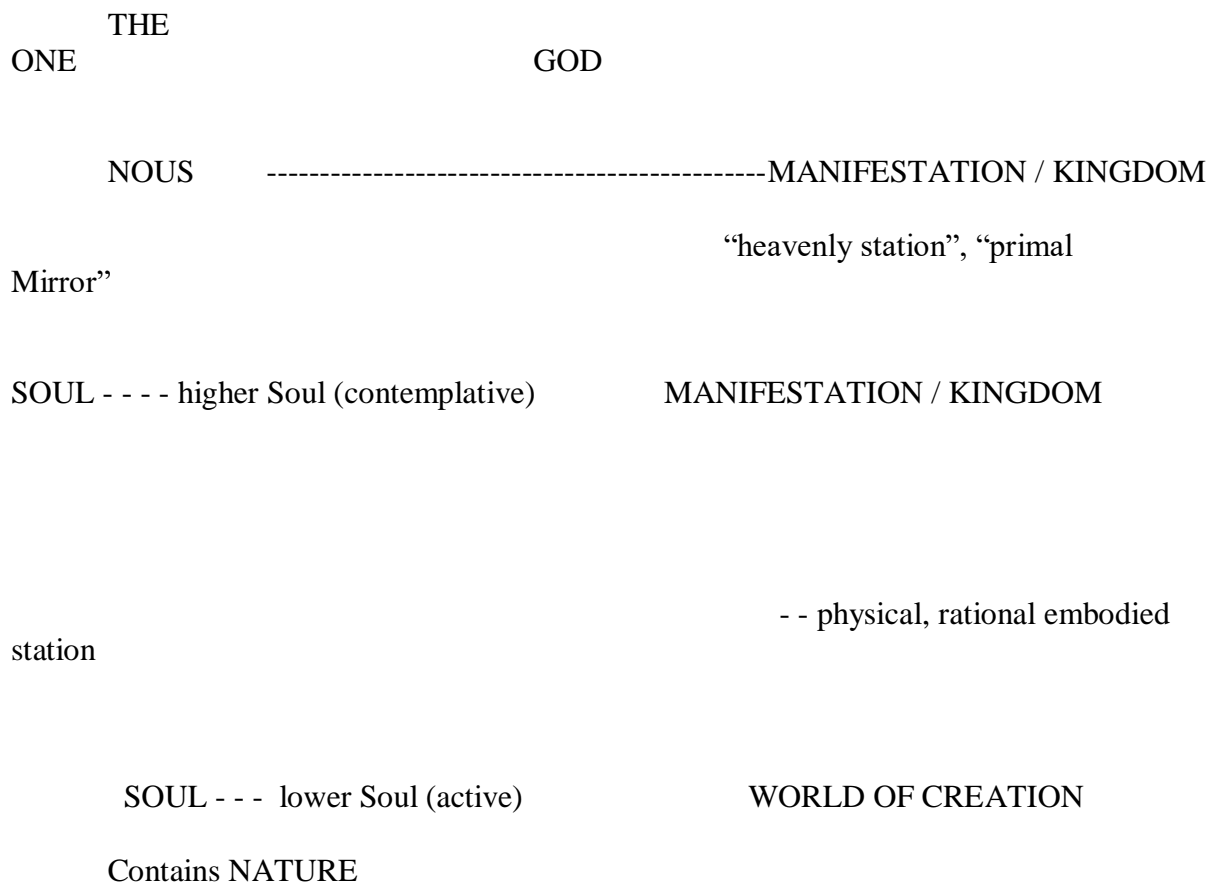
Bahá'u'lláh's subsequent words re-enforce these ideas:

These Tabernacles of holiness, these primal Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles. By the revelation of these gems of divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty and grace, are made manifest.[166]

In the phrase “primal Mirrors,” i.e. Manifestations who are “expressions” or emanations of God, we are reminded of the Manifestation’s role as Nous. The reference to making God’s names “manifest” refers to the work of the active Soul which emanates a natural world in which God’s names can be manifested. Thus, this statement shows the Manifestation as both Nous and Soul.

Another similarity between the Manifestation and the Soul is that “the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God, surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities.”[167] Nature, as Plotinus tells us, is contained by the Soul.

At this point we are ready to provide a diagrammatic representation between the system of Plotinus and the system embedded in the Bahá’í Writings.



As is evident, there is a basic similarity here which is re-enforced by the similarities in attributes

and functions of the various levels of the emanationist schema. These similarities support our contention that the Bahá'í Writings exhibit a philosophy that belongs to the Neoplatonic family. Such membership also explains why the Writings contain both Platonic and strong Aristotelian elements[168] One of the goals of Neoplatonism was to unite and reconcile Plato and Aristotle into a coherent whole. This, of course, has major implications for our view of Bahá'í philosophy, which obviously belongs to the Hellenic tradition of philosophy. Even though the Hellenic tradition has a Western i.e. European off-shoot and an Eastern i.e. a Muslim as well as an Eastern Orthodox Christian off-shoot does not alter the fact that the root of these off-shoots is Hellenic and that the Bahá'í Writings are yet another off-shoot.

15. Participation

The concept that the names of God correspond to the Ideas or “Intelligibles” in the Enneads, points to yet another similarity – the theory of participation. According to Plotinus, all created things participate, i.e. reflect the image of the ontologically superior entity and through that reflection process imitate or participate in its being. Thus, the Nous participates in the One by reflecting its image like a mirror; the higher Soul reflects the Nous and the lower Soul and Nature reflect the higher Soul. Therefore:

[e]verything has something of the Good, by virtue of possessing a certain degree of unity and a certain degree of Existence and by participation in Ideal-Form: to the extent of the Unity, Being, and Form which are present, there is a sharing in an image, for the Unity and Existence in which there is participation are no more than images of the Ideal-Form.[169]

In some way or another, all things reflect the One, and thus possess unity and “a certain degree of Existence;” the higher the degree of participation, the higher the degree of existence possessed; this process ends with the Nous or Manifestation in His station as “Primal Mirror” Who has more existence or reality than anything except God or the One. It needs to be interjected at this point that the belief in the relativity of degrees of existence is also reflected in the Bahá'í Writings: “The second proposition is that existence and nonexistence are both relative.”[170] Moreover in the Writings, just as in Plotinus, God, or the One sets the standard for measuring our existence: “the existence of creation in relation to the existence of God is nonexistence.”[171] The Manifestation, of course, enjoys a greater degree of existence because His ontological station as “Primal Mirror” is closer to God.

That said, it remains to note that in the Bahá'í Writings, created things reflect the names of God, and, thus become participants in the actions that these names refer to:

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 . . . How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man . . . For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him. Even as He hath said: "Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery.[172]

Through the revelation of God's names, all beings, and especially humankind, become participants in the divine emanative process. Individual human beings, of course, are free to choose the extent and way in which they will reflect or participate in the divine names or actions. That is why it is so important to cleanse the mirrors of our hearts: "May the mirrors of hearts be cleansed from dust in order that the Sun of Truth may be reflected therein." [173] The more we polish our mirrors, the more they will participate in the light of the divine truth, i.e. names. Humankind's special measure of bounty in the regard constitutes its unique position in the order of creation.

16. Matter and Evil

Any study of the philosophy of Plotinus and the Bahá'í Writings is bound to consider the issue of matter and its relationship to evil. Before discussing this issue it is essential to draw attention to two important points. First, when Plotinus discusses matter he does not mean matter as we ordinarily think of it, for example, minerals, elements or compounds. According to the Enneads, this matter has already received form to be a particular kind of matter, e.g. gold, roses or granite. [174] Matter "lives on the farther side of all these categories [that identify particular forms of matter] and so has no title to the Name of Being." [175] For Plotinus, matter is the "substratum" [176] on which all the particular forms of matter are imposed. It may also be described as 'perfect receptivity' [177] waiting for form and for this reason Plotinus compares it to a mirror and what it reflects to "phantasms." [178] Because matter is formless, it is also unbounded, unlimited, shapeless and without qualities and therefore has no particular form or being. Matter, says Plotinus, is "utter destitution," [179] or, to use the more common term, it is 'privation' [180] or lack of attribute. It is like a shadow. At the same time, Plotinus states that matter aspires to substance, i.e. real existence, [181] although this aspiration can never be met but must remain an aspiration. The One, or God, is, of course, the most real of all existents and for that reason, matter also aspires towards the One. This feature of matter inevitably calls to mind Bahá'u'lláh's prayer in which He addresses God as:

my Desire and the Desire of all things . . . my Aim and the Aim of all things. . . Suffer me not,

I implore Thee, to be kept back from the ocean of Thy tender mercies, nor to be far removed from the shores of nearness to Thee.[182]

Finally, it must be noted that matter is the last stage or degree of the emanative process. As pure receptivity or potential, matter cannot emanate anything because in itself, it has nothing to give and can only receive.

The second major point about matter and evil is that for Plotinus, there are two kinds of evil which must not be confused with each other.[183] Moral evil is committed by human beings as a result of free will while ontological evil is the result of matter being the lowest level of the emanative process. Because there are degrees of perfection in the stages of emanation, there must be a point where there are no more perfections are possessed and there is only a perpetual receptivity to perfections from higher levels of the emanative process. Thus, when we say that matter is inherently evil in Plotinus, we mean that it is ‘metaphysical evil,’ i.e. a lack of attributes that can have any form imposed on it:

Evil is not in any and every lack; it is absolute lack. What falls in some degree short of the Good is not Evil; considered in its own kind it might even be perfect, but where there is utter dearth, there we have Essential Evil, void of all share in Good; this is the case with matter.[184]

Plotinus explains why this lack makes matter evil:

[I]t corrupts and destroys the incomer, it substitutes its own opposite character and kind not in the sense of opposing , for, example, concrete cold to concrete warmth, but by setting its own formlessness against the Form of heat, shapelessness to shape, excess and defect to the duly ordered. Thus, in sum, what enters into Matter ceases to belong to itself, comes to belong to matter . . . [185]

In other words, matter brings about a lack of moderation i.e. a lack of limitation, of order, measure and shape. Here we have not only an explanation for the ontological nature of evil – or absolute disorder – but also the ontological foundation for the Bahá’í emphasis on moderation,[186] as seen for example, in the emphasis on “true liberty.”[187]

In these teachings, we observe that in the Bahá'í Writings, as in the Enneads, ethics are grounded in and correlated with ontology. The higher we rise above matter in the emanative order, i.e. the closer we approach the One or God, the closer we approach to form, 'Ideas,' or the names of God, and thereby, the closer we approach to our own real nature or true 'selves.' Matter, of course, undermines form, order, measure and the spiritual which means that the more we fall into the power of matter, the less we shall be our 'true selves.' Applying this principle to human ethics, `Abdu'l-Bahá, says:

Every good habit, every noble quality belongs to man's spiritual nature, whereas all his imperfections and sinful actions are born of his material nature. If a man's Divine nature dominates his human nature, we have a saint . . . Saints are men who have freed themselves from the world of matter and who have overcome sin. They live in the world but are not of it, their thoughts being continually in the world of the spirit.[188]

Elsewhere, he says that in receiving God's bounty "the reality of man becomes purified and sanctified from the impurities of the world of nature." [189] In other words, moral goodness requires that there be appropriate order in the soul. 'Appropriate' in the case of humankind means that the higher, i.e. spiritual control the lower, i.e. material nature. When this does not happen, when the soul turns away from the One and to itself, it descends into non-being, in which the lower is in control.[190] Because the higher should control the lower it is proper that man controls or masters nature (in a non-destructive way) for man represents the spiritual principle in the material world.[191] In both Plotinus and the Writings, the spiritual takes ontological and ethical precedence over the material.

At this point a note of caution is necessary. For the Writings, nature and matter are not necessarily morally evil in themselves. That is why `Abdu'l-Bahá says that "it is evident that in creation and nature evil does not exist at all; but when the natural qualities of man are used in an unlawful way, they are blameworthy." [192] An "unlawful way" is taken when we choose to submit the spiritual to our animal nature. Consequently, Adam's physical nature is the "source of all imperfection" [193] and his spiritual nature is the "source of all perfection." Furthermore, in nature, all existences are good in themselves although they may not be good in relationship to each other:

Are they [scorpions] good or evil, for they are existing beings? Yes, a scorpion is evil in relation to man; a serpent is evil in relation to man; but in relation to themselves they are not evil, for their poison is their weapon, and by their sting they defend themselves. But as the elements of their poison do not agree with our elements--that is to say, as there is antagonism

between these different elements, therefore, this antagonism is evil; but in reality as regards themselves they are good.[194]

Thus, evil is relational insofar as a thing or an act can only be evil in relationship to something else. The Enneads reflect a similar view. Matter, i.e. utter privation or pure potentiality is not evil in itself but in relationship to form, its effects are evil because it undermines form with its formlessness and immoderation. Matter may be evil in relationship to the soul because the soul becomes fixated on the body and thus turns away from the One. For that reason matter, bodies, nature can drag humans into moral evil if humans choose to be dominated by them. This happens when the soul focuses only on itself and cuts itself off from the influence of higher emanations, and, ultimately, the One.[195] Cutting itself off from the One or the Manifestation of God from Whom all gifts and powers are obtained, causes the self to suffer deficiencies. This idea is apparent in `Abdu'l-Bahá's statement:

the sensible realities are absolutely good, and evil is due to their nonexistence--that is to say, blindness is the want of sight, deafness is the want of hearing, poverty is the want of wealth, illness is the want of health, death is the want of life, and weakness is the want of strength.[196]

Here, too, evil is being defined as a privation or lack of that which is good, just as in Plotinus it is defined as that which lacks form, order, or other positive attributes.[197] Thus, it is non-being,[198] i.e. not nothing but rather the difference that contradicts Being or the One.[199] Of course, `Abdu'l-Bahá's reference is to moral evil but we observe that the same principle of ontological evil as privation is being applied. `Abdu'l-Bahá asserts:

the intellectual realities, such as all the qualities and admirable perfections of man, are purely good, and exist. Evil is simply their nonexistence. So ignorance is the want of knowledge; error is the want of guidance; forgetfulness is the want of memory; stupidity is the want of good sense. All these things have no real existence.[200]

By "no real existence," `Abdu'l-Bahá means that evil has no substance, i.e. has no independent existence in itself but is simply the lack of certain attributes and/or virtues. It has 'presence' insofar as we can detect, feel, recognise these deficiencies ; however, this presence makes itself felt only by way of a negative contrast, a deficiency of something that should be there.

17. The Return to God

The final subject we shall refer to briefly in this outline of the similarities and convergences between the Bahá'í Writings and the Enneads concerns the return to God. Such a return is the deepest desire of all souls, whether they are aware of it or not because all souls are attracted to beauty. As Plotinus says:

Therefore, we must ascend again towards the Good, the desired of every Soul. Anyone that has seen This [Good or Beauty], knows what I intend when I say that it is beautiful. even the desire of it is to be desired as a Good. To attain to it is for those that will take the upward path . . . divest themselves of all that we have put on in our descent . . .[201]

This statement is in complete harmony with Bahá'u'lláh's prayer, in which He addresses God as:

my Desire and the Desire of all things, my Strength and the Strength of all things, my King and the King of all things, my Possessor and the Possessor of all things, my Aim and the Aim of all things, my Mover and the Mover of all things! Suffer me not, I implore Thee, to be kept back from the ocean of Thy tender mercies, nor to be far removed from the shores of nearness to Thee.[202]

In this prayer, the soul calls out to approach as close as it can get to the Divine, i.e. to on the "shores of nearness to Thee." Helping us to achieve this goal is the purpose of the Manifestation's appearance in physical form.

Conclusion

Even on the basis of an outline such as this, it is clear that the Bahá'í Writings and the philosophy of Plotinus have numerous foundational principles in common. In other words, the similarities and convergences are essential not accidental and for this reason we may say from a historical viewpoint that the Bahá'í Writings belong to the Neoplatonic family of philosophies.

In my opinion, this suggests that any further philosophical developments from the Writings must be based on – though not necessarily limited by – the Neoplatonic foundations found in the Writings. Otherwise such developments will either contradict the Writings at worst, or be neutral

towards them at best. To actually harmonize with them, such developments must at least adopt the foundational principles and accept the philosophical constraints they contain. For example, it will not be possible to develop a genuinely materialistic philosophy on the basis of the Writings. The foundational principles are simply antagonistic.

It also bears repeating that showing the similarities and convergences between the Bahá'í Writings and Plotinus does not mean that the former are simply a borrowing of the latter. From a Bahá'í point of view, Plotinus may be an interesting philosopher, but his ideas have not been confirmed or established as truth until they are accepted by Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá. It is their validation of these ideas that makes them true for Bahá'ís. They do not, for example, validate Plotinus' belief in re-incarnation which remain mere historical artefacts of Plotinus' philosophy. Moreover, it should be recalled that the Writings go far beyond Plotinus, i.e. they build on his basic insights but extend them in application to the modern world. Thus, the Writings are not a pale reflection of Plotinus' work.

Selected Bibliography

- `Abdu'l-Bahá
Trust, 1995.
- Paris Talks.* London: The Bahá'í Publishing
Trust, 1995.
- Some Answered Questions.* Wilmette: Bahá'í
Publishing Trust, 1981.
- The Promulgation of Universal Peace.* Second
Edition. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá.,*
Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1957.
- Bahá'u'lláh
Wilmette: Bahá'í. Publishing Trust, 1976
- Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.*
- Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh,* Haifa: Bahá'í World
Centre, 1978.
- The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh (Arabic).* Kuala
Lumpur: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1985
- Brehier, Emile.
Thomas.
Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- The Philosophy of Plotinus.* Trans. By Joseph

- Cole, Juan. "The Concept of the Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings."
http://bahai-library.org/file.php?file=cole_concept_manifestation
- Deck, John. N. *Nature, Contemplation and the One*. Burdett N.Y. Larson Publications, 1967.
- Foster, Mark. "Neo-Platonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Ontology,"
<http://bahai-library.com/unpubl.articles/neoplatonism.framework.html>
- Gerson, Lloyd, P. *Plotinus*. New York, Routledge, 1994.
- Gerson, Llyod, P. editor *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*.
 Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Hadot, Pierre. *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Hazini, Nima. "Neoplatonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Metaphysics."
<http://bahailibrary.com/conferences/neoplatonism.hazini.html>
- Inge, William, Ralph. *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. I and II. New York, Longmans, Green and Co. 1918.
- O'Meara, Dominic J. *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Plotinus. *The Enneads*. Trans. by Stephen MacKenna. Burdett N. Y., Larson Publications.
- Rappe, Sara. *Reading Neoplatonism*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 200.
- Rist, J.M. *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967.

Footnotes

[1] *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Audi p. 563, which subsumes ontology under metaphysics; Anthony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, 255; see also *The*

Oxford Companion to Philosophy ed. by Ted Honderich and *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* ed. by Simon Blackburn.

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

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

[4] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 5.

[5] John Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One*, p. 24.

[6] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148

[7] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.

[8] Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18

[9] *Enneads*, VI, p. 8, 7.

[10] *Enneads*, VI, p. 8, 13.

[11] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 231.

[12] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXI, p. 157.

[13] *Enneads*, V, p. 4,1.

[14] *Enneads*, VI, p. 9, 6.

[15] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXX, p. 136.

[16] *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 318.

[17] *Enneads*, VI, p. 8, 14.

[18] *Enneads*, VI, p. 8, 17.

[19] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 283.

[20] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 260.

[21] *Enneads*, V, p. 4, 1; also V 2, 1.

[22] *Enneads* VI, p. 9, 3.

[23] *Enneads*, V, p. 2, 1.

- [24] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 207.
- [25] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- [26] *Enneads*, VI, p. 8, 13; VI, 8, 14; VI 8, 16.
- [27] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- [28] *Enneads*, V, p. 4,1.
- [29] *Enneads*, V, p. 5, 6.
- [30] *Enneads*, VI, p. 9, 7.
- [31] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 390.
- [32] *Enneads*, V, p. 5, 5.
- [33] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 206.
- [34] Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 281.
- [35] Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 206.
- [36] Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 205.
- [37] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 173
- [38] *Enneads*, III, p. 8, 8.
- [39] John Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One*, p. 28; original emphasis.
- [40] John Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One*, p. 28.
- [41] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVII, p. 66.
- [42] *Enneads*, VI p. 8, 8;
- [43] *Enneads*, VI, p. 8, 8.
- [44] *Enneads*, VI, p. 9, 6.
- [45] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVII, p. 66.
- [46] *Enneads*, VI, p. 8, 9.

- [47] *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 80.
- [48] *Enneads*, VI, p. 8, 16; III, 9, 4.
- [49] *Enneads*, V, p. 5, 9.
- [50] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 205.
- [51] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 178.
- [52] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXVII, p. 150; see also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 272, 377, 462.
- [53] *Enneads*, V p. 2,
2.
- [54] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 295 – 296.
- [55] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- [56] *Enneads*, I, p. 8, 2.
- [57] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 51; emphasis added.
- [58] *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 177.
- [59] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 181.
- [60] *Enneads*, V, p. 3, 12.
- [61] *Enneads*, III, p. 9, 9.
- [62] *Enneads*, III, p. 8, 11.
- [63] *Enneads*, V, p. 6, 3.
- [64] *Enneads*, VI, p. 7, 40.
- [65] *Enneads*, VI, p. 7, 41.
- [66] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 293 – 294; emphasis added.
- [67] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221; emphasis added.
- [68] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 24.

- [69] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 24.
- [70] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 23 – 24; emphasis added.
- [71] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 138.
- [72] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- [73] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.
- [74] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.
- [75] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 221.
- [76] *Enneads*, III, p. 8, 10.
- [77] *Enneads*, III, p. 8, 10; V 3, 13, 14.
- [78] *Enneads*, VI, p. 9,4.
- [79] *Enneads*, V,p. 3, 14; emphasis added.
- [80] Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads*, p. 56.
- [81] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220 – 221.
- [82] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- [83] *Enneads*, V, p. 3, 14; emphasis added.
- [84] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 222; emphasis added.
- [85] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147.
- [86] Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XXVII, p. 65
- [87] *Compilations, Baha'i Scriptures*, p. 50; emphasis added.
- [88] Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads*, p. 60.
- [89] Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 29-30.
- [90] *Enneads*, V, p. 3, 12; emphasis added; see also I, 7, 1.
- [91] *Enneads*, V, p. 1, 6.

- [92] Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 108.
- [93] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203; emphasis added.
- [94] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296.
- [95] *Enneads*, III, p. 8, 10.
- [96] *Enneads*, III, 8, 10; emphasis added.
- [97] *Enneads*, V, p. 4, 1.
- [98] Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads*, p. 44.
- [99] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 181; emphasis added.
- [100] *Enneads*, V, p. 2, 1.
- [101] *Enneads*, V, p. 4, 1.
- [102] *Enneads*, V, p. 1, 6.
- [103]. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, LXXVIII, p. 150.
- [104] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 272; emphasis added.
- [105] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- [106] Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XXVI, p. 60.
- [107] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 9.
- [108] Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CXXIX, p. 284.
- [109] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 272.
- [110] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 151 – 152.
- [111] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 151.
- [112] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 151.
- [113] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 295.
- [114] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 213.

- [115] *Enneads*, I, p. 6,6.
- [116] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203
- [117] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- [118] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- [119] *Enneads*, III, p. 7, 11-13.
- [120] William Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*.
- [121] *Enneads*, V, p. 1, 6.
- [122] *Enneads*, V, p. 2, 1; emphasis added.
- [123] *Enneads*, V, p. 2, 1.
- [124] *Enneads*, V, p. 1, 6.
- [125] *Enneads*, V, p. I, 6.
- [126] *Enneads*, V, p. 1, 6.
- [127] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIX, p. 48; Abdu'l-Baha, *Abdu'l-Baha in London*, p. 66; `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147; `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 206;
- [128] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 205.
- [129] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 147; emphasis added.
- [130] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 26.
- [131] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.9.
- [132] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 14.
- [133] William Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. 1, p. 132.
- [134] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 72.
- [135] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 130.
- [136] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 119.

- [137] Lloyd P Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 55.
- [138] Lloyd P Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 55.
- [139] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157 – 158.
- [140] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 171.
- [141] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 181.
- [142] J.M. Rist, *Plotinus, The Road to Reality*, p. 88.
- [143] *Enneads*, V,p. 9, 5.
- [144] *Enneads*, V, p. 9, 6; emphasis added.
- [145] Plato, *Timaeus*.
- [146] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 283.
- [147] *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 178; emphasis added.
- [148] *Baha'i World Faith*, p. 400.
- [149] William Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol, I, p. 151.
- [150] William Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol, I, p. 152.
- [151] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXIV, p. 141 – 142.
- [152] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.9.
- [153] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 272.
- [154] *Enneads*, V, p.1, 3.
- [155] John Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One*, p. 49.
- [156] John Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One*, p. 49.
- [157] *Enneads*, IV, p.3, 10; emphasis added.
- [158] *Enneads*, IV, p.3, 9.
- [159] *Enneads*, IV,p. 3, 9.

- [160] *Enneads*, IV, p.3, 9.
- [161] Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads*, p. 77.
- [162] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 177.
- [163] *Enneads*, IV, p.3, 9.
- [164] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XC, p.179; emphasis added.
- [165] J.M. Rist, *Plotinus The Road to Reality*, p. 90.
- [166] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XC, p.179; emphasis added.
- [167] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157 – 158.
- [168] Ian Kluge, "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings," *Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 4.
- [169] *Enneads*, I, 7, 2.
- [170] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 281.
- [171] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 281.
- [172] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- [173] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 244.
- [174] *Enneads*, III, p. 6, 7.
- [175] *Enneads*, III, p. 6, 7.
- [176] *Enneads*, II, p. 5, 5.
- [177] *Enneads*, II, p. 4, 4.
- [178] *Enneads*, III, p. 6, 7.
- [179] *Enneads*, II, p.4, 16.
- [180] *Enneads*, III, p. 9, 3; II, 4, 1.
- [181] *Enneads*, III, p. 6, 7.
- [182] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 59.

- [183] Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads*, p. 86.
- [184] *Enneads*, I, p. 8, 5.
- [185] *Enneads*, I, p. 8, 8.
- [186] *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 69.
- [187] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIX, p. 336.
- [188] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60.- 61; emphasis added.
- [189] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 92.
- [190] *Enneads*, III, 9, 3.
- [191] *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 11.
- [192] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 215.
- [193] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 118.
- [194] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 263 – 264; emphasis added.
- [195] Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads*, p. 83.
- [196] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 263.
- [197] Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads*, p. 82.
- [198] *Enneads*, I, 8, 6.
- [199] *Enneads*, II, 4, 16.
- [200] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 263
- [201] *Enneads*, I, 6, 7; emphasis added.
- [202] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 59.

Neoplatonism 2 and the Bahá'í Writings

by Ian Kluge KK edited

Published in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 12, 2011

1: Introduction

This paper expands and builds on the issues and ideas presented in “Neoplatonism and the Bahá'í Writings, Part 1” in order to demonstrate how the work of Plotinus and his successors complements and offers new insights into the philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Revelation. Because the agreements and convergences between the Writings and Neoplatonism are numerous and far-reaching, it seems clear that to improve our philosophical understanding of the Writings, we must have some familiarity with Plotinus and his successors, especially Proclus.

A project like this immediately raises two issues. The first is, what is meant by referring to a philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Writings? Does not Shoghi Effendi write that Bahá'u'lláh “has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be.”[1]? Does he not say that the Bahá'í Faith has “refus[ed] to be labeled a mere philosophy of life.”[2] Elsewhere he writes:

For the Cause is not a system of philosophy; it is essentially a way of life, a religious faith that seeks to unite all people on a common basis of mutual understanding and love, and in a common devotion to God.[3]

In light of these statements, is not a project like this in danger of reducing the Writings to a man-made philosophy? In our view, this is not the case because this study recognizes that studying the philosophical aspects of the Writings does not exhaust their contents; there is obviously more to the Writings than philosophy. However, we must clearly recognize that these aspects exist. For example, Shoghi Effendi indicates that philosophical aspects of the Teachings exist when he refers to the “philosophy of progressive revelation”[4] and the “Bahá'í philosophy of social and political organization.”[5] Indeed, he encourages a questioner to correlate the Writings with contemporary developments in philosophy and only warns him or her away from what he calls “metaphysical hairsplitting.”

Philosophy, as you will study it and later teach it, is certainly not one of the sciences that begins

and ends in words. Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting is meant, not a sound branch of learning like philosophy.[6]

Correlation with other philosophical schools can only be done by focusing on the philosophic aspects of the Writings which is precisely what Shoghi Effendi is encouraging with this advice. In addition, we have 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of philosophical knowledge, principles and arguments throughout his talks and letters, as, for example, in his proofs for the existence of God. In one such he proves the necessity of God by presenting the philosophical argument that the idea of an actual infinite regress of causes is "absurd." [7] The impossibility of actual infinite regresses is a highly philosophical issue and brings in its train a variety of logical implications. Elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá proves the immortality of the soul with the argument that simple i.e. noncomposite things cannot decompose and die.[8] Such passages amply demonstrate that the Writings have well-developed philosophic aspects that requires study.

The second issue raised by this project is what do we mean by a philosophical understanding of the Writings? In a nutshell, a philosophical understanding seeks rational knowledge of four things: what the Writings say explicitly or implicitly; the connections among various statements; their reasons or underlying principles for their statements; and how they are related to other philosophies.

First, a philosophic understanding of the Writings seeks to discover what the Writings say explicitly or implicitly about a certain subject, and especially about subjects related to such studies as metaphysics and ontology, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of man and philosophy of history and politics. Explicit statements on these subjects are easy to find but their hidden implications are not always readily apparent. For example, in regards to epistemology, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that "the essence of a thing is known through its qualities; otherwise, it is unknown and hidden." [9] He adds, "everything is known by its qualities and not by its essence." [10] The explicit meaning of these statements is clear but the implicit implications are equally important. For example, they guarantee the ontological integrity of all things, and especially of the human soul which no one but God can know in and of itself. Our freedom and spiritual independence and freedom from undue interference are guarded in this way.

Second, a philosophical understanding seeks to identify and study how the explicit and hidden connections among the teachings, so that we can discern more of the underlying unity of the Writings, i.e. their organic, interdependent structure. In other words, a philosophic understanding can help us recognize the Writings as an integral whole, instead of treating them like a loose eclectic or syncretistic collection. This is important because the inability to see the organic integral structure of the teachings inevitably causes us to underestimate the strength of their rational coherence and thus undercuts our ability to explicate and defend the Writings and to carry on meaningful dialogue with other thought-traditions.

Third, a philosophic understanding of the Writings also seeks to elucidate the foundational principles which underlie and inform or shape the teachings on a variety of subjects. For example, what epistemological principles are at work in the Writings? What principle links ontological status to the ability to know, be it in a human being, a Manifestation or God? What principle forms the basis for the infallible knowledge of the Manifestation? What are the bedrock principles of Bahá'í metaphysics and ontology, i.e. what principle(s) if taken away would create logical chaos among the ideas and teachings? The answers to these and other questions are the goals of philosophic understanding.

Fourth, a philosophical understanding of the Writings allows us to discover the relationship of the ideas in the Writings to those in other philosophical schools. For example, given the emanationist metaphysics starting from a non-material source as the ultimately real, it seems clear that the Writings have significant similarities to some forms of idealism. But if so, what kind of idealism do they resemble – the subjective idealism of Berkeley or the objective idealism of Hegel or Schopenhauer? And how do they relate to other great traditions, such as Thomism, Transcendentalism, existentialism, phenomenology and neo-Aristotelianism? Philosophic understanding can also help us understand why the Writings are so difficult to harmonize rationally with dialectical materialism, logical positivism or postmodernism. Knowing which philosophic traditions the Writings resemble and which ones we do not can help us expand our understanding of the Writings by widening our intellectual horizons, sharpening our thinking about important questions and studying the Writings from new perspectives.

As an addendum, we should say that paradoxically, a philosophical understanding of the Writings also helps us to appreciate the inherent limits of rational thought. The Writings do not just promote rational understanding but also the “understanding heart.”[11] Not everything can be fully understood or comprehended by reason alone, such as the deepest inner motives that cause us to accept Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation for this Age or our fullest love for the Manifestation and His plan for the world. As Pascal said, “The heart has reasons which reason cannot know.”[12]

2: The Theology of Aristotle

It is possible, of course, to study the agreements and convergences between the Bahá'í Writings and Neoplatonism from a strictly non-historical perspective, i.e. to study the two as separately developed and independent but strikingly similar systems of thought. In biology such a development is known as “convergent evolution.” However, in the case of the Bahá'í Writings and Neoplatonism, there is strong evidence that links the cultural world of late antiquity i.e. of Plotinus and Proclus to the cultural world of Bahá'u'lláh. This concerns the entry of Neoplatonic thought into the Muslim and specifically, Persian, world.

The first entry to Neoplatonism into Persia came in 529 AD when the Christian emperor Justinian I closed the School of Athens and the philosophers, the vast majority of them Neoplatonists, fled for protection to the Sassanid King Khosrau I. They brought with them numerous manuscripts including those of their master Plotinus. Their exile from Rome only lasted four years, but, at the very least, contact between Neoplatonism and the Persian cultural sphere had been established. Neoplatonist learning then continued in the Academy of Gundishapur which was an important Sassanid intellectual center.

However, there is a far more tangible link between Neoplatonism and the Muslim world, namely a text called *The Theology of Aristotle* which was “the most important direct source of Neoplatonic ideas in the Islamic world.”[13] This book, allegedly produced in Baghdad in the Ninth C. CE, was actually a misattribution of Plotinus’ *Enneads* to Aristotle. It was widely circulated and influenced generations of great Muslim philosophers including such Persians as al-Ghazzali, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra. In other words, there is a clearly identifiable Neoplatonic influence in the cultural world in which Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lived. Given this historical and cultural context, it is not surprising that there should be agreements and convergences between the Writings and Neoplatonism.

In itself, the *Theology* was a paraphrase (it has even been called a ‘forgery’) with some additions of *Enneads* IV to VI. Some of the paraphrases are reasonably close to the original passages in the *Enneads*, but some in some cases the *Theology*’s words stray far from the meaning of the original.[14] This does not seem to have affected the Writings whose agreement with Plotinus is consistent. The *Theology* was augmented by other, though less influential Neoplatonic works such as the *Book of Causes* based on Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, as well as *The Letter on Divine Science* which also paraphrased portions of the *Enneads*. However, these other books lacked wide influence because they were not associated with Aristotle’s prestige.[15]

The pervasive influence of *The Theology of Aristotle* also sheds a cultural and historical light on one of the interesting features of the Bahá’í Writings, viz. the mixture of elements that from a historical perspective can be called ‘Platonic’ and ‘Aristotelian.’ An idea which is historically associated with Plato is that the “the earth is the mirror of the Kingdom; the mental world corresponds to the spiritual world.”[16] Plato, of course, taught that the material world was a reflection or shadow of the ideal spiritual world. Elements that are historically associated with Aristotle are four-fold causality[17]; actuality and potentiality[18] and arguments, such as the impossibility of an actual (as distinct from theoretical) infinite regress to prove the existence of a Prime Mover.[19] The co-existence of Platonic and Aristotelian elements is significant because one of the major goals of Neoplatonists from Plotinus onward was to reconcile the ideas of the two Greek philosophical giants and fit them into a coherent whole. This harmonious use of both

Plato and Aristotle points to another similarity between the Writings and Neoplatonism.

3. Discourse About God, The First Mode

In this section we shall examine Bahá'í and Neoplatonic discourse about God or the One. Our discussion will start with an observation by Eugene F. Bales that the Enneads employ “three modes of discourse”[20] about God.

The first mode of discourse is employed when he speaks of The One as though it transcends Being, Mind, Freedom, Will, Consciousness and Form and is thus void of all act and intelligible content. This mode of discourse I shall refer to as meontological.[21]

In this mode God is spoken of as transcending all the phenomenal attributes including not only the most fundamental one – being – but also form, which all phenomenal things must have to be particular things, as well as higher attributes such as mind and consciousness. The Writings, of course, warn us against any reduction of God to the level of a phenomenal being:

This appearance through manifestation [i.e. as a phenomenal being] would be for God, the Most High, simple imperfection; and this is quite impossible, for the implication would be that the Absolute Preexistent is qualified with phenomenal attributes. But if this were so, pure independence would become mere poverty, and true existence would become nonexistence, and this is impossible.[22]

Abdu'l-Bahá then goes on to say, “The preexistence of God is the preexistence of essence, and also preexistence of time.”[23] In other words, God has “preexistence” and this “preexistence” is essentially His, i.e. it constitutes Him. This can be understood to mean that insofar as God is preexistent, He transcends ‘being’ or existence itself; He is the pre-condition needed for the being of created things to occur. For things to ‘be,’ they must be limited, i.e. have their own particular or limited being. However, since God is not limited in any way, He does not have being in this way. This is emphasized in the following statement:

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the Divine Being[24], is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men.[25]

Here, too, we observe how God transcends, “is immensely exalted beyond,” phenomenal attributes, and, therefore, beyond human conception. Clearly, the word “Being” in the phrase “Divine Being” is not used in the same way as when it refers to created beings since it is

qualified by the word “Divine.” This passage draws the obvious conclusion that since God surpasses ordinary attributes of being, He also surpasses human understanding:

It is evident that the human understanding is a quality of the existence of man, and that man is a sign of God: how can the quality of the sign surround the creator of the sign?--that is to say, how can the understanding, which is a quality of the existence of man, comprehend God? Therefore, the Reality of the Divinity is hidden from all comprehension, and concealed from the minds of all men. We see that everything which is lower is powerless to comprehend the reality of that which is higher. . . . Therefore, how can man, the created, understand the reality of the pure Essence of the Creator?[26]

The “lower” and “higher” refer to ontological dependence. That which is “lower” in the scale of being depends on that which is “higher,” and God, being independent of all things, is the highest and therefore, beyond comprehension by any created thing. Another way in which the Writings emphasize God’s transcendence of the ordinary attributes of being is by the use of such phrases as “the All-Bounteous, the Most Generous,”[27] “the Almighty, the All-Knowing.”[28] Phrases like this abound throughout the Writings. All of them indicate that God possess these attributes pre-eminently, in a way that surpasses the nature of all created things.

Perhaps the most dramatic statement of God’s transcendence vis-à-vis the created, phenomenal world is the following quotation:

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.[29]

A clearer and categorical statement of God’s transcendence is difficult to imagine, since there is “no direct intercourse” and “no resemblance whatever” between the Divine and creation. Implicit within this is the conclusion that none of the attributes that apply to phenomenal existence apply to God, i.e. that God’s mode of existence is utterly different in kind from ours.

Plotinus pursues this same line of thought from a more philosophical perspective. He writes:

The First must be without form, and if without form, then it has no Being. Being must have some definition and therefore be limited.; but The First cannot be thought of as having a definition and limit, for thus it would not be the Source [of form and limit] but the particular item indicated by the definition assigned to it.[30]

Here, too, we see the idea that the One transcends ‘being’ because ‘being’ implies existence as a particular thing and this, in turn, implies having limitation, i.e. definition and form. However,

God surpasses definition and form and therefore exceeds the capacities of the human mind:

“No vision taketh in Him . . .”[31] Because God exceeds form, limit and definition He cannot be merely one more thing among all the other things. He is the pre-condition for their existence and consequently, He must transcend these attributes:

Furthermore, strange as it may seem, for Plotinus God transcends act or will in the ordinary human understanding of these terms (which will have to be amended later), because both of these imply deficiency or lack. We will something to be or to be done, we act in order to achieve goals because we do not yet have whatever thing, situation or condition for which we act. We are a subject acting to obtain a goal of some kind. However, since God is “self-subsisting,”[32] i.e. self-sufficient and lacks nothing, He transcends the ordinary sense of these terms. Another way of explaining this concept is to say that the will of the One is not something which aims at an end, but [is] the end itself. There is no distinction of any kind between the will and its accomplishment.[33]

The logical basis for Rist’s view is the absolute unity of the One or God which vitiates any distinction between intention (will) and act. In God, they are one.

Of course, the Writings refer to “the Divine Will that pervadeth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth”[34] but from our perspective, the qualifier “Divine” already indicates transcendence of any mere human conception of ‘will.’ To claim otherwise would be to posit deficiency in God. However, as Plotinus makes clear, in the case of the One, willing need not be motivated by lack or need for something; rather, the One wills and acts not out of need but from completeness and super-abundance.

In our view, this concept of superabundance is the ontological significance of some of the imagery in the Writings:

This is the Ocean out of which all seas have proceeded, and with which every one of them will ultimately be united. From Him all the Suns have been generated, and unto Him they will all return. Through His potency the Trees of Divine Revelation have yielded their fruits . . . [35]

We might characterize this as the ‘imagery of excess,’ i.e. the imagery of superabundance, emphasized by the capitalization of such words as “Ocean.” Other examples are “Ocean of everlasting bounty,”[36] “the Most Great Ocean,”[37] and “the ocean of My eternal wealth.”[38] These suggestions of super-abundance are also implicit in such epithets of God as “the All-Possessing,”[39] “the All-Bounteous, the Most Generous,”[40] and “the Great Giver.”[41]

The language and imagery we have examined in the Writings and the Enneads suggests that God's actions are the consequence of His superabundance and His transcendence of all merely phenomenal qualities.

3.1 The Second Mode of Discourse About God

In his article on the modes of discourse about God, Bales identifies a second mode of discourse [which] is employed when Plotinus speaks of The Good [i.e. the One or God] as though it is within Being rather than beyond it, the essence of Act, containing all things potentially, as having some kind of Consciousness, Will, Mind and as being the Transcendent Self. This mode of discourse I shall designate ontological.[42]

In other words, the second mode of discourse treats the Good, the One or God as having presence in the phenomenal world instead of only transcending it. He quotes Plotinus:

Hence the Good is not to be sought outside [of the Good]; it could not have fallen outside of what is; it cannot possibly be found in non-Being; within Being the Good must lie, since it is never a non-Being. If that Good has Being and is within the realm of Being, then it is present, self-contained, in everything: we, therefore, are not separated from Being; we are in it.; nor is Being separated from us; therefore all beings are one.[43]

In Plotinus' view, the Good cannot be entirely divorced from the phenomenal world of being because it would be without presence within creation, and this absence would effectively be equivalent to "non-Being" within creation. This is impossible since the Good cannot be "non-Being" anywhere: such an absence of the Good would be a deficiency. In the language of the Writings, the Good would no longer be "omnipresent"[44] and, therefore, lacking an essential divine attribute. Because the Good is also present (somehow) in the world of being, we are not separated from the Good and are joined together by its presence.

However, we must not conclude that Plotinus means that the Good literally incarnates itself in specific objects; rather the Good is present pre-eminently, i.e. in a manner consistent with its own divine nature. The Writings also reject the belief that God's presence in creation means that God is somehow divided or distributed in the particular objects of the world. `Abdu'l-Bahá categorically denies the Sufi view which requires that the Independent Wealth should descend to the degree of poverty, that the Preexistent should confine itself to phenomenal forms, and that Pure Power should be restricted to the state of weakness, according to the limitations of contingent beings. And this is an evident error. [45]

Although the Bahá'í Writings disallow incarnation as a mode of God's presence in creation, they

explicitly recognize God's presence in the phenomenal world. Bahá'u'lláh writes, "No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it." [46] Perceiving God "within" things is to see the presence of the Divine in them, and by extension, in the phenomenal world. Of course, the Divine is not present in the phenomenal world in the same way we are as incarnated beings. (The phrases "God before it" and, perhaps, "God after it" refer to the transcendence of God.) God's presence is also evident in the following quotation:

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man Again He saith: "And also in your own selves: will ye not, then, behold the signs of God?" [47]

The concept of God's presence through the revelation of the "attributes and names of God" is clearly evident in this passage, which also asserts that this revelation is necessary for phenomenal things to exist. No kind of existence from the atoms to humankind is exempt from revealing signs of God. Furthermore, it is worth noting that humans have a privileged place for the divine presence to reveal itself: "And also in your own selves: will ye not, then, behold the signs of God?" [48] Elsewhere, God reveals that "We are closer to man than his life-vein." [49] A more dramatic way of emphasizing God's presence in humankind and in the phenomenal world is difficult to imagine.

The Neoplatonists recognize that God's "attributes and names" are present throughout creation. Proclus refines this insight into a universal principle of ontology:

Prop. 18. Everything which by its existence bestows a character on others itself primitively [originally] possess that character which it communicates to its recipients. [50]

Any cause, therefore, "communicates" some of its nature or character to what it causes and thus retains a presence in the effect. The operation of this principle is most readily evident in the creation of art, but it is really a principle that describes action at all levels of reality.

The Writings also portray God's presence in the phenomenal world through His Will and His actions:

"He doeth whatsoever He willeth in the kingdom of creation," that thereby the sign of His sovereignty might be manifested in all things. [51]

Here we observe how God acts “in the kingdom of creation” rather than remaining transcendently distant from it; moreover, He does so to manifest signs of His presence in the phenomenal world. In a similar vein, the Writings say:

. . . He doeth whatsoever He willeth and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth. Know thou moreover that all else besides Him have been created through the potency of a word from His presence, while of themselves they have no motion nor stillness, except at His bidding and by His leave.[52]

God wills and ordains, i.e. issues commands that lead to the creation of the phenomenal world among other things. Even more, nothing in creation has “motion” or “stillness” except by God’s “leave” or permission, i.e. all things depend on God’s permission to act or not. This emphasizes the extraordinary degree through which God’s power is present through the actions of all things. He actively operates within creation on an on-going basis in all our “motion []or stillness.”

God is also portrayed as acting in the phenomenal world by means of progressive revelation according to which He takes part in human history by sending Manifestations to guide us through the next phase of our historical development. The Manifestation is the intermediary through which this is accomplished.[53] God also establishes a covenant with humankind and assists us in our troubles when He listens to or answers our prayers. He is portrayed as a “beneficent Father,”[54] which is another image involving presence-in-the-world, as is the image of God as the “compassionate physician,”[55] and “the Healer, the Preserver.”[56] These and other quotations make it clear that in addition to being utterly transcendent to the phenomenal world, God is also portrayed as having presence within it.

If the One or God has a will to cause specific acts in the phenomenal world, it seems logical to suppose that God, in some sense, has a self, i.e. an identity, desires[57] and a will. Otherwise, how, or why would it act in creation? In this way, the One may be portrayed as being within the world. This is conclusion drawn by Bales, who claims that the Enneads’ discourse about the Good proceeds “as though it is within Being rather than beyond it:”[58] the Good also is portrayed as having a ‘self’ which would, of course, make it the “Supreme Subject or Self.”[59] Plotinus says, “He is what He is, the first self, transcendently The Self.”[60] The One, therefore, has, to that extent, an identity and the will to express itself and its decrees, though to a greater degree than any created thing.[61] In the traditional language of theology, it has these attributes pre-eminently.

The Bahá’í Writings also seem to suggest – albeit more tenuously – that God has a self and refer to it in a number of passages. For example, in his discussion about the four kinds of love `Abdu'l-Bahá says that the third kind of love is the love of God towards the Self or Identity of God. This is the transfiguration of His Beauty, the reflection of Himself in the mirror of His Creation. This is the reality of love, the Ancient Love, the Eternal[62]

Not only do we observe God's presence "in the mirror of His creation" but also we have an explicit reference to God's "Self" and "identity." Indeed, in this case, we have a self-reflexive action by God, one in which He is both subject-actor and object-recipient. Such internal division is unthinkable to a transcendent God and is conceivable only to an entity within the world of being. Furthermore, the Writings state that God "hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self." [63] Moreover, some of God's actions are portrayed as being consistent with a being which has a sense of self:

He bestoweth His favor on whom He willeth, and from whom He willeth He taketh it away. He doth whatsoever He chooseth . . . He hath, however, caused you to be entangled with its affairs, in return for what your hands have wrought in His Cause. [64]

Elsewhere, God "willeth, and ordaineth that which He pleaseth." [65] Bestowing favor, willing, taking, causing and being pleased – are the kinds of actions consistent with a self that is involved with creation. This raises the suggestion that God acts like a self or person insofar as He has an identity, conscious knowledge ("the All-knowing, the All-Wise" [66]), desires and will or intentionality. Of course, to say this is only to say that He does not lack these attributes, not that He is limited by them. [67] Nonetheless, the possession of these attributes allows us to conclude that God's relationship to us involves a personal aspect; that God is a 'person' in some pre-eminent way. Conversely, we might say that it would be mistaken to claim that the Bahá'í view of God is impersonal or non-personal. He is not only a power or ground-of-being, though He is these things as well. The personal aspect of God's relationship to us is also evident in the Manifestation Who, as we shall see below, reflects the personhood of God into the phenomenal world. It is through the Manifestation that we relate to God personally.

3.2 The Third Mode of Discourse About God

Bales refers to the third mode of discourse about the One or God as "paradoxical." [68] By this he means that it joins and "shows the relationship between the first two modes of discourse," [69] it exhibits traits of both the transcendent mode of discourse and the imminent mode of discourse that indicates the One's actions in the world. Bales' paradigm case for the third mode in Plotinus is self-causation. [70] The One is said to be self-caused – but how can this be? For something to cause itself it would have to exist in order to bring itself into existence before it existed! The cause and the caused are identical: "his [the One's] self-making is to be understood as simultaneous with Himself; the being is one and the same with the making." [71] This is logically untenable, or, to use Bales' term, "paradoxical." However, by means of this paradox, Plotinus unifies the discourse of God as transcendent to being, i.e. transcendent to the phenomenal world as we have seen in the first discussion and the discourse of God as imminent or acting within being as we saw in the second.

Can such paradoxical concepts be found in the Bahá'í Writings? In our view, they can, both implicitly and explicitly. For example, both Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá refer to God as the

“Self-Subsisting.”[72] Self-subsistence means independence of anything outside itself, i.e. absolute self-sufficiency, i.e. complete transcendence over the conditions of phenomenal existence in which such uncompromised self-sufficiency is impossible. In the phenomenal world of being self-sufficiency means being one’s own final, formal, efficient and material cause[73] - something that no phenomenal thing can be. Yet God is exactly that from the phenomenal perspective. Thus, like the concept of self-causation in Plotinus, the concept of self-subsistence paradoxically unifies two contradictory perspectives and modes of discourse.

Another example of such paradoxical concepts is found in the phrase that God is “he most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!”[74] Unlike the previous example, the paradox is quite explicit here. As absolutely transcendent, God is “the most hidden of the hidden” and yet as present throughout creation (God is seen, in, before and after things as explained above) God is plainly manifest or visible if we have the desire to see. The transcendent and immanent modes of discourse are joined in this description of God as they are in the statement, “Nothing have I perceived except that I perceived God before it, God after it, or God with it” which we have already examined.”[75] Here, too, God’s transcendence and immanence are joined in one paradoxical statement.

Perhaps the most important example of unifying the transcendent and immanent perspectives is found in the discourse about the Manifestation. It should be noted at this point that in the *Enneads* no counterpart to the concept of a Manifestation exists. The knowledge required to achieve freedom and salvation at the personal and social levels needed only individual knowledge and effort and did not require guidance from someone through whom God speaks. Enlightenment came to the individual seeker through mystical union with the One, which Plotinus describes as:

the life of the gods and of the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of the earth, the passing of the solitary to [the] solitary.[76]

The “solitary,” of course, refers in the first instance to the human seeker who is alone in his quest for enlightenment and in the second, to the One who has no peer or likeness and is, therefore, alone.

Discourse about the Bahá’í concept of the Manifestation includes and unifies transcendent and immanent elements. It may be objected that this subject has little or no connection to the transcendence and immanence of God; after all, the Manifestation is not God.

While this is patently true of the Manifestation in His earthly station, the issue is more complex vis-à-vis His divine station. The following passage paradoxically joins both of these stations in the person of the Manifestation himself:

When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things “verily I am God”; and when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay![77]

The transcendent aspect is in the statement, “I am God” since it is only through the Manifestation that we can know anything about God. As Baha'u'llah says:

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: "I am God," He, verily, speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His names and His attributes, are made manifest in the world[78]

However, Baha'u'llah's statement that when he considers Himself, He finds Himself “coarser than clay!” includes the immanent aspect of existence which His being also includes. Here is another example:

“Manifold and mysterious is My relationship with God. I am He, Himself, and He is I, Myself, except that I am that I am, and He is that He is.” And in like manner, the words: "Arise, O Muhammad, for lo, the Lover and the Beloved are joined together and made one in Thee.”[79]

The Manifestation embraces two contradictory identities, His own identity as a creation and his identity as God the Creator and this duality-in-one necessarily requires paradoxical discourse as the foregoing passage illustrates. The second part of this passage also exemplifies the paradoxical discourse required by the Manifestation's duality-in-one. The “Beloved,” of course, is God, “the Desire of the world”[80] and in this statement the lover and the “Beloved” are paradoxically one.

We may, therefore, conclude that the Manifestation combines in one being both transcendent and immanent aspects and any discourse about the nature of the Manifestation is inevitably paradoxical. We observe this in the following selection:

Thus, viewed from the standpoint of their oneness and sublime detachment, the attributes of Godhead, Divinity, Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence, have been, and are applicable to those Essences of Being [Manifestations], inasmuch as they all abide on the throne of Divine Revelation, and are established upon the seat of Divine Concealment.[81]

The Manifestation possess the “attributes of Godhead” and the “Inmost Essence,” i.e. the attributes of transcendence. It is worth noting that this passage contains another related paradox: the Manifestation is established both on the “throne of Divine Revelation” and “Divine Concealment; He is both hidden and revealed, with the hidden referring to the transcendent aspect and the revealed to His worldly, immanent aspect.

However, the Manifestations also possess aspects associated with immanence in the world of being:

Viewed in the light of their second station--the station of distinction, differentiation, temporal limitations, characteristics and standards--they manifest absolute servitude, utter destitution, and complete self-effacement. Even as He saith: "I am the servant of God. I am but a man like you." [82]

The attributes listed here are those of ordinary, limited beings: they are conditioned by time, have identifiable characteristics, have distinct form and, like all other contingent beings are "nothingness" [83] vis-à-vis God. This stands in sharp contrast to their transcendent attributes.

The dual nature of the Manifestations, the possession of both transcendent and immanent attributes inevitably makes any discourse about their nature paradoxical insofar as it must combine these inherently contradictory aspects. Efforts to avoid this paradox can only end in developing a distorted understanding of the nature of Manifestations. Hence, from a Bahá'í viewpoint, a purely humanistic or secular understanding of Manifestations is inherently false.

A clear concept of these three modes of discourse is useful in at least three ways. First, it defuses misunderstanding and/or possible critique. The Writings are not contradicting themselves in their various ways of speaking about God, saying first one kind of thing and then the opposite. Rather, they discourse about God in three distinct modes appropriate to three distinct viewpoints: the viewpoint of absolute transcendence of the phenomenal world; the viewpoint of immanence or presence within the phenomenal world and the viewpoint of the Manifestation Who exemplifies both transcendence and presence. Because the three modes are based on three different point of view, the Writings cannot be contradictory in their discourse about the divine. Second, awareness of the three modes of discourse and the viewpoints from which they originate helps us think more precisely about any statements the Writings make about God by relating the modes of discourse to particular points of view.

Third, the shared three modes of discourse about the Divine suggest that the Writings and the Enneads share a common understanding of God's way of being and relating to creation. Of course, this discourse can only reflect what human capacity allows us to know and, therefore, reflects our understanding of God's way of being as related to us through the revelation of His Manifestations. [84] Nonetheless, we should not overlook the fact that this understanding, while limited, is still genuine understanding and knowledge that reflects the realities of our human situation. There are truths available. Forgetting this all too easily leads to a relativism, skepticism and, at its worst, nihilism.

4: Human Being: Body and Soul

We shall begin our examination of human being in the Bahá'í Writings and the Enneads with a study of the relationship between the soul and body. According to `Abdu'l-Bahá, the soul is not located within the body:

the rational soul, meaning the human spirit, does not descend into the body--that is to say, it does not enter it [the body], for descent and entrance are characteristics of bodies, and the rational soul is exempt from this. The spirit never entered this body so in quitting it, it will not be need of an abiding place.[85]

Time and space, ascent and descent and entrance and departure are attributes of material things and soul or “the human spirit is an intellectual, not sensible reality.”[86] Therefore, it does not enter or leave anything. This naturally raises the question of the soul’s relationship to the body, about which `Abdu'l-Bahá, says:

Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident--that is to say, the body--be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.[87]

Because this explanation is couched in Aristotelian philosophical terminology, a few preparatory remarks are in order. A substance in Aristotle’s philosophy is, primarily, anything that “exists by itself” as a distinct and individual entity be it a sensible or intellectual reality.[88] Every substance has attributes which depend on it, just as `Abdu'l-Bahá describes how, in one view, the soul “depends upon the substance of the body.” Attributes are of two kinds: essential attributes are those which a substance needs to have to be the thing it is, e.g. water-tightness in a cup, and, accidental attributes are those which it may have but does not need to be what it is, e.g. the color of the cup. In the materialist view, in which the “body is the substance . . . [and] . . . the spirit is accidental,” the non-essential soul need not be present for the body to exist as a body.

`Abdu'l-Bahá takes a diametrically opposite position. In his view the “rational soul is the substance,” i.e. exists independently and the body is the accident, i.e. non-essential to the existence of the soul. Therefore, the body may pass away but the soul will survive:

The rational soul--that is to say, the human spirit-- has neither entered this body nor existed through it; so after the disintegration of the composition of the body, how should it be in need of a substance through which it may exist?[89]

This statement has at least three major consequences. First, it demonstrates the soul’s

independence from the body, and, thereby, its immortality, a viewpoint Plotinus shares.[90] Proclus elevates this idea to a basic principle of Neoplatonism: “Prop. 186. Every soul is an incorporeal substance and separable from body.”[91] This is only possible because the soul is the cause of the body, i.e. without the soul there would be no body at all. As an attribute, body is dependent and cannot exist without the soul, i.e. it takes a soul to make an actual body as distinct from a conglomeration of elements or a mechanical device. This relationship of dependence is not reciprocal.

Third, `Abdu'l-Bahá's position is, in effect, a rejection of emergentism and reductionism. Emergentism is a group of philosophies based on the belief that new, irreducible and unpredictable attributes appear or emerge as material structures become more complex; while the ‘emergents,’ such as mind, consciousness or soul, cannot be reduced to their material substratum, they cannot exist without it either. This is obviously not compatible with what `Abdu'l-Bahá has written here since the soul is the independent substance and the body the dependent accident. Emergentism should not be confused with the following statement in Some Answered Questions:

Moreover, these members, these elements, this composition, which are found in the organism of man, are an attraction and magnet for the spirit; it is certain that the spirit will appear in it. So a mirror which is clear will certainly attract the rays of the sun.[92]

This differs from `Abdu'l-Bahá's position insofar as in emergentism the very existence of the soul depends on its material substratum. In the foregoing quotation, the appearance or presence – but not the existence – of the soul or spirit in the phenomenal world depends on a certain level of physical complexity. Second, according to `Abdu'l-Bahá, the soul is ‘external’ to the complex organism insofar as it is attracted from a higher ontological level than matter whereas emergentism (and reductionism) views the soul as on par or dependent on matter. Reductionism holds that only attributes present in the original components of the material substratum of a complex structure are real and that all phenomena such as life or mind can be explained by or reduced to the qualities of the underlying matter. In effect, the soul is a property of matter. Clearly, this, too, contradicts `Abdu'l-Bahá's statements. Both emergentism and reductionism make the soul dependent on its material foundation and both reduce the soul to the same ontological plane as matter.

Fourth, the distinction between soul and body is not a distinction between two utterly different and independent substances as, in for example, the philosophy of Descartes. In fact, there is only one substance – soul; the body is an attribute of that soul-substance when it appears in the

material world. This, in effect, dissolves the mind-body problem since we are not dealing with two separate and unrelated substances but with one substance – soul – and an accidental attribute – body. There is no ‘problem’ or ‘mystery’ about how a substance can communicate with or is linked to its own attributes; no ‘communication’ – as if between two separate things – is necessary because attributes are essentially (permanently) or accidentally (temporarily) part of the substance. From the Bahá’í perspective, the so-called mind-body problem does not exist.

Let us now investigate the Neoplatonic view. According to Pauliina Remes, “given the overall causal and explanatory directions [of Neoplatonism], the body is not a separate substance but generated by the soul.”[93] Plotinus writes, “Soul on the contrary is that which engenders the Form residing within the Matter and therefore is not the Form. “[94] Leaving aside the philosophical technicalities regarding “Form” this statement means that ultimately the soul causes the existence of the body so the Enneads, like the Writings reject emergentism and reductionism. This conclusion echoes `Abdu'l-Bahá’s statement about the soul as substance and the body as accident produced by the soul.

Furthermore, Plotinus shares the view that the soul is not in the body: Neither the Soul entire nor any part of it may be considered to be within the body as in a space . . . the Soul is not a body and is no more contained than containing.[95]

Plotinus then proceeds to refine what he means by explaining that “the mode of the Soul’s presence to body is that of the presence of light to the air [.]”[96] He adds that this image is accurate because while the air constantly shifts, the light is “stable” and that “the air is in the light rather than the light in the air.”[97] Later, he adds, “a living body is illuminated by soul”[98] just as air is illuminated by light. For Plotinus, the body is ‘in’ the soul because the body is dependent on the soul for its existence; in his system of emanations, the spiritual is always higher than the material if for no other reason than that the material is the lowest level of being. The physical depends on the spiritual to exist.[99] As William Inge puts it so aptly, “the Soul ‘is present’ with the Body, but not within it.”[100]

The analogous soul-body relationship in the Writings and the Enneads leads to some similar conclusions, the most obvious of which is the immortality of the soul.[101] Being spiritual makes the soul non-composite, and, therefore, immune to destruction. Another implication is that the soul is the active principle in its relationship to the body and that the body is passive. According to Abdu'l-Bahá, “the soul as thou observest, whether it be in sleep or waking, is in motion and ever active.”[102] Soul, says Plotinus, is “act and creation”[103] and “is the starting

point of motion and becomes the leader and provider of motion to all else.”[104] In other words, even physical motion is a symptom of, or, perhaps material metaphor for, spiritual action. This, in turn, suggests that the material derives its value from the spiritual,[105] illustrating, thereby, how intimately ontology and value are related both in the Writings and in the Enneads. The value of anything depends on its ontological position in the cosmic hierarchy in which God or the One is the most valuable at the apex and matter being the least valuable at the lowest level. Value in this instance is determined by the degree of creativity something has or, conversely, how many other things depend on it. Since everything depends on God or the One, He has supreme value.

5: Psychology or Ontology?

At this point an objection may be raised. When Plotinus speaks of the soul, he sometimes seems to be speaking about the World Soul i.e. about ontology, and sometimes he seems to be speaking about the souls of individual humans, i.e. about psychology. This brings us to one of the distinguishing features of Plotinus and Neoplatonism in general, namely, that the ontological or metaphysical and the psychological reflect one another. Pauliina Remes refers to the internalization of the Platonic metaphysical hierarchy. In some manner, a human being encompasses, or is fundamentally related to, the metaphysical levels. She is not an outside spectator.[106]

R..T. Wallis, for example, observes that in Neoplatonism, metaphysics and psychology “cannot be sharply separated.”[107]

Viewed as a metaphysical reality each level is real in its own right; viewed as states of consciousness, on the other hand, the lower levels become imperfect ways of viewing the true realities contemplated by the ‘higher’ ones.[108]

Emilsson agrees, writing that “at the intelligible level, being and knowledge, ontology and epistemology, are unified.”[109]

These two viewpoints – the ontological and the psychological – are not contradictory and exclusive but rather, they are complementary because each promotes understanding of different aspects of reality. We can adopt both understandings simultaneously. Of course, the higher is always paradigmatic for the lower; the lower always reflects the higher to the limits of its capacity. Proclus, the great systematizer of the Enneads, succinctly sums up this idea when he writes, “For each principle participates its superiors in the measure of its natural capacity and not in the measure of their being.”[110] In other words, to the limits of its ability, all things, including the human soul reflect the nature and activities of the World Soul. Bahá'u'lláh states:

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 . . . To a supreme degree is this true of man . . . [111]

Each thing reveals the “attributes and names of God” to the limit of its capacity. In *The Elements of Theology*, Proclus writes, “All is in all but in each appropriately to its nature”[112] Every level of reality is present in every other but in a manner that is appropriate to its capacities and limitations. Because “all is in all” the psychological reflects or participates in the ontological and, therefore, by looking inward, we can learn a great deal about the ontological nature of reality. This teaching of the “all in all” opens up far-reaching possibilities for a ‘subjective science,’ i.e. a ‘science’ of subjectivity which explores reality by a rigorous study of subjective consciousness. Such a development has obvious affinities to modern phenomenology.

6: Humankind as Microcosm

The idea of the “all in all” implicitly contains the notion that humankind is a microcosm. Pauliina Remes writes:

A basic feature that metaphysics reveals about Neoplatonic anthropology is that to be human is to exist on and in a sense encompass all metaphysics levels: the sensible realm of time and matter, and the hypostases, that is, the Soul, the Intellect and the One.[113]

In a manner appropriate to our nature, humankind ‘contains’ the phenomenal realm and even the hypostases. Of course, the phrase “in a sense” suggests that we cannot accept this claim literally.

Rather, it seems to mean that the phenomenal realm and the hypostases have a presence as signs or images within us, or, as the principles operative in the rest of reality also operate in us. One might also call this a ‘holographic likeness.’ In a holographic picture, every portion reflects the whole to a degree proportional to its segment of the whole, i.e. to its nature.

This view of humankind as a microcosm is explicitly adopted by Plotinus:

For the Soul is many things, is all, is the Above and the Beneath to the totality of life: and each of us is an Intellectual Cosmos, linked to the world by what is lowest in us, but, by what is the Highest, [linked] to the Divine Intellect: by all that is intellective we are permanently in that higher realm, but by the fringe of the Intellectual, we are fettered to the lower.[114]

Metaphysically speaking, human beings live in various levels of reality or, to put it psychologically, in various states of mind. We are an “Intellectual Cosmos” because we reflect or ‘contain’ the principles at work throughout created reality; we touch on both the “higher” and “lower” realms although it must be emphasized again, we do so in a manner proportionate to the capacities and limitations of our essential nature.

The idea of humankind as a microcosm is also found in the Bahá’í Writings:

Man is the microcosm; and the infinite universe, the macrocosm. The mysteries of the greater world, or macrocosm, are expressed or revealed in the lesser world, the microcosm . . . Likewise, the greater world, the macrocosm, is latent and miniaturized in the lesser world, or microcosm, of man. This constitutes 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.[115]

Similarly, we read, “Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him.”[116] This passage may be understood to mean that humankind expresses or discloses all the principles operative throughout the macrocosm. In us, these principles are “latent” which is to say, hidden or concealed – like “mysteries” – presumably until such time as human evolution allows us to become conscious of and reveal them. Since the universe is “infinite,” this evolutionary unconcealing process within humankind will endure infinitely. In all likelihood, the reference to “virtues” here refers not so much to virtues in an ethical sense, but virtues in the sense of powers or capacities inherent in the rest of creation as well as in humankind. Because God also possesses these capacities to a pre-eminent degree, humankind is an image of God as stated above by `Abdu'l-Bahá. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh clearly tells us that even atoms contain signs of the revelation of God and that:

[t]o a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed.[117]

Here, too, we observe that humankind is a microcosm or image of God containing, at least potentially, “all the attributes and names of God.” Of course, these attributes are present in us in a manner appropriate to our particular and limited human nature. Proclus proposition # 103 – “All things are in all things but in each according to its proper nature” – appears to apply in the Bahá’í Writings as well not only vis-à-vis creation but also vis-à-vis the signs of God within us.

One of the logical consequences of the doctrine of the microcosm is that turning inward is one way for humankind to encounter the Divine. In the Arabic Hidden Words Bahá'u'lláh says:

Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.[118]

In our view, a literal reading of this passage presents so many logical obstacles as to make it untenable. At the very least, it violates `Abdu'l-Bahá’s statement:

It [the sun, i.e. God] does not appear in the substance of things through the specification and individualization of things; the Preexistent [God] does not become the phenomenal; independent wealth does not become enchained poverty; pure perfection does not become absolute imperfection.[119]

If Bahá'u'lláh’s statement cannot be taken literally, then it is inevitable that the phrase “Me standing within thee” refers to the signs of God or of the Manifestation abiding within the human microcosm. This is why it is so important to attain self-knowledge, not just of our ego and conscious selves but of our spiritual human nature as microcosms:

In this connection, He Who is the eternal King -- may the souls of all that dwell within the mystic Tabernacle be a sacrifice unto Him -- hath spoken: “He hath known God who hath known himself.”[120]

Interpreting this passage literally instead of reading it as a reference to an inward sign of God adapted to our human capacities could lead – at its worst – to a potentially disastrous inflation of the human ego.

7: The Lower and Higher Aspects of Humankind

One of the consequences of being a microcosm is that human beings also have a higher and

lower nature that corresponds to the general cosmic order with its higher i.e. divine and lower, i.e. material aspects. This understanding of our dual or nature is evident in the Writings. For example, `Abdu'l-Bahá states:

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. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. 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.[121]

We might say that humans are “amphibious”[122] i.e. they live in two worlds, though, of course, they must ultimately choose which of these worlds is to predominate and guide our development. This is made clear by `Abdu'l-Bahá’s foregoing statement which associates all positive virtues with our higher nature and negative attributes with our lower nature. Similar ideas are expressed in the following passage:

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality--that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light; that is why it has been said that the condition of man is the end of the night and the beginning of day, meaning that he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and that he possesses the degrees of perfection. He has the animal side as well as the angelic side[123]

This declaration takes an ontological perspective of humankind’s duality, pinpointing our location in the hierarchy of being at the borderline between “materiality” and “spirituality.” This borderline ontological location is reflected in our dual nature. It is noteworthy, too, that `Abdu'l-Bahá associates “materiality” with imperfection and “spirituality” with perfection – a connection clearly made in the philosophy of Plotinus who not only associates the higher with the divine and the lower with the body but also holds that the soul occupies an intermediate position between higher and lower levels of reality:

But in spite of it all [being in a body] it has, for ever, something transcendent; by a conversion towards the intellectual act, it [the soul] is loosed from the shackles and soars . . . Souls that take this way have place in both spheres, living of necessity the life there and the life here by turns, the upper life reigning in those able to consort more continuously with the divine intellect, the lower dominant where character or circumstances are less favourable.[124]

Elsewhere he states that “every human Being is of two-fold character.”[125] Pierre Hadot sums up the situation succinctly:

The human soul occupies an intermediate position between realities inferior to it – matter and the life of the body – and realities superior to it: purely intellectual life characteristic of divine intelligence and, higher still, the pure existence of the Principle of all things.[126]

According to Remes, Plotinus holds that “human beings are ‘amphibious’” – they live two kinds of life, those of the intellect and those of the composite.” [127] The “composite”[128] refers to the view that the human body is matter and a form which endows it with animal life. ‘Intellect,’ of course, refers to the higher spiritual life of the Nous (translated as ‘Spirit’ by Inge) which finds its image in the human soul; ‘intellect’ does not simply mean the ‘rational intellect.

It is clear, therefore, that both the Writings and Plotinus position humankind between two contradictory types of reality, matter and intellect or spirit. This has some interesting philosophical consequences. Because humanity has two different natures we may conclude that humankind is inherently and constitutively self-contradictory, divided, paradoxical, or, even absurd. Existentialism is, of course, the philosophy that has richly explored these aspects of our existence from both an atheist and theist perspective.[129] At the same time, in terms of process or dynamics, humankind might well be described as a dialectic since it would appear our entire lives are an on-going interaction of these two sides of ourselves as we evolve. This ‘between’ situation in which we find ourselves is an interesting connection point between the ancient philosopher Plotinus, the Writings and contemporary philosophy.

8: Actualizing Our Highest Potentials

The foregoing passages show that both the Writings and Plotinus maintain that our challenge as human beings is to actualize our higher potentials by cultivating that which is spiritual in us. `Abdu'l-Bahá re-emphasizes this theme when he writes:

He has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side. Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes the satanic power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among the creatures; but if the satanic power overcomes the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures.[130]

He also says, “If a man's Divine nature dominates his human nature, we have a saint”[131] whose spiritual condition is contrasted to that of a “mere animal.”[132]

Plotinus expresses similar views:

Our task, the, is to work for our liberation from this sphere [the material world], severing Ourselves from all that has gathered around us; the total man is to be something better than a body ensouled- the bodily element dominant with a trace of Soul running through it and resultant life-course mainly of the body. There is another life, emancipated, whose quality is progression towards the higher realm, towards the good and divine . . . [so we may become] . . . the higher, the beautiful, the Godlike. . . [133]

Both passages emphasize the importance of overcoming our lower nature so that human beings may free the full powers of their specifically human natures to become “saints”[134] or “Godlike.”

In other words, both agree that human beings do not have a natural destiny but rather a supernatural destiny – a view which follows logically from the fundamentally spiritual nature of humankind.

However, we must not be deceived into thinking that Plotinus and the Bahá'í Writings completely disparage the body, let alone recommend sharp ascetic practices. Our challenge is neither to over or underestimate the body and to keep it in control. Plotinus writes:

He [the sage] will give to the body all that he sees to be useful and possible, but he himself remains a member of another order . . . [the body is] the thing which he tends and bears with as a musician cares for his lyre, as long as it serves him . . . [135]

This is an eminently practical attitude; we must do our best to look after our body properly but must not become obsessed about catering to it. The Bahá'í view on this subject is perhaps best summarized by Shoghi Effendi, who categorically states:

We are not ascetics in any sense of the word. On the contrary, Bahá'u'lláh says God has created all the good things in the world for us to enjoy and partake. But we must not become attached to them and put them before the spiritual things.[136]

Quite clearly, both the Writings and Plotinus both adopt an attitude of moderation in regards to the body.

9: Free Will

Both the Writings and Plotinus agree that human beings have free will. Having accepted free will as a basic datum of human nature, Plotinus proceeds to define what this freedom is:

We think of our free act as one which we execute of our own choice, in no servitude to chance or necessity or overmastering passion nothing thwarting our will . . . everything will be ‘voluntary’ that is produced under no compulsion and with knowledge[137]

Elsewhere he adds, “Where act is performed neither because of another nor at another’s will, surely there is freedom.”[138] In many respects his ideas are quite modern insofar as they present a ‘negative freedom’ i.e. freedom from outside interference by other people or circumstances as an essential part of being free. Furthermore, he requires knowledge for informed consent to an act. Interestingly enough, he requires not being in the grip of an “overmastering passion” as a criterion for a free act. That which hinders us from implementing “our own choice” may well come from within yet nonetheless, it is not really ‘us’ and we could find ourselves as “slaves of passion”[139] This concept of negative freedom is also evident when he writes:

Effort is free once it is towards a fully recognized good; the involuntary [unfree] is, precisely, motion away from the good and towards the enforced, towards something not recognized as good; servitude lies in being powerless to move towards one’s good, being debarred from the preferred path in menial obedience. Hence the shame of slavery is that . . . [is when] the personal good must be yielded in favour of another’s. [140]

Freedom requires that we are not forced away or deterred by others from our desired good and have the capacity or power to achieve our good. Anything else is “servitude” or lack of freedom.

However, Plotinus’ view of free will is not limited to ‘negative freedom’ of non-interference. Absence of interference is a necessary condition for exercising our free will but it is not, by itself, sufficient. Plotinus writes:

Soul becomes free when it moves without hindrance, through Intellectual Principle [Nous], towards The Good: what it does in that spirit is its free act . . . That principle of Good is the sole

object of desire and the source of self-disposal to the rest.[141]

According to Plotinus, full freedom requires a lack of external or internal hindrance but also requires that our acts be towards the Good. If they are not, then our so-called freedom is deficient or incomplete and we, in effect are not entirely free. However, Plotinus' view goes further. Because he believes that all things naturally seek to approach the good in a way befitting their nature, he also thinks that anything which takes us away from the Good is, in effect, "enforced," "involuntary" and "servitude." Hence, insofar as we move towards the Good, we are fully free.

At this point, an obvious question arises: 'Does freedom not include the ability to do wrong?' Plotinus inclines to a negative answer because in his view, the ability to make negative choices is not necessarily a virtue.

But when our Soul holds to its Reason-Principle, to the guide, pure and detached and native to itself, only then can we speak of personal operations, of voluntary act. Things so done may truly be described as our doing, for they have no other source; they are the issue of the unmingled Soul[142]

Pauliina Remes summarizes Plotinus' position:

Freedom is based on knowledge of universal good and intelligible principles that govern the universe, and is thus not primarily personal or subjective but tied strongly with the intelligible order.[143]

This constitutes a significant difference from modern concepts which closely associate freedom with personal, i.e. subjective choice and action no matter how arbitrary it might seem. On this issue, John Rist writes, "in Plotinus' view true freedom is a direction of the soul to its source in the One." [144] Elsewhere, Rist points out:

Freedom then for Plotinus is not simply equivalent to the power of choice. Rather it is freedom from that necessity of choice which the passions impose. The soul that hesitates between good and evil is not free, nor is such a choice godlike.[145]

R.T. Wallis sums up Plotinus' position:

Clearly, Plotinus does not accept the idea that freedom necessarily requires the possibility of choice among opposites. He writes, the "ability to produce opposites is inability to hold by the

perfect good; that self-making must be definite once for all since it is the right.”[146] He seems to be saying that having the ability to do the bad also means being unable to hold to the good., i.e. being unable to achieve the perfection that is natural to us. Until we can hold to the good so closely that the bad is not even an option for us we are still enslaved to one degree or another, to our passions. In this quest we are assisted by the fact that the good is natural to us because “[t]he spring of freedom is the activity of the Intellectual-Principle, the highest in our being; the proposals emanating thence are freedom.”[147] As humans, the highest aspect of our being is our reflection of the Nous or “Intellectual-Principle” and consequently, our real freedom lies there. It is what we really want even though we may think we want something else. In the words of Lloyd P Gerson, “We are only in control and therefore free when we identify ourselves as agents of rational desire.”[148]

In short, we humans may pursue the pseudo-freedoms of our own desires or the genuine freedom offered by the quest for the One. The former seems genuine but is really restrictive and the latter may feel restrictive but is actually true freedom. This conclusion follows from our human nature which, in Plotinus’s view, is an objectively real and with which we can live in harmony, i.e. freedom, or in disharmony i.e. slavery. Even though we choose to delude ourselves that slavery is freedom, it is slavery nonetheless.

The Bahá’í Writings clearly support the belief that humankind has free will. `Abdu'l-Bahá writes that [s]ome things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions; it is evident and clear that these actions are, for the most part, left to the will of man. But there are certain things to which man is forced and compelled, such as sleep, death, sickness, decline of power, injuries and misfortunes[149]

Elsewhere, he writes, “But in the choice of good and bad actions he is free, and he commits them according to his own will.”[150] What these passages make clear is that moral decisions are within human power but a large number of physical necessities are not. Ethical freedom exists, but freedom in other matters may be non-existent, such as the need to sleep or eat, or severely circumscribed. According to the Writings, we also have freedom of thought – which includes the freedom to think mistakenly as indicated by Shoghi Effendi:

There is, unfortunately, no way that one can force his own good upon a man. The element of free will is there and all we believers--and even the Manifestation of God Himself--can do is to offer the truth to mankind.[151]

Because of free will, belief cannot be compelled even if it is for our own good. Shoghi Effendi also advises an inquirer that “The exercise of our free will to choose to do the right things is much more important [than speculation in astrology]”[152] thereby again drawing attention to free will in matters of morality. In the teaching of the independent investigation of truth the

Writings clearly advocate freedom of thought for each individual, a freedom which is predicated on our ability to think and to exercise free choice. On this issue `Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

When freedom of conscience, liberty of thought and right of speech prevail--that is to say, when every man according to his own idealization may give expression to his beliefs--development and growth are inevitable.[153]

From the foregoing discussion it is plainly evident that the Bahá'í Writings value the importance of free will, free choice and free thought.

9.1: The Limits of Liberty

However, like Plotinus, the Bahá'í Writings do not embrace without qualification the concept that humans are well served by unlimited freedom or that everything which humans choose to call 'freedom' really is freedom in the truest sense of the word. The fact that we have free will as individuals does not necessarily mean that we should follow our inclinations in any direction or that the exercise of free will can, by itself, justify almost anything. Our freedom in the world – which is predicated on our free will – can easily be misused. As Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Consider the pettiness of men's minds. They ask for that which injureth them, and cast away the thing that profiteth them. They are, indeed, of those that are far astray. We find some men desiring liberty, and priding themselves therein. Such men are in the depths of ignorance.

Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition, whose flames none can quench. Thus warneth you He Who is the Reckoner, the All-Knowing. Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal . . . Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness.[154]

Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that not everything we call “liberty” is necessarily “true liberty”[155] – a position similar to that adopted by Plotinus. False understanding of liberty may mislead us into forgetting “Noble have I created thee”[156] and thereby lead to harm, or even to “depravity and wickedness” that disgraces our higher nature. Certainly Bahá'u'lláh rejects the notion that liberty for its own sake can justify negative and self-destructive acts. That is why He says:

We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others. We, verily, are the All-Knowing.

Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty.[157]

This passage makes reemphasizes that Bahá'u'lláh denies any purely subjective concepts of freedom: an act is not necessarily free or not free because we personally think it is. Subjectivity alone does not determine what is or is not free. One of the other, objective factors that must be taken into consideration are the Manifestation's commandments, which reflect what is best for human nature and development whether we personally like it or not. That is why Bahá'u'lláh says freedom is submission to His commands, "little as ye know it" meaning that although we may not recognize a condition as being truly free, it may be free despite our subjective disagreement.

Concrete examples help to clarify His concept. For example, if people drove their cars on the basis of subjective freedom, the roads would be a worse carnage than they are. Ultimately, this kind of purely subjective freedom is no freedom at all because everyone would be stalled amidst the wreckage. The freest driving is made possible by everyone's submission to the rules of the road because there are objective laws of physics that must be obeyed. The same is true in other areas of life. Are people who are compulsive shoplifters or eaters free even though they inflict untold harm on themselves and others? Subjectively, they might claim to make their decisions freely, but are they really? Ultimately, would they not be more free if they submitted to the laws forbidding shoplifting and the medical guidelines providing rules for healthy eating? After all, the 'laws' of physiology are as rigorously objective as the laws of physics as are the acts of our human nature.

To fully understand the second example, we must remember that both Bahá'u'lláh and Plotinus agree that human nature includes higher and lower aspects, and that our real or essential self is associated with our higher nature. Consequently, our "true liberty" is to do whatever strengthens our higher self, and 'false liberty' or unfreedom advances our animal nature. We cannot violate our essential nature and claim to be free in any but the most subjective meaning of the word.

Of course, such a line of argument raises an obvious question: 'What are we free from in the kind of freedom advocated by Bahá'u'lláh?' As with Plotinus, the answer is that we are free from slavery to our passions, to our lower animal nature and to the vagaries of the world. In other words, Bahá'u'lláh's pronouncement is on a convergent course with Plotinus' insofar as both recognize the distinction between true and false liberty and both advocate that submission to

divine commandments and to our noble human nature gives us more genuine freedom than the arbitrary exercise of human preferences. It is obvious of course, that approaching the Good in Plotinus and submitting to Bahá'u'lláh's "commandments" are virtually the same actions. After all, the divine commandments are intended to bring us to the Good.

Both Bahá'u'lláh and Plotinus seem to agree that liberty is not an end-in-itself and its own self-justification but rather is a means to achieve the goals of developing the intellectual and spiritual nature of humankind, of liberating our higher selves. Modern sensibilities are likely to find this unsatisfactory because we think of subjective freedom of choice as the ultimate freedom. Appearances to the contrary, these two concepts of freedom are not necessarily mutually exclusive if we place them in a hierarchy. At the basic level there is freedom of choice, where people have to make all kinds of choices regarding good and ill, their emotions, their values, purpose and goals and so on. This is the level of freedom as generally discussed in our society. However, at a higher level, we find what Emile Brehier calls "radical freedom"[158] the kind of freedom apparent in Plotinus and the Writings, i.e. a freedom from the kind of choices that mark the first level and where individuals are no longer slaves of "passion." Such freedom is greater than its predecessor because the individual "is not a prisoner of any of the forms of reality." [159] This "true liberty" is achieved by following the divine commandments or, in Plotinus' terms, participating in our higher spiritual nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to be thinking of this kind of freedom when he says people must be educated so that they will avoid and shrink from perpetrating crimes, so that the crime itself will appear to them as the greatest chastisement, the utmost condemnation and torment.[160]

When this level of sensitivity and awareness has been attained, the individual no longer experiences crimes or other human weaknesses as possible choices or temptations, and, thereby, no longer a matter of choice. Such individuals have transcended freedom-as-choice to a higher level where freedom finds its fullest expression in likeness to God either by obeying His commandments or evolving to participate more fully in His attributes.

10: Who/What is the Self?

The issue of free will brings us directly to the subject of 'self,' i.e. the individual who acts and experiences subjectivity. We know that we share a universal human nature with other people:

but what about our specific 'selves' who make decisions, have feelings, take actions and are particular, i.e. different from others? What about the "historical personality,"[161] the self-aware person whom I identify as 'me'? What is its origin? How is it related to our universal human nature?

To discuss this matter clearly vis-à-vis the Bahá'í Writings, it is first necessary to review what is said about the soul. According to `Abdu'l-Bahá, “the essence of man is the soul”[162] which is to say, the soul is our unique distinguishing feature as human beings; the essence of a thing is precisely what gives it its identity as the kind of thing it is, in this case, man. This is confirmed when `Abdu'l-Bahá says, “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.”[163] Rationality is one of the divine gifts as indicated when Bahá'u'lláh tells us to “Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man.”[164] This, in turn, suggests that the essence of man and rationality are strictly correlated, i.e. rationality is an essential attribute. The human soul cannot be human without it.

In Plotinus, the situation is similar. The rational soul is the human essence, i.e. what makes us the kind of being we are.[165] Plotinus states:

The true man is the other, going pure of the body, natively endowed with the virtues which belong to the Intellectual Activity . . . This Soul constitutes the human being.[166]

In Plotinus' philosophy, the human soul is an emanation or projection of the Nous or Intellect and thus reflects its rational nature; John Deck calls it an “emissary from the Nous [Intellect].”[167] A similar line of reasoning is at work when Plotinus says “the soul is a rational soul by the very same title by which the All-Soul is called rational.”[168] The All-Soul is that aspect of the third hypostasis, i.e. Soul from which the human soul is emanated; since the hypostasis is rational by nature, so is the human soul. According to Pauliina Remes, “For Plotinus, every person has a single, rational and self-aware soul;[169] Plotinus identifies “the self primarily with the core self, the reasoning capacity.”[170] Like the Writings, he also associates the rational self with the ‘higher self’ that will “illuminate the life of the lower self.”[171] This, by implication makes the rational soul the higher self.[172] In Plotinus' words, “the We (the authentic human principle) loftily presides[s] over the Animate,[173] i.e. our animal nature.

At this point it is already clear that the Writings and Plotinus agree on two issues: the identification of the soul as humankind's essence and the essential rationality of the soul. However, these are the universal aspects of the soul that apply to all human beings, but this does not tell us anything about our individual identity or ‘personality.’ How does this arise? What are its foundations and what is its ultimate destiny?

10.1: The Descent in Plotinus

For Plotinus, the origin of our personal existence is the inevitable result of the soul's fall into the imperfect phenomenal world. The following passages from Pauliina Remes effectively summarize Plotinus' position:

Our home and origin in the intelligible universe, gazing closely at the One or God, yet becoming a human being with a personality, individual characteristics and body, as well as a place and a task in the universe, unrelentingly ties us to the realm below perfection. Thus belonging to something high and perfect, without any individualizing characteristics, is contrasted with being an individual with one's particular existence and personal features. Personality and individuality are understood as essential to our nature, yet connected to imperfection. [174]

The "intelligible universe" is, of course, the *Nous* (sometimes translated as Intellect or Spirit) which contains all potentially existing things: "the Intellectual-Principle [*Nous*] is the authentic existences and contains them all – not as in a place but as possessing itself and being one thing with this content." [175] The "intelligible objects" or the "Authentic Beings" are, in effect, Plato's Ideas, i.e. models for nature, a lower level of reality, to aspire to and imitate in concrete individual examples. This is "intelligible realm" from which the soul descends; our personality is a consequence of this descent. From this, it is clear that personality or individuality begins with the soul's existence as a separate entity.

According to Plotinus, the association of personality with the imperfection of material existence happens because [t]he evil that has overtaken them has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self-ownership. They [the potential souls] conceived a pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged their own motion; . . . they came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine. [176]

Once again, we observe the correlation of the descent into the phenomenal world and the desire for "self-ownership" and "self-will," both of which are attributes of personality. The soul becomes so entranced by these desires that it forgets its divine origin. Plotinus' word for this is 'tolma' which means audacity with a suggestion of hubris. This casts the descent of the soul in a decidedly negative light. He also believes that the soul enters phenomenal reality to actualize its potentials "by exhibiting those activities and productions, which remaining merely potential . . .

might as well have never been . . .[177] While this is a more positive reason for the descent, it is not the explanation emphasized by Plotinus. Finally, Plotinus claims the soul descends partly to “bring order to its next lower [level],”[178] i.e. to act as a form for lower levels of reality. This may be called the soul’s cosmic function. The Bahá’í Writings share these views, though not this attitude towards phenomenal existence.

10.2: The Descent in the Writings

How well Plotinus’ doctrine of *tolma* coincides with the Writings depend on how it is understood. If we interpret it metaphysically, i.e. as an actual choice made by a pre-existing soul, then there is no correspondence. In the Writings, the soul makes no such choice before coming into existence on the “material plane.” However, if it is interpreted psychologically, as a person’s self-assertion towards God, i.e. as an exertion of self-will and hubris, then there is a correspondence. This fall occurs not before birth but can happen at any time in our lives whenever we over-value the blessings of the material world and obey our physical instead of our spiritual impulses.

According to the Writings, self-actualization of potential capacities is the reason for our appearance in the phenomenal world.

The wisdom of the appearance of the spirit in the body is this: the human spirit is a Divine Trust, and it must traverse all conditions, for its passage and movement through the conditions of existence will be the means of its acquiring perfections. So when a man travels and passes through different regions and numerous countries with system and method, it is certainly a means of his acquiring perfection . . . It is the same when the human spirit passes through the conditions of existence: it will become the possessor of each degree and station. Even in the condition of the body it will surely acquire perfections.[179]

As in the *Enneads*, the soul may use its life in the phenomenal world to actualize potentials, or acquire “perfections.” However, unlike the *Enneads*, the Bahá’í Writings view self-actualization as the major cause for our appearance in the material world, and, thereby, retain a more positive outlook on this event. It is not a result of audacity or any other defect as with Plotinus.

..the journey of the soul is necessary. The pathway of life is the road which leads to divine knowledge and attainment. Without training and guidance the soul could never progress beyond the conditions of its lower nature, which is ignorant and defective.[180]

It is evident that the Writings and Plotinus have different emphases in their explanations for the appearance of the soul in the phenomenal world. As we have already seen, for Plotinus, the

appearance in the world is a fall, the self's desire to exert its own unique powers even though this will separate us from the higher realm of the Nous. Although it is an issue of contention whether or not Plotinus thinks that earthly existence degrades the soul, it is apparent that his attitude is ambivalent, being neither whole-hearted embrace nor complete rejection. The following quote illustrates this:

Under the stress of its powers and of its tendency to bring order to its next lower, it penetrates to this sphere in a voluntary plunge; if it [the soul] turns back quickly all is well; it will have taken no hurt by acquiring knowledge of evil and coming to understand what sin is, by bringing its forces into manifest play by exhibiting those activities and productions, which remaining merely potential . . . might as well have never been . . .[181]

We observe both positive and negative elements here. On one hand, all will be well if the soul “turns back quickly” so it will “take no hurt by acquiring knowledge of evil and . . . sin.” Clearly existence in the phenomenal world is not an unalloyed gift nor a necessary phase in the actualization of our capacities. On the positive side of the ledger, Plotinus thinks the soul also provides order to the lower levels of reality, and also actualizes its latent abilities in the phenomenal world. However, Plotinus’ belief that matter is the ontological foundation of evil[182] casts a lugubrious shadow over his view of the material world.

The Bahá’í Writings differ from the Enneads insofar as they are not tinged with any ambivalence about our bodily existence or about our exposure to sin and evil. In regards to the latter, Bahá'u'lláh teaches us to pray, “O Thou Whose tests are a healing medicine to such as are nigh unto Thee”[183] Only when the soul becomes too attached to the physical world does material existence become “a prison for heavenly souls.”[184] Similar statements can be found in Plotinus, but, as noted before, they are overshadowed by his belief that matter is characterized by inherent ontological evil, a belief not shared by the Bahá’í Writings which see the ‘evil’ of matter as relative.[185]

Plotinus also mentions that the soul descends partly to “bring order to its next lower [level],”[186] an idea that is similar to what the Bahá’í Writings say about humankind’s cosmic role:

For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. If man did not exist in

this world, it would have been like a tree without fruit.[187] Even more, dramatically `Abdu'l-Bahá says,

This world is also in the condition of a fruit tree, and man is like the fruit; without fruit the tree would be useless.[188]

Without humankind, the phenomenal world would lack its highest possible development or purpose, i.e. its final cause, and would, thereby remain incomplete. Of course, in the four-fold causality accepted by `Abdu'l-Bahá, [189] if the final cause is missing, there can be no formal cause, and, therefore, no order. This is virtually identical to Plotinus' idea that without man, the lower world would lack "order" or form since man is the formal cause bringing order. In each case, the human soul has a cosmic function.

According to Plotinus, the soul undertakes a "voluntary plunge." As Gerard O'Daly says, for Plotinus "Human existence is willed, it is a decision;"[190] "historical human existence is willed by a good soul – it is a realization of essence on a lower level." [191] This view, which somewhat lightens the typically gloomy outlook Plotinus has on material existence, has no counterpart in the Bahá'í Writings. According to the Writings we do not choose our existence here although we do choose how to conduct ourselves once we have arrived. Plotinus believes in this choice to re-enter the material world because he advocates re-incarnation, in which souls have to decide when and how to return. The Writings reject this option.[192]

11: Given Attributes not a Blank Slate

What the Writings and the Enneads have to say about the soul has relevance for a long-standing debate between those who believe humans are a blank slate and those who think that humans arrive with certain characteristics or structures pre-given. In our view, there can be no question that for the Writings and Plotinus, humans are not blank slates but rather pre-determined in some essential ways. It is worth recalling here that both the Bahá'í Writings and Plotinus agree that it is the soul which "generates" and individuates the body and not vice versa as is so often assumed.[193] In other words, the body cannot be "a part of us in any essential way"[194] which implies that the personality is original to the soul itself. Furthermore, the soul is the essential human being, not the body: "the authentic man will be as Form to this Matter or as agent to this instrument, and thus, whatever the relationship be, the Soul is the man." [195] A survey of both the Writings and the Enneads makes it clear that both reject the 'blank slate' theory of human nature.

In the case of Plotinus, this is evident from passages such as the following:

One Reason-Principle cannot account for distinct and differing individuals: one human being does not suffice as the exemplar for many distinct each from the other not merely in material constituents but by innumerable variations of ideal type: this is no question of various pictures or images reproducing an original Socrates; the beings produced differ so greatly as to demand distinct Reason-Principles.[196]

Every soul has its own reason-principle or forming-principle, i.e. it is given its individuality from the very beginning. (The World Soul or Soul of All Things contains – albeit not in any spatial sense – all possible reason-principles.) No one individual can be the model for all others of its type and account for all the diversity within a type. This implies that in the last analysis, our individuality is not a product of the physical body or of historical and/or cultural circumstances or choices. Our individuality has ontological foundations and is given to us.

The same is clear when `Abdu'l-Bahá says:

The personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body, but the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God.[197]

`Abdu'l-Bahá clearly rejects the idea that the personality or individuality is caused by the “instrumentality of the body.” As with Plotinus, our existence as persons is not dependent on the body or on our physical condition. Instead, our “personality” or individuality is an inherent aspect of the human soul; it is absolutely correlated with our existence.[198] Soul, not matter, individuates. Thus, we are individual, particular persons from the very start of our journey through the phenomenal world. From our very beginnings, we have a unique, given ‘self’ although it may take a life-time of development to actualize even a portion of its infinite potentials.

This inherent aspect of ourselves is also referred to as the “inmost true self”, as, for example, in the following statement from Bahá'u'lláh:

Through the Teachings of this Day Star of Truth every man will advance and develop until he

attaineth the station at which he can manifest all the potential forces with which his inmost true self hath been endowed.[199]

Like the soul and “innate character,” the “inmost true self” is endowed with divine bestowals which suggests that humans are not blank slates but rather come into being with certain divinely given structures and potentials or capacities. These form both our species-essence as human beings and our individual-essence as particular persons. In addition, these various statements strongly imply that the terms “inmost true self,” “rational soul,” and the “innate character” refer to the divinely given essence of man.

Another feature of humankind’s given or pre-determined nature is our location in the ontological scale of being. Plotinus tell us that:

Humanity, in reality, is poised midway between gods and beasts and inclines now to the one order, now to the other; some men grow like to the divine, others to the brute and the greater number stand neutral.[200]

One of the innate, essential, human attributes is that we “are revealed as the medial and mediating tensions between conflicting and diverging opposites.”[201] These words could also apply to the following statement by `Abdu'l-Bahá:

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality--that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light;[202]

In both the Writings and Plotinus our ontological position as the meeting point of “gods and beasts” and “materiality” and “spirituality” determines an essential aspect of our nature as human beings. This nature is given i.e. it is not decided by personal will or culture, and cannot be eradicated or amended by fiat or legislation; indeed, this ontological position is pre-determined by the One or God as one of the essential attributes of our being. It is the ontological pre-condition for our existence as beings endowed with moral choice. All we can do is choose which of these two aspects of our nature we shall develop.

In the Bahá'í Writings, the ambiguity concerning the soul's ontological position at the border between the material and the spiritual, is, as we have seen in a previous section, also reflected in our dual nature.

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. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. 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.[203]

We are constituted by two contradictory natures and this gives us a certain ambiguity; Pauliina Remes describes humankind as “amphibious.”[204] Lest we disparage this ambiguous or amphibious state, it should be noted again that this ambiguity is the ontological pre-condition for our freedom of choice and is, thereby, one of the pre-conditions of our existence as humans. In any case, our “higher nature” is what we have inherited from God, i.e. the rational soul, our original personality or “inmost true self” which always remains in us and is always available if we turn our lives towards God or the One:

the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God.[205]

The narrative that is constructed by the history of our choices may be called our ‘historical self.’ When the rational soul chooses to turn to God, we may become one of the “angels.”[206] However, when the rational soul chooses to turn towards phenomenal, material reality, we develop an “ego.”[207] and give in to “the natural inclinations of the lower nature”[208] which “is symbolized as Satan--the evil ego within us.”[209] Shoghi Effendi says:

The ego is the animal in us, the heritage of the flesh which is full of selfish desires. By obeying the laws of God, seeking to live the life laid down in our teachings, and prayer and struggle, we can subdue our egos. We call people "saints" who have achieved the highest degree of mastery over their egos.[210]

It appears that the term ‘ego’ (as used here) describes the rational soul, self or personality when it turns away from God and the Manifestation.[211] Because it is a consequence of our

turning away from God, the 'ego' is a construct of the rational soul which has become too attracted to and dependent on phenomenal reality. In this condition, we confuse our "inmost true self" and our rational soul, with the ego, the "idol of self and vain imagination,"[212] a confusion which impedes spiritual progress. Blinded by this "idol" we no longer are aware of our higher nature and our higher potentials.

The inherently ambiguous nature of the human soul complicates the matter of personal identity insofar as the relationship between the lower and higher self is concerned. In Plotinus, the lower aspects of the soul are associated with its connection to the animal body and the material world. However, the soul has not completely fallen into physical existence. Plotinus writes:

Even our human Soul has not sunk entire; something of it is continuously in the Intellectual Realm, though if that part, which is in this sphere of sense hold mastery, or rather be mastered here and troubled, it keeps us blind to what the upper phase hold in contemplation.[213]

In other words, even though the soul exists in the phenomenal world, one aspect of the soul remains in the Nous (Intellect or Spirit). The higher self never enters or falls into the phenomenal world where the other, lower aspects of self are to be found. This leaves the self in an ambiguous situation, divided or perhaps even torn between these two aspects and, thereby, inevitably conflicted to one degree or another. The conflict about which facet of self to favor or develop constitutes the narrative of our lives as ethical beings.

12: The Hierarchical Self

Does Plotinus' doctrine of the higher self remaining in the Nous (the intelligible realm) have a counterpart in the Bahá'í Writings? Initially, the answer appears to be negative, but further reflection suggests that there may be a line of reasoning that could at least close the distance between the two viewpoints. According to `Abdu'l-Bahá, we must "Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out." [214] This statement leads to a crucial question: if the phenomenal world is a shadow of the Kingdom, do human beings also have their 'heavenly counterpart'? If such is the case – and that remains to be proven – then one could, indeed, claim that there is a higher version of ourselves in the Kingdom, i.e. a 'higher self' that is has not fallen into phenomenality. This higher self could be interpreted as the ego with which we converse in inward consultation:

A man may converse with the ego within him saying: "May I do this? Would it be advisable for me to do this work?" Such as this is conversation with the higher self.[215]

If we interpret the “higher self” as the “higher nature”[216] of the rational soul, there is little agreement with Plotinus’ position. In this case, our interpretation might be called psychological because it concerns an aspect of our inner constitution. However, if we read these passages ontologically, one could make a case that a ‘heavenly’ version of ourselves exists in the Kingdom even though we currently dwell in the phenomenal world; this “higher self” is what we consult in inner deliberations. This view would be closer to Plotinus’ position. It seems clear that further detailed study is necessary to reach any definitive conclusion on this matter. The most we could say is that because of our ethical free will, the higher self - whether it is interpreted ontologically or psychologically – is always available to us, i.e. we can always turn to our higher nature.

There seems little doubt that in the Bahá’í Writings our true self is our “higher nature” or the personalized “rational soul.” This is the self that should be in control of our embodied lives. However, in the phenomenal world, the given, personalized “rational soul” operates in the phenomenal world through the instrumentality of the body, i.e. the soul’s accidental physical attribute.[217] Of course, our spiritual, higher nature should be in control, allowing the soul’s physical nature its due, but no more.

Consequently, the Bahá’í Writings seem to present our identity in the phenomenal world as two-fold hierarchical structure. The foundation of this structure is the rational soul, or “inmost true self” with its divinely bestowed personality. This foundation is given to us by God. The second level consists of what the “rational soul” chooses to make of itself through its powers such as the mind[218] as well as its other gifts and potencies. This might be called the ‘historical self’ or acquired self. It is constituted by our decisions to move towards or away from God by the way we live. If we have chosen to turn away from our higher selves and God, we develop an ‘ego’ in (the negative sense) which keeps us focused on the material world and keeps us veiled from the Kingdom. With such an ‘ego’ we develop a false consciousness which supports a false identity often based on being under control of our “lower nature.” Finally, such a false identity inevitably causes inner dissonance for individuals, an inherent and contradiction between the higher potentials which are always available, and the lower choices that betray these potentials in one way or another. This conflict cannot be resolved without turning towards God. On the other hand, if we choose to turn towards our higher selves and God, our ‘historical’ self and our rational soul will be in harmony with each other to one degree or another. We will be more like polished mirrors and, we might say, we will also be ‘genuine’ because we are one with our highest

self. In either case – genuine or false – the ‘historical self’ is the self we bring into the next world:

As to the soul of man after death, it remains in the degree of purity to which it has evolved during life in the physical body, and after it is freed from the body it remains plunged in the ocean of God's Mercy.[219]

A similar idea can be found in the Enneads:

the entire form, man, takes rank by the dominant [part of ourselves which has ruled our lives], and when the Life-Principle leaves the body it is what it is, what it most intensely lived.[220]

In other words, the identity we take into the next life is the one we have created on the “material plane.”

With Plotinus, the situation regarding identity is similar but not identical. He holds that human existence has three degrees: first, there is the person as found in the Nous or intelligible realm; second, this higher self illuminates the person who lives by sensation; third is the lowest part of the vegetative functions of growth and reproduction. These three are unified under the form of the highest, i.e. humanity.[221] We take our identity from that aspect of ourselves which we choose to develop: “each person is that by which he acts, though he is all as well.”[222] That is to say, even though we are human beings, our acquired identity is shaped by the degree according to which we habitually choose to act. Some people act mainly on the vegetative, i.e. the lowest biological level; others live in the materialist world of sensations and tangible realities; and still others actualize their uniquely human potentials. It is important to remember that each person contains all of these levels to the degree appropriate to our nature but of these three, the real self, is the “higher soul . . . [which] . . . constitutes the man,”[223] i.e. the soul at its highest level which faces the ethical task of freeing itself from entrapment in the material world:

Our task then is to work for our liberation from this sphere . . . the total man is to be something better than a body ensouled . . . there is another life, emancipated, whose quality is progression towards the higher realm towards the good and divine . . . [224]

These words, which harmonize well with the Writings, describe the challenge confronting the real self of “Authentic Man.”[225] The history of meeting these challenges and making ethical decisions[226] constitutes the ‘historical’ self. Here, too, we observe the two-part hierarchy of self that we found in the Bahá’í Writings. At the foundation is the ‘pure’ person as existing in the Nous or intelligible realm, who then must choose and act in the material world, and through choices and actions develop a ‘historical self.’ This ‘historical self’ is the second stage of this hierarchy. Moreover, as with the Writings, this historical self can be in harmony or disharmony with its higher original; it can be an ego or false consciousness, or, to use a Bahá’í metaphor, a polished mirror.

13: A Normative Ethical Telos

The Bahá’í Writings and the Enneads share another important attribute: they both hold to a normative telos: not just any kind of life, choices and actions count as self-constitution. The normative ideal, the inner self understood as the wholly actualized and integrated reason is supposed to regulate the process . . . unified by the active and goal-directed self-constitution on the part of the agent. Nor is the rationality in question just any kind of exercise of one’s cognitive capacities. It involves understanding the essential structures of the intelligibly ordered cosmos . . . [227]

The “normative telos” referred to by Remes is a goal or end-state that is appropriate for all humans since, in varying degrees, we share the same basic nature and, therefore, the same ultimate good, i.e. resemblance to the One or God, and rational freedom from domination by the material realm whether it be the external world or their own bodies. Our actions must be in conformity with the nature of the cosmos and our own human nature. Contrary to prevailing attitudes:

[w]hat is sought is not an individual identity with worldly ties and personal experiences but something over and above it, a free self-determination not bound by the restrictions of the phenomenal realm.[228]

Not any action will do, no matter how sincerely motivated it may be. To achieve the desired effects, it is imperative that our actions accommodate themselves to the objective criteria and requirements of cosmic and human nature. In the Bahá’í Writings, this “normative telos” makes itself apparent in the virtues that we are expected to strive for to the best of our ability. No consideration whatever is given to our personal preferences or agreement:

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.[229]

In this passage, Bahá'u'lláh informs us that if we wish certain things – “sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting” – we are required to achieve certain virtues. Nothing in the overt content nor in the tone of this categorical statement suggests that our preferences are even slightly relevant. Because we have a certain nature as human beings, certain virtues are objectively necessary for us to achieve our goals; moreover, because these virtues are objectively necessary, there is an imperative to achieve them.

A similar outlook prevails in Plotinus. The operation of a “normative telos” is evident even in the First Ennead, which informs us that certain virtues are necessary in order to actualize our highest human aspects. There is no choice about what these virtues are; they are made necessary by the facts of our human nature. In particular, Plotinus emphasizes *sophrosyne*, i.e. self-control and moderation acquired through self-knowledge. If we wish to be fully human, then we must know our own nature as human beings and as individuals. This knowledge makes the actualization of these virtues possible. (Bahá'u'lláh expresses a similar idea when He says that “man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement.”[230]) For Plotinus, to be virtuous as human beings and escape the evils of embodied existence, we must strive to resemble the One.[231]

it would be good, it [the soul] would be possessed of virtue if it threw off the body’s moods and devoted itself to its own Act – the state of Intellection and Wisdom – never allowed the passions of the body to affect it – the virtue of *Sophrosynyn* [moderation guided by self-knowledge] – knew no fear at the parting from the body – the virtue of Fortitude – in which state is Righteousness.[232]

We observe that Plotinus prescribes certain actions in order to acquire certain virtues; both of these are normative for all human beings simply because we share a universal human nature. Our actions are not virtuous because they are sincere or express us but because they are appropriate to the kind of beings we are.

14: Sculpting the Self

Plotinus uses the analogy of the sculptor to explain how we must proceed to acquire the virtues we seek in order to be at our best:

Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there . . . never cease chiseling your statue until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue . . .[233]

In other words, we must consciously undertake to reform ourselves in such a way as to let our highest potentials appear. This, of course, requires us to know ourselves, and our human nature as well as what beauty is. That beauty becomes apparent when “[we] find yourself wholly true to [our] essential nature”[234] i.e. when our acquired historical self harmonizes with our divinely given higher self. Moreover, unlike most modern philosophy which is strictly focused on cognition, Plotinus believes that our philosophical knowledge and insight depend on the kind of lives we live and the kind of people we are: “first, let each become godlike and each beautiful who cares to see God and Beauty.”[235] Our understanding of God or the One and the universe, our cognition of reality depends on the virtues we have acquired.

The Bahá'í Writings have much the same emphasis in associating personal virtue and cognitive knowledge. `Abdu'l-Bahá summarizes the remarks of Galen, a non-Christian philosopher and medical scientist:

“In our time there is a certain people called Christians, who, though neither philosophers nor scholastically trained, are superior to all others as regards their morality. They are perfect in morals. Each one of them is like a great philosopher in morals, ethics and turning toward the Kingdom of God.”[236]

The Christians' cognitive knowledge of ethics depends on the moral condition they have achieved in their lives. To appreciate the full significance of this, we must recall that 'ethics' in this context means the objective knowledge of what actions are objectively appropriate to human nature and not merely rationalized preferences, acting in 'good faith' or sincere self-expression. We also see this more objective outlook when Bahá'u'lláh says, “that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty.”[237] This self-knowledge is a pre-condition for following the “straight path [which] is the one which guideth man to the dayspring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding.”[238] This emphasis on the connection between attaining personal virtue and cognitive philosophical knowledge is a typical feature of classical Greco-Roman philosophy with its primacy of philosophy as a way of life over the purely theoretical knowledge.[239]

Furthermore, the Bahá'í Writings, albeit in different language, have a concept parallel to Plotinus' image of the sculptor of self. Just as the sculptor chisels away and smooths over unacceptable aspects of his art work, Bahá'ís are told to sacrifice, i.e. give up those aspects of self that impede making moral progress. `Abdu'l-Bahá states:

Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favour and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr's field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self . . . [240]

It is through sacrifice that we 'carve' or 'sculpt' ourselves, removing undesirable attributes as a sculptor removes unwanted marble from a statue. Such removal is the "dying to self." We also have to practice "detachment from self" by looking and judging ourselves objectively, not by our personal preferences but by the criteria provided by the divinely revealed Writings. Another statement by `Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes these points:

With reference to what is meant by an individual becoming entirely forgetful of self: the intent is that he should rise up and sacrifice himself in the true sense, that is, he should obliterate the promptings of the human condition, and rid himself of such characteristics as are worthy of blame and constitute the gloomy darkness of this life on earth--not that he should allow his physical health to deteriorate and his body to become infirm.[241]

`Abdu'l-Bahá's injunction tells us to "obliterate" the unwanted aspects of ourselves, just as Plotinus' sculptor chisels away unwanted marble. (Of course, neither the Writings nor Plotinus approve of asceticism, as we have already discussed above.) The underlying idea in both cases is the same: we must exercise our free will and our power to shape ourselves according to a standard that appropriately adapts us to the ontological structure of reality and to the eternal spiritual realm instead of merely to our temporary residence in material reality.

Pauliina Remes' statement about the Enneads is equally true of the Bahá'í Writings:

In contrast to modern accounts of selfhood as a process or a story in time, for Plotinus the end is – or should be – fixed. Only a process leading towards what is good and beautiful counts as true

self-constitution. The normative ideal acts also as a regulative principle. Embodied selfhood is always a process towards ideal unity, rationality and virtue, a lifelong exercise in becoming what we are . . . What is sought is not an individual identity with worldly ties and personal characteristics but something over and above it.[242]

In other words, the Bahá'í Writings and the Enneads share a common understanding of what constitutes true or genuine selfhood. We should not give unqualified assent to the notion that 'genuine' selfhood is merely any life-story whatever; every person inevitably has a life-story but every life-story does not constitute a genuine, true self according to the criteria laid down by the Writings or the Enneads.[243] Bahá'u'lláh's injunction to know ourselves clearly indicates that self-deception about ourselves is possible [244] as do the countless passages about being led "astray." For the Writings and the Enneads the goal is to seek an identity that does not exclude but transcends material and worldly considerations. As `Abdu'l-Bahá says, "become yourselves the saints of the Most High!"[245] In this sense, both the Writings and the Enneads share what may be called the 'perennialist' concept of self, i.e. the concept that genuine selfhood requires trying to meet certain ethical and spiritual standards in order to prepare us for a better lives in the future. These standards are almost universal and re-appear in all of the world's major religions. The re-appearance of these generally similar concepts of self in various forms are, of course, one of the implications of the essential unity of religions.

15: Union with God

The ultimate human goal according to the Bahá'í Writings and the Enneads is nearness to or unity with God, but what this actually means must be carefully explored in each case. Both agree that the closer we are to God or the One, the more truly we are ourselves, the more authentic we become; in other words, we become more like our essential, spiritual selves and achieve our higher destiny. The Bahá'í Writings tell us that:

The greatest attainment in the world of humanity is nearness to God. Every lasting glory, honor, grace and beauty which comes to man comes through nearness to God. Every lasting glory, honor, grace and beauty which comes to man comes through nearness to God. All the Prophets and apostles longed and prayed for nearness to the Creator.[246]

The matter could not be stated more clearly; this "attainment" has no equal in the phenomenal world, meaning that no amount of knowledge, technological progress, creative cultural sophistication or political wisdom can compensate for its lack. This goal is irreplaceable. However, in the Bahá'í Writings, "nearness to God" does not imply even the slightest suggestion that human beings can in any way or from any perspective become ontologically one with God.[247]

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 [248]

The ontological difference between an absolutely independent God and an absolutely dependent human is unalterable. Proclus seems to suggest the same idea when he writes:

Prop. 9. All that is self-sufficient either in its existence or in its activity is superior to that which is not self-sufficient but dependent upon another existence which is the cause of its completeness. [249]

Things cannot be superior or even equal to that on which they depend as long as the dependency relationship lasts. In the case of the One, or God, this is bound to be eternal. It is, therefore, inconceivable, that humans and God could become ontologically one and any such assertions must be rejected as mistaken understandings. To assume such a union has taken place, is, in effect, to elevate ourselves to the rank of the Manifestations. [250] A mergence of self and God may be experienced psychologically, but, as the foregoing passage shows, this experience must not be interpreted ontologically. Consequently, for Bahá'ís, "nearness to God" means, for example, something like a mergence of our individual wills into the will of the Manifestation, or a psychological loss of self-consciousness in a vision of the Divine splendour, or, our ecstasy of spiritual insight and knowledge of the mysteries of creation, [251] or our elation at escaping from the prison of the ego. (This is not, of course, intended as a complete list of possibilities.) In each of these examples, there is a loss of self/ego, i.e. a psychological state which is not to be confused with an actual, i.e. ontological union with God.

The mediator between God and humankind is the Manifestation Whose "double station"[252] enables Him to represent God as "One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself" as well as the human station. Given the impossibility of ontological union with God, the only way to achieve "nearness to God" is through our relationship to the Manifestation:

In all the Divine Books the promise of the Divine Presence hath been explicitly recorded. By this Presence is meant the Presence of Him Who is the Dayspring of the signs, and the Dawning-Place of the clear tokens, and the Manifestation of the Excellent Names, and the Source of the attributes, of the true God, exalted by His glory. God in His Essence and in His own Self hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable. By Presence, therefore, is meant the Presence

of the One Who is His Vicegerent amongst me.[253]

The Báb states:

[t]here is no paradise more wondrous for any soul than to be exposed to God's Manifestation in His Day, to hear His verses and believe in them, to attain His presence, which is naught but the presence of God, to sail upon the sea of the heavenly Kingdom of His good-pleasure, and to partake of the choice fruits of the paradise of His divine Oneness.[254]

These passages leave no doubt that attaining the presence of the Manifestation is what the Writings mean by attaining the presence of or “nearness to God.” This concept obviously affects the Bahá’í understanding or interpretation of concepts such as ‘union’ with God, ‘mystical’ experiences of God as well as cataphatic as well as apophatic theology. For example, if attaining the “Divine Presence” means attaining the presence of the Manifestation, what is involved in the latter, especially for those Who never knew Bahá’u’lláh personally? In what sense and to what extent is a Bahá’í cataphatic theology possible since the Manifestation can be known, at least to some extent? Or, conversely, must Bahá’í theology necessarily be apophatic? These and other questions await further exploration.

In Plotinus, the issue of “nearness to God” is more complicated because, as we already observed, in the Enneads psychology and ontology are not clearly separated.[255] Therefore, whether or not the human soul merges with the One ontologically or only psychologically by losing consciousness of itself is not easily settled. For example, it is possible to argue that the following passages show that there is complete ontological union.

In this seeing [of the One], we neither hold and object nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into it, one with it . . . [256]

Even more dramatically, Plotinus writes:

she [the soul] has seen that presence [of the One] suddenly manifesting within her, for there is nothing between; there is no longer a duality but a two in one; for, so long as the presence holds, all distinction fades; it is the lover and the beloved here . . . the soul has now no further awareness of being in a body and will give herself no foreign name, not man, not

living being not being . . . [257]

When the soul becomes united with the One, it does not lose consciousness of being a separate identity but rather it loses its separate existence and thus become indistinguishable from the One. It has, so to speak, been ontologically ‘up-graded’ from a dependent and contingent to an independent and non-contingent. This situation raises questions about how this identity can be regained after the moment of union is over. If the self is lost ontologically, how can it be regained without continuing to exist in some way? Questions of this kind prompt scholars such as J.M. Rist reject the notion of the soul’s ‘obliteration’ in the One:

while the soul as a spiritual substance can be enveloped by the One, enraptured, surrendered, wholly characterized so as to become infinite and not finite, it is neither obliterated nor revealed as the One itself . . . [258]

In some way, the distinct soul continues to exist even while new hitherto unimaginable potentials become actualized in this state of union; however, the soul does not disappear or become the One. This position is strengthened by its logical consistency with Plotinus’ characterization of the One. For example, Plotinus states that “the Supreme as containing no otherness is ever present with us”[259] meaning that even though the One is always with us, it does not, thereby, contain any “otherness,” i.e. other substances or individuals. “We are ever before the Supreme”[260] says Plotinus; we can contemplate it and lose ourselves in the contemplation but we can never be it. If we could, the One would contain ‘otherness.’ Pauliina Remes takes a similar position.

The problem with the idea that the human soul could unite with the One is the fact that the One is supposed to be complete and self-sufficient. If it were possible to ‘add’ something to it, its completeness and uniqueness might be compromised . . . The One remains beyond substance and human soul. [261]

In other words, the concept that the union of self and the One is ontological contradicts the essential, self-sufficient nature of the One as well as its being beyond the category of

“substance.”

Indeed, if the One is infinite in its self-sufficiency, how can anything be added to that which is infinite? Remes also claims that “[t]here is no danger of getting lost in the One”[262] because the formless and limitless nature of the One is inherently incompatible with the nature of the rational soul which “grasps things through limits and definitions – through rational or intellectual activity.”[263] If the soul loses its inherent, essential nature, it would no longer exist, and that, once again, raises extremely difficult questions about how the limited rational soul could return to existence after the end of its union with the One. Plotinus himself recognizes this difficulty:

yet, there comes the moment of descent . . .and after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how the Soul ever enter into my body . . . [264]

There are no obvious answers to this question if the union is ontological. For example, is the body the ‘anchor’ during the time of union? How can the individual soul or higher self re-constitute itself after it has lost its distinguishing essential and personal attributes in the One? Re-constituting oneself after the self has been ontologically eliminated seems contradictory since it requires one to exist when one does not! Or is there a remnant of self? But if the latter is the case, the union is not fully ontological but at least partly psychological since a remnant remains even though it may not be conscious of itself as different from the One.

While this difficult issue in Neoplatonic studies is one for specialists to solve if, indeed, that is possible, we can say that the Bahá’í Writings are only compatible with the psychological interpretation of the union with the One. From the Bahá’í perspective, any suggestion that the created can attain the ontological status of the Creator is inadmissible because the absolutely dependent can never become absolutely independent. Such an assertion would be equivalent to claiming the same ontological status as God:

Beware, beware, lest thou be led to join partners with the Lord, thy God. He is, and hath from everlasting been, one and alone, without peer or equal, eternal in the past, eternal in the future, detached from all things, ever-abiding, unchangeable, and self-subsisting.[265]

In short, the Bahá’í Writings do not allow us to change our ontological status. The claim that we can unite with God ontologically violates the principle that God is “one and alone” since such a claim makes it possible for us to ‘end’ God’s aloneness and His ‘one-ness.’ It also means that

God is no longer “detached from all things” and “unchangeable” since the mergence with the human soul suggests that something has been ‘added’ to the Divine. This, in turn, undermines the concept of God as “self-subsisting” since the very possibility of ‘adding’ anything to God means that God was in some way ‘deficient’ before the addition was made, and, therefore, dependent on the addition to be complete. A similar point can be made for “ever-abiding.” If it is possible to ‘add’ anything to God, He cannot be “ever-abiding;” nor can He be “eternal” in the past and future because there would a ‘before’ and ‘after’ the union. Finally, if a soul, i.e. a dependent creation can raise its ontological status to ‘independent’ from ‘dependent,’ then obviously God is not “without peer or equal.”

16 Sympathy

One of the key principles of Plotinian thought is that of ‘sympathy,’ i.e. “the view that since the world is a living organism, whatever happens in one part of it must produce a sympathetic reaction in ever other part.”[266] In other words, creation is a unity made up of inter-active parts none of which exist or can exist in isolation. The Stoics called this view “cosmic sympathy;”[267] it was a point of agreement among all ancient philosophies except the materialists and atheists. According to Plotinus, every created thing while executing its own function, works in with every other member of the All from which its distinct task has by no means cut it off; each performs its act, each receives something from the others, each one at its own moment bringing its touch of sweet or bitter.[268]

In short, directly or indirectly, everything influences everything else in some way and thereby helps make the world what it is. `Abdu'l-Bahá teaches the same idea:

For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. It is confirmed through evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association.[269]

The concept of a “chain” reminds us of the ancient concept of the “great chain of being”[270] which holds all elements of creation together in a coherent order based on ontological levels. In `Abdu'l-Bahá’s statement, reciprocal interactions are the “causes of existence” which means that nothing can exist or come into existence in isolation. Such interactions are also necessary for “development and growth,” suggesting thereby that self-actualization of all latent potentials requires the presence of a community of beings and is not something that can be done alone – or

for oneself alone. In one way or another, at least some actions must be adapted to the community context in which things find themselves.

However, `Abdu'l-Bahá does not think that the interactive process in the phenomenal, material world is self-directed but rather requires guidance:

a universal power inevitably existeth, which encompasseth all, directing and regulating all the parts of this infinite creation; and were it not for this Director, this Co-ordinator, the universe would be flawed and deficient. It would be even as a madman . . . every separate part of it performing its own task with complete reliability . . . Thus it is clear that a Universal Power existeth, directing and regulating this infinite universe. Every rational mind can grasp this fact.[271]

It is evident, therefore, that the powers of sympathy and influence in the phenomenal, material world do not function randomly or capriciously; their actions are necessary but are not sufficient to explain the order we observe. To provide a complete, adequate explanation a “Universal Power” is needed which cannot only provide cosmic order by guiding the interactive processes through law, but can also help explain the origin of physical laws, and the origin of the capacity to influence and be influenced. Obviously, such a power must transcend the phenomenal world.

Plotinus agrees. In the *Enneads*, he compares things of the universe to members of a “dance-play[.]”[272] in which each dancer plays a part in order that is “the coordinating All.”[273]

The Circuit does not go by chance but under the Reason-Principle of the living whole; therefore, there must be a harmony between cause and caused; there must be some order ranging things to each other’s purpose or in due relations to each other.[274]

Change and motion, the interactive process of things, (“the Circuit”) creates a rational order through influence or sympathy, i.e. the “harmony between cause and caused.” Without that harmonized sympathy or influence, the cosmic process would be random and capricious and the Universe could not be a “living whole” let alone a rational order.

17. Conclusion

In the two parts this paper, we have focussed on major areas of similarity between the Bahá’í Writings and the Enneads in regards to ontology, epistemology, ethics and philosophical anthropology. Naturally, this study is not complete, but it does provide an initial foray into this hitherto largely unexplored field of studies. From this investigation we are able to draw three conclusions.

First, the similarities between the Writings and the Enneads are numerous and far-reaching on the foremost issues. In this sense, the philosophy embedded in the Writings and the philosophy espoused by the Enneads are ‘sister-philosophies’ i.e. they bear a close family resemblance to one another.

Second, these foundational similarities open a new worlds to explore in regards to the philosophy embedded in the Writings and classical Greco-Roman philosophy, a field that is currently subject to dramatically increased interest. The relevance is not limited to specific teachings but also includes such issues as the nature of philosophy and how philosophy should be pursued.

Third, the similarities between the Writings and the Enneads form a solid foundation for in-depth philosophical dialogue with three major religious traditions whose philosophical expression has been heavily influenced by Neoplatonism: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Such dialogue is important because it concerns the intellectual basis on which other teachings and

attitudes are built.

Selected Bibliography

- `Abdu'l-Bahá *Paris Talks*. London: The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995.
- Trust, 1981. *Some Answered Questions*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981.
- The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. Second Edition. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá.*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1957.
- Adamson, Peter. *The Arabic Plotinus*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. 2002.
- Bahá'u'lláh *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976
1978. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre,
- The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh (Arabic)*. Kuala Lumpur: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985.
- Brehier, Emile. *The Philosophy of Plotinus*. Trans. By Joseph Thomas. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Cole, Juan. "The Concept of the Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings." http://bahai-library.org/file.php?file=cole_concept_manifestation
- Deck, John N. *Nature, Contemplation and the One*. Burdett N.Y. Larson Publications, 1967.
- Foster, Mark. "Neo-Platonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Ontology," http://bahai-library.com/unpubl.articles/neoplatonism_framework.html

- Gerson, Lloyd, P. *Plotinus*. New York, Routledge, 1994.
- Gerson, Llyod, P. editor *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Hadot, Pierre. *Plotinus or the Somplicity of Vision*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Halfwassen, Jens. *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 2004.
- Hazini, Nima. “Neoplatonism: Framework for a Bahá’í Metaphysics.”
<http://bahailibrary.com/conferences/neoplatonism.hazini.html>
- Hines, Brian. *Return to the One*. Salem Oregon: Adrasteia Publishing, 2004.
- Inge, William, Ralph. *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. I and II. New York, Longmans, Green and Co. 1918.
- O’Daly, Gerard, J.P. *Plotinus’ Philosophy of Self*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.
- O’Meara, Dominic J. *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Plotinus. *The Enneads*. Trans. by Stephen MacKenna. Burdett N.Y., Larson Publications.
- Plotinus. *The Enneads*. Trans. By H Armstrong. Cambridge Mass., Loeb Classic Library, 1966.
- Proclus. *The Elements of Theology*. Trans. By E.R. Dodds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Rappe, Sara. *Reading Neoplatonism*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 200.
- Remes, Pauliina. *Neoplatonism*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008.
- Plotinus on Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Rist, J.M.
Cambridge University Press, 1967.

Plotinus: The Road to Reality. Cambridge,

Wallis, R.T.
Sons, 1972.

Neoplatonism. New York: Charles Scribner's

Footnotes

[1] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 19.

[2] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 196.

[3] Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, # 201.

[4] Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 432.

[5] Shoghi Effendi, *The Lights of Divine Guidance* Vol. 1, p. 55.

[6] Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 445; emphasis added.

[7] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18.

[8] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 91.

[9] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.

[10] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.

[11] Bahá'u'lláh *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, p. 52.

[12] This is why I believe the Writings advocate a moderate rationalism, as philosophically opposed to an extreme rationalism/positivism for which only rational knowledge is true knowledge, or irrationalism in which there is ultimately no real knowledge at all but only a plethora of competing relative opinions.

[13] Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, p. 1.

[14] Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus*, p.

[15] R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 163.

- [16] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Question*, p. 283.
- [17] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- [18] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 219.
- [19] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18.
- [20] Eugene F. Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One" in *The Structure of Being: A Neoplatonic Approach*, ed. by R. Baines Harris, p. 41.
- [21] Eugene F. Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," p. 41.
- [22] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- [23] Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- [24] The significance of this use of "Being" will be discussed below.
- [25] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIX, p. 46 – 47; emphasis added.
- [26] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146- 147; emphasis added.
- [27] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 13.
- [28] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIV, p. 35.
- [29] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVII, p. 66; emphasis added.
- [30] *Enneads*, V, 5, 6.
- [31] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIX, p. 47.
- [32] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, X, p. 13.
- [33] J M Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, p. 78.
- [34] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, II, p. 5.
- [35] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LI, p. 104; emphasis added.
- [36] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XII, p. 24.
- [37] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXIX, p. 71
- [38] Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words, From the Persian*, # 11.

- [39] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 41.
- [40] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 13.
- [41] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 5.
- [42] Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 41.
- [43] *Enneads*, VI, 5, 1 in Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 41.
- [44] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 286.
- [45] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 295.
- [46] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 102; emphasis added.
- [47] *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- [48] *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- [49] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCIII, p. 185.
- [50] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 18; see also Prop. 27.
- [51] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXVI, p. 295; emphasis added.
- [52] *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 110; emphasis added.
- [53] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVII, p. 66.
- [54] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 66.
- [55] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 19; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 56;
- [56] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLVIII, p. 237.
- [57] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, L, p. 103; *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 36; *The Hidden Words, (Persian)* # 19.
- [58] Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 41.
- [59] Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 45.
- [60] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 14 in Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 45.

- [61] *Enneads*, VI, 8.
- [62] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 180.
- [63] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXI, p. 50; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXVIII, p. 175.
- [64] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CIII, p. 209.
- [65] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXIV, p. 291.
- [66] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIV, p. 35.
- [67] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- [68] Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 41.
- [69] Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 41.
- [70] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 20.
- [71] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 20 in Bales, "Plotinus' Theory of the One," in *The Structure of Being*, p. 47.
- [72] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, X, p. 13; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 192.
- [73] The Writings accept the four-fold analysis of causality, See *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- [74] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, p. 248.
- [75] *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XC, p. 178.
- [76] *Enneads*, VI, 9, 11.
- [77] Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 234.
- [78] *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XXII, p. 53.
- [79] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVII, p. 66 – 67; emphasis added.
- [80] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LV, p. 109.
- [81] *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XXII, p. 53.

- [82] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXII, p. 53 – 54.
- [83] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 281.
- [84] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 148.
- [85] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239; emphasis added.
- [86] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 84.
- [87] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.
- [88] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 84.
- [89] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239 – 240.
- [90] *Enneads* I, 1, 1.
- [91] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 186.
- [92] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 200.
- [93] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 28; see also Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 108.
- [94] *Enneads*, IV, 3, 20.
- [95] *Enneads*, IV, 3, 20.
- [96] *Enneads*, IV, 3, 22.
- [97] *Enneads*, IV, 3, 22; emphasis added.
- [98] *Enneads*, IV, 3, 23.
- [99] John N. Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One*, p. 50.
- [100] William Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, Vol. I, p. 218.
- [101] *Enneads* IV, 7, “The Immortality of the Soul”.
- [102] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 8.
- [103] *Enneads*, IV, 7, 8.5.
- [104] *Enneads*, IV, 7, 9.

- [105] Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus, An Introduction to the Enneads*, p. 20.
- [106] Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 101.
- [107] R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 5.
- [108] R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 5.
- [109] Eyjolfur Kjalar Enilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect*, p.2
- [110] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 172.
- [111] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 177; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 270.
- [112] Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, Prop. 103; see also Prop. 195.
- [113] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 25.
- [114] *Enneads*, III, 4, 3; emphasis added.
- [115] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 69; emphasis added.
- [116] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 236.
- [117] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- [118] Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words (Arabic)* # 13, p. 7.
- [119] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 295; see also p. 113.
- [120] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 101.
- [121] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60.
- [122] Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 106.
- [123] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
- [124] *Enneads*, IV, 8, 4; see also III, 4, 2.
- [125] *Enneads*, II, 3, 9.
- [126] Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or the Simplicity of Vision*, p. 26.
- [127] Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 106.

[128] *Enneads*, IV, 7, 1.

[129] Sartre is the best known representative of atheist existentialism, Kierkegaard of theist existentialism. Heidegger has been interpreted as being in both camps.

[130] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235; emphasis added.

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

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

[133] *Enneads*, II, 3, 9.

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

[135] *Enneads*, I, 4, 16.

[136] Shoghi Effendi, *The Lights of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 2, p. 69.

[137] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 1.

[138] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 4.

[139] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, 2; also Lily Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, Slaves of Passion*.

[140] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 4.

[141] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 7; emphasis added.

[142] *Enneads*, III, 1, 9.

[143] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus On Self*, p. 183.

[144] J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: the Road to Reality*, p. 80.

[145] J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: the Road to Reality*, p. 137.

[146] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 10.

[147] *Enneads*, VI, 8, 3.

[148] Lloyd Per Gerson, *Plotinus*, p. 162.

[149] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 248

- [150] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 248; see also 250,
- [151] Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*, p. 447.
- [152] Shoghi Effendi, *Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 516.
- [153] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 197.
- [154] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIX, p. 335.
- [155] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIX, p. 336.
- [156] Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words (Arabic)*, # 22.
- [157] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIX, p. 336.
- [158] Emile Brehier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, p. 186.
- [159] Emile Brehier, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, p. 186.
- [160] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 268 – 269; see also *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 136.
- [161] Gerard J.P. O'Daly, *Plotinus Philosophy of the Self*, p. 27.
- [162] Abdu'l-Baha, *Divine Philosophy*, p. 128.
- [163] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- [164] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXIII, p. 164.
- [165] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 208.
- [166] *Enneads*, I, 1, 10; see also IV, 7, 1.
- [167] John Deck, *Nature, Contemplation and the One*, p. 50.
- [168] *Enneads*, IV, 3, 3.
- [169] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 11.
- [170] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 207.
- [171] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 56.

- [172] John Deck, Nature, *Contemplation and the One*, p. 66.
- [173] *Enneads*, I, 1, 7; emphasis added.
- [174] Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 113.
- [175] *Enneads*, V, 9, 6; emphasis added.
- [176] *Enneads* V, 1, 1.
- [177] *Enneads*, IV, 8, 5; emphasis added.
- [178] *Enneads*, IV, 8, 5.
- [179] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 200; emphasis added; see also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 295.
- [180] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 296
- [181] *Enneads*, IV, 8, 5; emphasis added.
- [182] See Ian Kluge, "Neoplatonism and the Baha'i Writings," Part 1, *Lights of Irfan* Vol. 10, 2010.
- [183] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, CXXXIII, p. 220.
- [184] Abdu'l-Baha, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha* v1, p. 109.
- [185] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 263.
- [186] *Enneads*, IV, 8, 5.
- [187] *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 120; see also *Some Answered Questions*, p. 201.
- [188] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 201.
- [189] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- [190] Gerard J.P.O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self*, p. 38.
- [191] Gerard J.P.O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self*, p. 39.
- [192] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Chapter 81, p. 282.
- [193] *Enneads*, IV, 3, 9.

- [194] Gerard J.P.O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of Self*, p. 29.
- [195] *Enneads*, IV, 7, 1.
- [196] *Enneads*, V, 7, 1.
- [197] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 240; emphasis added.
- [198] This cannot help but have obvious and far-reaching effects on the way we think about such topics as abortion or human genetic research.
- [199] Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXVII, p. 67; emphasis added.
- [200] *Enneads*, III, 2, 8.
- [201] Gerard J.P.O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of Self*, p. 31.
- [202] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 235.
- [203] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 60.
- [204] Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, p. 106.
- [205] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 240.
- [206] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, v 1, p. 145.
- [207] This use of the word 'ego' should not be confused with other usages such as the "intelligent ego" i.e. "your spirit" with which we consult during reflection. See *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 242.
- [208] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 287.
- [209] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 287.
- [210] Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* p. 453.
- [211] See Ian Kluge, Neoplatonism and the Bahá'í Writings Part 1 for "The Principles of 'Turning Towards God' " in *Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 11 for a detailed explication.
- [212] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXV, p. 291.
- [213] *Enneads*, IV, 8, 8.
- [214] *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 178; see also *Some Answered Questions*,

p. 283.

[215] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 179; emphasis added.

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

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

[218] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 209.

[219] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 66.

[220] *Enneads*, III, 4, 2.

[221] *Enneads*, III, 4, 2.

[222] Gerard J.P. O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self*, p. 37.

[223] Gerard J.P. O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self*, p. 40.

[224] *Enneads*, II, 3, 9.

[225] *Enneads*, II, 3, 9.

[226] *Enneads*, VI, 7, 6.

[227] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 209.

[228] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 210 – 212,

[229] Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words (Arabic)*, p. 3.

[230] *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35.

[231] *Enneads*, I, 2, 1.

[232] *Enneads*, I, 2, 3.

[233] *Enneads*, I, 6, 9.

[234] *Enneads*, I, 6, 9.

[235] *Enneads* I, 6, 9.

[236] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 331.

[237] *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35

[238] *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35.

[239] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* ; see also Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

[240] *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 76; emphasis added.

[241] *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 180; emphasis added.

[242] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 211.

[243] This is not to say that individuals have the insight or right to make these judgments about others.

[244] *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 35.

[245] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 61.

[246] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 147; emphasis added.

[247] See Ian Kluge, "Relativism and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 9, 2008, for a detailed exploration of this topic.

[248] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVII, p. 66.

[249] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 9; see also Prop. 40; Prop. 75.

[250] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXII, p. 54.

[251] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 57.

[252] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVII, p. 66.

[253] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 118; emphasis added.

[254] The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 77.

[255] R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 5.

[256] *Enneads*, VI, 9, 10.

[257] *Enneads*, VI, 7, 34.

[258] J.M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality*, p. 227.

[259] *Enneads*, VI, 9, 8.

[260] *Enneads*, VI, 9, 8.

[261] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 249.

[262] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 253.

[263] Pauliina Remes, *Plotinus on Self*, p. 253.

[264] *Enneads* IV, 8, 1.

[265] *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCIV, p. 192.; emphasis added.

[266] R.T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, p. 70.

[267] This concept is often associated with Stoic philosopher Posidonius (135 BCE to 51 BCE).

[268] *Enneads*, II, 3, 7.

[269] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 178 – 179.

[270] Most effectively explicated on A.O. Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* (1936)

[271] *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 48 – 49

[272] *Enneads*, IV, 4, 33.

[273] *Enneads*, IV, 4, 33.

[274] *Enneads*, IV, 4, 33.

ueCopyright © Ian Kluge. All rights reserved.