



Avicenna's arguments regarding the nature of God's creative act, His relation to the world, and the limitless duration, into the past and future, of His creation. It furthermore submits that Avicenna's philosophy sheds a uniquely informative light on Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysics and theology, insofar as his theological analysis helps one understand the philosophical content and significance, and rational rigor, of Bahá'u'lláh's own statements on God's existence, nature, and creative act. Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysics and theology, Avicena por la existencia insofar as his theological analysis helps one understand the philosophical content and significance, and rational rigor, of Bahá'u'lláh's own statements on God's existence, nature, and creative act. Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysics and theology, Avicena por la existencia insofar as his theological analysis helps one understand the philosophical content and significance, and rational rigor, of Bahá'u'lláh's own statements on God's existence, nature, and creative act.

Resumé de Avicena relacionados a la naturaleza del actuar creativo de Dios, Su relación con el mundo, y la duración sin limites en el pasado y el futuro de Bahá'u'lláh sur la nature et l'existence Su creación. Además, sostiene que la filosofía de Avicena de manera única echa luz metafísica y la teología de Bahá'u'lláh, en la medida en que su analisis teológico le ayuda a uno entender el contenido y significado filosófico y el rigor racional, de

8 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

las aseveraciones propias de Baha'u'lláh philosophers in Christian Europe, such

sobre la existencia, la naturaleza, y el actuar creativo de Dios. Given the importance of Avicenna's thought in the history of Islam, with Acknowledgements in the cultural and religious context of which the Bahá'í Faith emerged, I would like first to thank Naeem Nabiliak- this article explores the currents of bar for his continuing and ceaseless love, support, counsel, and encouragement, his Avicenna's theology that are represented and affirmed in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, and, secondarily, in the explanations of instruction in Persian and Arabic; Adib Bahá'u'lláh Himself 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Though Masumian for his unflagging interest, generous help, enthusiasm, and patient proof-theology a work of systematized reading; Professor Rhett Diessner for his (Schaefer xiii), His many writings in Arabic and Persian are sound, illuminating scholarly perspective nonetheless rich in metaphysical content. and constructive comments; and Professor As a whole, they present a review, and kindness. philosophical worldview expressed in the substantial nomenclature of the Islamic intellectual tradition. Accordingly, one I may approach an understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's theology As suggested by the title, it is the by considering how it treats the central aim of this article to analyze and questions on the nature of God dealt with compare the core theological positions of Bahá'u'lláh and the Islamic philosophers, among whom by Islamic Avicenna stands out as especially prominent. Throughout the course of this perhaps most famous in the West as

article, I  
 the celebrated author of the *Qánún fī*  
*at-Tibb* or Canon of Medicine, was a  
 Bahá'u'lláh's  
 Persian Muslim born near the city of  
 substan-  
 Bukhárá in 980 A.D. Propounding a  
 metaphysical  
 rationalistic worldview and synthesis  
 Avicenna's ar-  
 of Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, and  
 and his  
 Islamic monotheism, Avicenna indeli-  
 God's na-  
 bly shaped the contents and character  
 act, with  
 of Islamic philosophy from medieval  
 teachings are  
 into modern times and became, by  
 Avicenna or  
 far, the most influential philosopher of  
 Second,  
 Islam; going well beyond the borders  
 metaphys-  
 of the Islamic world, his ideas even  
 Bahá'u'lláh's affirmation  
 informed the thought of the scholastic  
 arguments,  
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

will thus present two broad  
  
 First, I propose that  
  
 theological teachings are  
  
 tively affirmative of the  
  
 principles underlying  
  
 gument for God's existence  
  
 philosophical positions on  
  
 ture, attributes, and creative  
  
 no implication that His  
  
 derivative from those of  
  
 in any way reducible to them.

I suggest that Avicenna's  
 ics, given  
  
 of his core philosophical

9

provides a framework that clarifies  
 explicate  
 and rationally elucidates the essential  
 argument.  
 content, logical coherence, and phil-  
 osophical integrity of Bahá'u'lláh's  
 the Bahá'í  
 teachings on the existence and nature  
 that  
 of God. Thus, examining the aspects of  
 Avicenna's solu-  
 Avicenna's theology that Bahá'u'lláh  
 co-eternity of  
 affirms, far from being a merely aca-  
 it was  
 demic exercise, will all the more reveal

insights, though he does not  
  
 in detail Avicenna's original  
  
 Juan Cole, in his monograph "The  
 Concept of Manifestation in  
 Writings," significantly states  
  
 Bahá'u'lláh "affirmed  
  
 tion to the problem of the  
  
 the universe with God," though  
  
 beyond the aims of that work to

treat the implications, conceptual depth, and likewise rational nature of Bahá'u'lláh's meta-Avicenna in a physical and theological statements. Because Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá stressing the com- so consistently affirm, as will be seen, rationalist and both Avicenna's terminology and the with philosophical substance underlying philosophical that terminology, and reject opposing views in the history of Islamic thought in favor of Avicenna's, the deep study of Avicennian thought is relevant to discerning and articulating the principles of Bahá'í theology—a scholarly Darwinism: Its endeavor requiring that we examine the Context” historical frameworks that Bahá'u'lláh Response to the and 'Abdu'l-Bahá employ or forego in Existence,” describing Their distinctive theology. This article thus aims to contribute to a discourse in scholarship on Two the Bahá'í Faith that deals with the makes relationship between Bahá'u'lláh's Avicenna's teachings and Avicenna's theological relate to philosophy. Scholars have gestured Lawh-i-Hikmat. Nader before at the philosophical common-cosmol- alities between Bahá'u'lláh's teach- Gate of the ings and Avicenna's thought, even if Avicennian metaphysics has not been Bahá'í

Avicenna primarily. Ian Kluge has warmly referenced number of his outstanding essays on Bahá'í philosophy, monality of Avicenna's broadly Aristotelian worldview the Bahá'í Faith's own presuppositions. Keven Brown, similarly, has discussed some of Avicenna's views, along with those of other Islamic philosophers, in his papers Bahá's Response to Historical and Philosophical and “'Abdu'l-Bahá's Doctrine of the Unity of even if Avicenna was not the primary philosopher under discussion. Vahid Rafati in “Lawh-i-Hikmat: The Agents and the Two Patients” a useful reference to how account of the four elements Bahá'u'lláh's Saiedi likewise references the ogy of Avicenna in his book Heart, as does Moojan Momen in his paper “Relativism: A Basis for

their primary subject of concern. William Hatcher, in his admirable book *Minimalism*, put forth an argument in Bahá'u'lláh's formal logic for God's existence that Andalusian consciously draws from Avicenna's

10 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

This article therefore aims to contribute to this body of Bahá'í scholarship by investigating the elements of Avicenna's thought affirmed in the Bahá'í metaphysics treated Faith, specifically engaging Avicenna's and Bahá'u'lláh's theological positions and analyzing their respective thought in three discrete parts. Part One, accordingly, treats Avicenna's argument for the existence of God as the *vájib al-vujud* or "the Necessarily Existent," and seeks to demonstrate that Bahá'u'lláh affirms the basic metaphysical principles underlying Avicenna's argument for God's existence, validates his logical procedure, and corroborates his concept of God as an existentially or ontologically independent and transcendent first cause. Part Two then

Metaphysics." Interestingly, Momen does not mention Avicenna in his article "The God of favoring instead the Sufi thinker Ibn 'Arabí.

features of Islamic thought—and Avicenna, while certainly not the only philosopher relevant to understanding the in the Bahá'í Writings, is important to Bahá'í his significant place in this philosophy and of Islamic well as the extensive degree to which his principles and arguments are presented in the Bahá'í elucidate their

These subjects will be through analysis of the primary sources. These include a Bahá'u'lláh's discrete in Arabic and Persian, called (tablets), such as his Haqíqat and Lawh-i-Hikmat,

discusses Avicenna's deductive arguments (iláhiyyát) sections for why such a first cause must be philosophical and be divine, successively treats each and important attribute Avicenna ascribes to God, and argues that Bahá'u'lláh confirms Avicenna's account of the respective divine attributes. Lastly, Part Three establishes that Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna, being in harmony with indispensable inter-act and the eternal nature of the world, have central cosmological positions in common, and that Bahá'u'lláh's theology are vital when frequently affirms characteristically Avicennian positions on God's relation to the world. The conclusion will sum up our findings, treat several possible Bahá'ís from dis-objections, and likewise explain how the Avicennian ideas demonstrated to Súriy-i-Ghusn, and Lawh-i-'Ard-i-Bá. Even indeed meaningfully characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh's theology, and must Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

as the metaphysics within two of Avicenna's compendia, the Arabic ash-Shifá the Persian occasional reference to Arabic an-Naját. Passages from Bahá'u'lláh's writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, be analyzed in conjunction of Bahá'u'lláh as pretative aids.<sup>1</sup> Though 1 'Abdu'l-Bahá's of Bahá'u'lláh's analyzing Bahá'u'lláh's so far as 'Abdu'l-Bahá was appointed by Bahá'u'lláh to teachings and preserve agreement, as seen in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, i-'Ard-i-Bá. Even view, therefore, tations represent authoritative it. The atheist, conversely,

believes that used when available, extensive attention will be given, either in footnotes or the body of the text, to the precise wording of the Arabic or Persian original and the exact philosophical significance of particular words. All passages from Avicenna, however, are my own renderings, though they have benefited from reference to the pioneering translations published by Parviz Morewedge and Michael Marmura of the *Dānishnāmih* and *ash-Shifá*, respectively. Marmura's bilingual publication of *ash-Shifá's* "Metaphysics" has been especially useful as an edited source of Avicenna's original Arabic.

In what follows, we shall begin by considering how Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna each argue for God's existence, and a necessary point of departure before establishing the other areas of conceptual convergence.

There is no supernatural reality, asserts that nature is simply the whole of existence, and that any explanation of a thing must be a natural and not supernatural one. It follows on atheism, then, that existence of nature itself can have no cause, grounds, or explanation. because one cannot explain the nature and its existence through something that is itself part of and a natural phenomenon, by space, time, and the matter. One can only antecedent physical causes, physical conditions, but not why whole of nature should exist at all or, ultimately, anything which nonexistence is logically metaphysically possible. Therefore, nature is all there is, nature be inexplicable, even if individual phenomena within it allow for proximate, but of course never ultimate, causes and explanations.

A Bahá'u'lláh and

Avicenna both ex-

N E plicitly reject such naturalism,  
and

insist that there is a transcendent and

The primary difference between theism supernatural

reality—God—which

and atheism lies perhaps in differing grounds the existence of the  
world.

views of nature. According to the the- Bahá'u'lláh, in the Lawh-i  
Hikmat,

ist, there is a reality beyond and tran- writes on this theme:  
scendent above the material universe

and its phenomena—a supernatural Those who have rejected God and  
and absolute reality that ultimately firmly cling to Nature as it is

in

grounds the existence of the world, itself are, verily, bereft of  
knowl-

while remaining utterly sanctified from edge and wisdom. They are truly  
of them that are far astray. They

have failed to attain the lofty sum-

be considered in any thorough analysis of mit and have fallen short of the  
Bahá'u'lláh's writings.

12 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

ultimate purpose; therefore their his part, proposes an argument for  
eyes were shut and their thoughts the existence of God as just this sort  
differed, while the leaders among of transcendental reality in the  
meta-

them have believed in God and in physics section of his comprehensive  
His invincible sovereignty . . . When philosophical compendium, ash-Shifá,  
the eyes of the people of the East specifically in the first chapter of  
Book

were captivated by the arts and Eight of the “Metaphysics.” Some  
of

wonders of the West, they roved the premises of the argument, howev-  
distraught in the wilderness of ma- er, find their grounding in other  
parts of

terial causes, oblivious of the One the “Metaphysics,” which will thus  
be

Who is the Causer of Causes, and referenced in giving a whole account  
the Sustainer thereof . . . . (Tablets of his argument.

143–44; Maj'mú'iy-i-Alváh ba'd Avicenna begins his  
reasoning by

az Kitáb-i-Aqdas 85) noting that there are some concepts

which are “impressed in the soul in a

And Avicenna, for his part in ash- primary way” (ash-Shifá 22). That  
is

Shifá, distinguishes between the natural and supernatural or divine orders of causality: they cannot be proven or demonstrated, insofar as they are the fundamental ideas by which all other concepts mean by the term “efficient cause” might be demonstrated or defined. An example is the idea of existence. Avicenna points out that everyone, no matter the language spoken, understands the naturalists assert. Rather, they regard the efficient cause as that term in a basic way the meaning of the which is the source of a thing’s existence and what imparts existence itself or to demonstrate that existence to it, even as God imparts there is such a thing as existence would fail, because one would have to assume existence absolutely to the world the existence of something beforehand (and does not merely fashion it in order to use it subsequently to define or demonstrate the idea of existence. in order to use it subsequently to define or demonstrate the idea of existence. Any definition or demonstration would accordingly be circular and therefore, the existence of some reality that is not contained in the natural invalid. We thus understand existence in itself as a primary idea, and not order, and they will thus argue that as something apprehended secondarily nature itself is not a metaphysical ultimate. But why do they suppose that from other things. Avicenna then states that the there is anything beyond the phenomena necessary, possible, and impossible terms Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna 13

are likewise understood by the mind proceed to analyze the different modes in a primary way—as basic concepts in which things exist, as he does in chapter six of Book One in known intuitively and comprehended ash-Shifá. Conceptually, existence can be immediately. This is because any at-

divid-  
 tempt to define the necessary, possible, contingent  
 and impossible falls prey to circularity (vá-  
 just like trying to define existence does, impossible<sup>2</sup>  
 for the definition of any one of these exist,  
 terms is inescapably made in reference said of  
 to one or both of the other two. In de-  
 possible.  
 fining what is possible, for instance, possible,  
 one might say that it is something that exist,  
 is neither necessary, such that it must does  
 be and cannot not be, while at the same exist, however, then its  
 existence is, in  
 time it is not something that is impossi- some way, made actual or  
 necessary by  
 ble in itself, such that it could never be, through  
 just as a four-sided triangle could never a cause. To use a favored example  
 of  
 be. To define what is necessary, how- Avicenna, a house, considered in  
 itself,  
 ever, one must either say that “it is not might just as well exist as not  
 exist, and  
 possible to suppose its nonexistence, or its existence is thus only  
 possible in it-  
 that it is impossible to suppose it being self. But if a carpenter should  
 assemble  
 any other way than it already is” (ash- the proper materials and  
 construct it,  
 Shifá 28). the house that was merely  
 possibly or  
 In this way, Avicenna shows that potentially existent would become  
 nec-  
 the concepts of existence, necessity, essarily existent and actual.  
 possibility, and impossibility have Avicenna makes an important  
 point  
 self-evident and fundamental mean- here. The house, once it exists  
 in  
 ings that must be apprehended directly

by the mind, for the only definitions

2 As, for example, something that they can accommodate are mutually involves an essential contradiction or mis-referential. It is important for Avicenna to give an account of these terms at this juncture, since they will be central to his argument for God's existence, For exam-

and also since his very subject here is is not im-

metaphysics, which he defines as that necessary; there

branch of philosophy which studies be- given what

ing insofar as it is being. Accordingly, itself, it is

he must give an account of the basic one or not

terms he uses to describe existence. two states of

Having done so, Avicenna can then external causes are necessary.

14 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

actuality, is still only possibly or con- trajectory of his

tingently existent in itself, insofar as it that

requires a cause for its existence. Thus, that

according to Avicenna, it is necessarily is pos-

existent through another (wájib al-vu- and which

júd bi-ghayrihi) but only possibly or contingently existent in itself (mumkin theoretical

al-vujúd). This is because the house, however. If

as a particular arrangement of matter, contingently does not merely depend on its materi- there be

use of terms, such as an

lor or a round square.

3 That is, considering

merely in terms of what it is.

ple, the existence of a bachelor

possible, nor is it strictly

could be no bachelors. Simply

a bachelor is, considered in

equally possible for there to be

to be one. For either of these

affairs to obtain, therefore,

At this point in the

thought, Avicenna is confident

there are things that exist, and

there are things whose existence

sible or contingent in itself

may be made necessary and actual through a cause. Another

division of being remains,

there are things that are

existent in themselves, could

als having been assembled by an agent  
existent  
at some point of time in the past; it also  
itself? Avi-  
depends on the cohesion of its respec-  
that  
tive elements in the here and now—for  
existent  
without the cohesion of these parts, it  
in itself (vájib al-vujúd bi  
nafsihi) until  
could not exist. A water molecule may  
Book Eight of the  
“Metaphysics” in  
ash-Shifá. However, because the  
be presented as a contemporary exam-  
of the Necessarily Existent in  
idea  
ple. Before any two hydrogen atoms  
Itself is  
and single oxygen atom cohere in a co-  
central to Avicenna’s  
theological vi-  
sion, he thoroughly teases out  
valent bond, the existence of a certain  
the basic  
water molecule is merely possible, its  
implications of such a reality  
early in  
existence being contingent on the junc-  
ash-Shifá and also in the  
Dánishnámih,  
tion and cohesion of those atoms. But  
even before he formally attempts  
to  
demonstrate that the Necessarily  
once the bond is established, the exis-  
Exis-  
tence of that water molecule becomes  
tent does in fact exist.  
actual and necessary—though its exis-  
First, Avicenna makes it  
clear that  
the existence of what is  
tence remains only possible or contin-  
existent in itself, (mumkin  
contingently  
al-vujúd), is  
gent in itself—insofar as the molecule  
not in itself necessary or  
was originated by a cause, depends in  
it is thus possible. But it is  
impossible—  
the present on the covalent bond, and  
the contingently existent  
clear that for  
may well cease to exist as a water mol-  
actually to ex-  
ecule should the bond be broken. Con-  
ist, and for its existence to be  
rendered  
sequently, the inevitable and intrinsic  
necessary, it requires a cause.  
Avicenna  
features of a contingently existent being  
justifies this claim in the  
Dánishnámih,

are, first, its being originated, and second, its continuing dependence in the present on composition of some kind. Thus the water molecule does not, in and itself, exist necessarily, but only contingently, though its existence is rendered preponderantly necessary once its causes are present. Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

chapter nineteen of the  
when he writes:

As to whatever is contingent only possible, its existence, considered in itself, has no derance over its non-existence.

15

Its existence is therefore due to its necessary the existence of its cause, and its would not non-existence would be due to the is because non-existence of the cause. If it logically existed of itself without a cause, insofar its existence would be necessary— itself is not possible—in itself. Therefore, is something whatever is contingent and possible in itself, requires a cause for its necessary existence, and that cause is prior to non-existence it essentially (that is, not necessarily prior in time). (369) and non-existence are both similarly Avicenna's point here is that the existence of something possible is logically equivalent to its non-existence: in merely shows itself, it could just as well exist as not exist. If it exists in actuality, therefore,

actuality, it is clear that what necessarily existent in itself require a cause to exist. This its existence would not be equivalent to its non-existence, as the necessarily existent in not merely possible. If there thing that is truly necessary in its actual existence would be and essential to it and its impossible, in contrast to the gently existent being whose possible. This, of course, does show that there is such a necessarily in itself; it that what is necessarily self would require no cause.

its existence logically must have proceeded to it from another, something the *vá-* that acts as the determinative of its becoming existence: a cause.<sup>4</sup> theological im-

If, then, what is possibly existent He is in itself requires a cause to exist in reality on which all other beings depend—it is clear that He Himself could not require

4 Avicenna’s premise here should He did, He not be misconstrued as being an example another of inductive reasoning, and criticized on either creature, or created thing, among that ground. He is not drawing a general rule by observing that contingent things in his experience do in fact have causes, is show that there is a first cause that and then concluding that this stands for all for such contingent beings. He is rather concluding the Nec-

deductively that if the innate possibility of a thing’s existence is equal to the possibility of its non-existence, there must be something external to that thing to account Book Eight, for its existence, should it actually exist: a cause or sequence of causes. For Avicenna, with a the presence of the cause is a matter of logical necessity and is not, by any means, a generalized observation.

Yet the relevance of the of the Necessarily Existent, *jib al-vujúd*, might now be clear in regard to its plications: if God exists, and if the creator of all things—a a cause for His existence. If would not be God, but simply does not itself have a cause, a thing would be identical to necessarily Existent. His formal for the existence of a first found in several places works, but significantly in chapters one to three of as Daniel De Haan has noted, variation in an-Naját. The the argument below thus draws

ash-Shifá as well as the Dánishnámih. the first thing has its existence ei-

One important point before ex- ther in itself or from a third thing,

plaining Avicenna's argument for whereas the existence of the sec-

the Necessarily Existent as the first ond derives from the first.

More- over, the existence of the cause, however, is to clarify the ways second

in which, according to him, a cause thing, in this scenario, is necessi-

may be said to be prior to an effect. tated by the first, the second not

A cause, of course, can be prior to an being necessary in its essence, in-

effect in time, even as the father must sofar as in itself it is only possible.

exist prior to his son in time. But in Furthermore, this is allowing that

Avicenna's terminology, the father is the first thing, so long as it exists,

not prior to his son as a cause essen- necessitates the existence of the

tially, (muqaddam bi dhátihi) but only second thing. (ash-Shifá 126) temporally (bi zamán). This is because

the son, whether as a child or a man, Avicenna then clarifies this rather tech-

does not depend on the father for his nical explanation through an illustra-

continued existence, or his subsistence. tion. If Zayd is holding a key and his

The son, therefore, does not depend hand moves, the motion of the hand is clearly the cause of the motion of

essentially on his father, for causal de- the key, while the motion of the key

pendence on his father is not an essen- is clearly not the cause of the key

tial or necessary property of the son. If hand's motion. The motion of the hand is

the father dies, the son will continue thus

to exist. This is because, according to prior to that of the key

essentially, even though the motion of each one

Avicenna, the father is not actually the is

cause of the son's subsistence, but rath- simultaneous with the other. The mo-

er only of a certain aspect of the son's by, and temporal origination, "the motion of the seed" (ash-Shifá 201). Thus, for Avicenna, the activity of a true cause is always concurrent with its effect (201). A cause is essentially prior to its effect when they are concurrent, and the effect could not possibly exist without the sustaining activity of the cause. Avicenna states:

which I used as an illustration earlier: When there are two things and the existence of the first does not derive from the second, then the first thing is prior in existence to the second thing. This holds true when Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

tion of the key is necessitated essentially dependent on, the of the hand, while the hand's neither necessitated by nor on the key's motion. What is long as the motion of the hand so will that of the key.

In the Dánishnámih, Avicenna explains this idea of essential ority through the example of a house,

The generality of people suppose that the cause of a thing is that which brings about its existence and once it has done so, the thing

17

has no need of a cause. But they and the emission of light, fire and the emanation of heat, a sequence of movers and things moved (such as a series of gears), and the force that coheres the parts of a thing and the thing

have put forth an empty proof and have been pleased with a misleading analogy. They argue that "whatever had begun to exist subsequently does not depend upon its cause, insofar as one does not essence posed. Now, in these cases, the cause or source of the effect is in its

make again what is already made." independent of the effect, while the ef-

Their analogy is this: should someone make a house, it is not in need of another maker once it has been constructed. But this is their mistake: no one suggested that what cause. This is not merely a technical that lacks wider relevance. This understanding of what the efficient

is made needs to be made again. Rather, we say that what is made necessar- requires something to support and sustain it. But their analogy of the house betrays an evident error, for the carpenter is not the cause will of the existence of the house, but efficient is rather the cause of the motion of the wood and clay to a certain location, and that is precisely the meaning of carpenter and con- structor. But the cause of the form essen- of the house is the cohesion of its elements, and the nature of those stresses, elements that necessitates the per- of sistance of the house in the form it a has. (370) it.”

What, then, is Avicenna’s argument If the true cause is always concurrent independent of with its actual effect, then, any contin- in gent being—anything that is only pos- first sibly existent in itself—depends upon either a cause or causes in the here and now, and and not merely upon a certain cause in the past that was part of its temporal existent origination. Thus, examples of causes that are essentially prior and effects Avicenna essentially posterior include the Sun 18

consists in is vital to Avicenna’s ment for a first cause that is ily existent, an argument in which the question of time is completely irrele- vant. For when Avicenna then argues that there is indeed a first cause, he be speaking solely in terms of causes that are concurrent with their effects, and are ordered (murattab) in a sequence such that the causes are essentially—not temporally—prior their effects, and the effects are tially—not temporally—posterior to their causes. It is thus that he as Book Eight of the “Metaphysics” ash-Shifá opens, that “the cause of a thing’s existence is concurrent with it.”

for a first cause, itself any cause and necessarily existent itself? As we have seen, Avicenna establishes that everything is necessary or contingent in itself, shows that all contingent beings— since they are merely possibly in themselves—require concurrent causes to exist in actuality. then concludes that there must be a

necessarily existent being, since there cannot be an infinite series of concurrent contingent causes; any causal chain must therefore terminate in a necessarily existent being, on which the entire causal sequence depends, however, and which itself depends on no cause. He thus writes that if one “supposes an effect and its cause, and for that cause a cause, there cannot be for every cause yet another cause ad infinitum” (ash-Shifá 258).

One consequently must conclude, as Avicenna justifies this claim, in ash-Shifá, by having the reader meditate on a theoretical sequence of essentially cause” (ash-ordered causes simultaneous in time therefore (258). If, for example, a is the cause of b, and b is the cause of c, then a is the absolute cause of the effects b and c, while b acts as an intermediate cause Avicenna between the extreme cause a and the extreme effect c. Each member in this sequence would have a special characteristic, a as absolute cause of the succeeding members of the sequence, b as

how many more intermediate causes are added to the sequence. If no absolute cause, the sum of intermediate causes would lack the cause that it, due its requires. This absolute cause, cannot itself be contingent; if it it would itself have a cause, therefore be yet another cause added to the sum, and not absolute cause that the sum

Avicenna writes, that “[t]here be a sum of causes without there a causeless cause, a first Shifá 258). This first cause is not contingent, but necessarily of itself, and there thus exists a sarily existent being. In an-Naját, meanwhile, defends the need for a necessarily istent cause in slightly simpler (300). There, Avicenna points out the causal sequence of concurrent contingent causes is a composite,

intermediate cause, and c as ultimate any effect. Now, no matter how many more causes-members are added between the absolute order to cause and the ultimate effect, the exist, characteristic of intermediacy is still a continuous feature of the causes succeeding a and therefore preceding c. Thus, if the ultimate effect in is not c but z, such that the sequence is “whatever now a, b, c, d, . . . z, the mere addition also of more causes does not exempt them, cause of as a sum, from the characteristic of intermediacy. The important point here is however that all intermediate contingent causes, part of the precisely because they are intermedi- own ex- ate, will essentially depend and be con- must tinent on an absolute cause, no matter external Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

to the sum of contingent causes, and nec- which is therefore not contingent at all, but necessarily existent in itself. “Con- a tinent beings thus terminate,” so Avi- exis- cenna writes, “in a cause that is neces- sarily existent. There is not, therefore, for every contingent being a contingent cause ad infinitum” (an-Naját 301). It concurrent is this reality, then—the Necessarily

since composites are contingent, sum of concurrent contingent es itself requires a cause in exist. It depends on its parts to and those parts are themselves gently existent; the sum is contingent—an argument mirrored in ash-Shifá when he writes, is dependent on what is caused is caused” (ash-Shifá 258). The the sum of concurrent contingent es cannot itself be contingent, er. If it were, it would just be sum itself and the cause of its istence—an impossibility. There be a cause, therefore, that is

1. Whatever exists is either necessary or contingent.
2. Whatever is contingent has concurrent cause of its tence.
3. Whatever is necessary exists independent of any cause.
4. A causal sum of contingent causes is

itself con-  
 Existent—that causes, and bestows  
 existence on, the whole of contingent  
 being at every moment. Importantly, if  
 its  
 one were to counter that, given infinite  
 time, an infinite sequence of contin-  
 gent causes is possible, the objection  
 neces-  
 would have no bearing on Avicenna’s  
 1).  
 argument. This is because Avicenna is  
 discussing concurrent causes, as we  
 have seen, and is thus answering the  
 causes  
 question of how any contingent being  
 or the whole of contingent being can  
 exist in the here and now, given its  
 causes  
 intrinsically dependent and non-neces-  
 sary reality. To this question, Avicenna  
 answers that such contingent being ex-  
 ists because it is ceaselessly caused and  
 sustained by a necessarily existent and  
 something  
 independent reality.  
 of  
 Though this argument, in either  
 of the two forms, may seem complex  
 from the foregoing pages, this is mere-  
 ly because Avicenna’s basic premises  
 required a thorough explanation. In  
 summary, the argument may be pre-  
 exis-  
 sented as follows with nine premises,  
 existent  
 themselves supported by the arguments  
 sum of  
 above, leading to a final conclusion.  
 virtue  
 (For brevity, “necessary” and “contin-  
 only contin-  
 gent” will be used in place of the more  
 appears,  
 technical “necessary” or “contingent in  
 claim is  
 itself”).

tingent.  
 5. Therefore, such a causal sum  
 has a concurrent cause of  
 existence (from 2, 4).  
 6. The concurrent cause of such  
 a causal sum is either  
 sary or contingent (from  
 1).  
 7. If a causal sum has no nec-  
 essary cause, it will have  
 contingent concurrent  
 ad infinitum.  
 8. A causal sum cannot have  
 contingent concurrent  
 ad infinitum.  
 9. Consequently, the causal sum  
 does have a necessary cause  
 (from 7, 8).  
 10. Therefore, there is  
 necessary and independent  
 any cause (from 3, 9).  
 T N E  
 B ’ ’ ’ W  
 Avicenna thus demonstrates the  
 tence of something necessarily  
 in itself. His proposition that a  
 concurrent members subsists by  
 of those members and thus  
 gently is almost self-evident. It  
 therefore, that his strongest  
 found in premise two: “whatever

contingent requires a concurrent cause mumkinát, for its existence.” We have previously ex- seen the logical problems in suppos- is ing otherwise, and as such Avicenna’s Gleanings by argument represents a remarkably ele- various- gant and powerful logical argument— mumkinát, I will proceeding from an analysis of exis- parentheses. tence itself into model categories—for beginning of something necessarily existent. I will not address here, however, all possible objections to Avicenna’s argument, in- God, sofar as my larger purpose is to show that Bahá’u’lláh affirms his concept of incomparable and the divine.<sup>5</sup> universe,

The question before us now con- cerns the theological implications of Avicenna’s proof and how it relates Who, to Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings about God. from the First of all, essential to the idea of God is that He is the creator of all things, hath something metaphysically ultimate on of which the existence of all other things short depends, and who Himself depends on nothing for His existence—God is something beyond and independent of the phenomenal and contingent order of nature. The central idea of God, as to

to creation as consisting of contingent beings, only possibly istent in themselves. This tablet partially translated in Shoghi Effendi, and since he ly translated the term indicate it below with Bahá’u’lláh states in the the tablet: All praise to the unity of and all honor to Him, the sover- eign Lord, the all-glorious Ruler of the Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all things (mumkinát) . . . and rescuing His creatures abasement of remoteness and the perils of ultimate extinction, received them into His kingdom incorruptible glory. Nothing of His all-encompassing grace, His all-pervading mercy, could have possibly achieved it. How could it, otherwise, have been possible for sheer nothingness

Avicenna's analysis shows, is that He is worth- something necessarily existent in Himself. This—as will be demonstrated into the through quoted passages—is precisely what Bahá'u'lláh says regarding God. world and

In this vein, Bahá'u'lláh explicitly therein terms God *vájib*, necessarily existent, (64–65) in a short but comprehensive Persian tablet (*Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárah* identifies creation 338–42), in which He likewise refers existent, using precisely the same Arabic-Per-

5 For a similar, though distinct, appraisal of which of Avicenna's premises Bahá'u'lláh lit- are the most ontologically robust, see Mc- that all Ginnis, 166.

Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

contingent beings (*kull-i-mumkinát*) the Eternal have their existence, even as it is the and Necessarily Existent, for Avicenna, (Gleanings 66; that sustains the existence of any con- *Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárah* 28). tingent being in the here and now. the same Bahá'u'lláh implies here that God the distinc- must exist, insofar as contingent real- necessary ity could only derive from something to the that is ontologically superior to it; there that Avi- must be something existentially superi- God's or to the world of contingent beings to

have acquired by itself the ness and capacity to emerge from its state of non-existence realm of being? Having created the all that liveth and moveth (*kull-i-mumkinát*) . . . . Here Bahá'u'lláh with what is contingently sian term—*mumkinát* or contingent beings—as Avicenna. erally states that it is by God

21

the transient (*hádith*) and (*qadím*), the contingent (*mumkin*) the Absolute (*vájib*)” Bahá'u'lláh thus confirms metaphysical principles, tion between contingent and existence, and the need to appeal latter to explain the former, cenna employed to demonstrate reality as the Necessarily

Existent.

ground it and to cause its existence—  
be-  
something that is, by implication, nec-  
contin-  
essarily existent.

God

For Bahá'u'lláh, it is evident that  
this work

contingent beings could not precede  
centrality to

from “sheer nothingness,” and in  
theological vision in

themselves do not even have “the ca-  
soon as

capacity to exist.” They must depend,  
literally

therefore, on what is not contingent but  
contingent ex-

necessary. In itself, contingent being is  
creation

characterized only by “the abasement  
Bahá'u'lláh's writ-

of remoteness and the perils of ultimate  
mumkinát—

extinction,” and accordingly must be  
unavoidable

“rescued” by a transcendent reality in  
or epistle

order to subsist at all. Here we see, im-  
Hik-

PLICIT in Bahá'u'lláh's account, the vital  
is an Epistle

distinction between what is necessarily  
down

and what is only contingently existent,  
is

for it is by the former that the latter has  
who

its being, while the former in itself is  
(imkán).

independent of all else. Accordingly  
worlds!”

and significantly, in this same Tablet  
Majmú'iy-i-Alváh ba'd

Bahá'u'lláh soon identifies God explic-  
Likewise, the

This language distinguishing

tween the necessary and the

gent in reference respectively to

and His creation is central to

of Bahá'u'lláh, and its

Bahá'u'lláh's

general is clearly realized as

one notes that the term imkán,

signifying the realm of

istence, is used in reference to

ubiquitously in

ings, even as mention of

contingent beings—is

in most any prayer, tablet,

from Him. As such, the Lawh-i

mat opens with: “This

which the All-Merciful hath sent

from the Kingdom of Utterance. It

truly a breath of life unto those

dwell in the realm of creation

Glorified be the Lord of all

(Tablets 137;

az Kitáb-i-Aqdas 80).

itly with what is necessarily existent, Long Obligatory Prayer enjoined by using the term *vájib*, technically meaning “Thou seest me turning toward Thee, and rid of all attachment to anyone save Thee, and clinging to Thy cord, through tie of direct intercourse to bind the one whose movement the whole creation (*mumkinát*) hath been stirred up” whose true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between (Prayers 22 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021 and Meditations 317; *Ad’íyyiy-i-150–51; Hadrat-i-Mahbúb 65). Iqtidárát 72–73). Here, “whatsoever in These are but two examples among the contingent world can either be ex-myriad of Bahá’u’lláh’s identification pressed or apprehended” translates the of creation with contingent being, with Persian *ánchih dar maqám-i-mumkin, literally “whatsoever is in the its implied attribution of necessity station of the contingent (mumkin)”;* to God. We may further consider, for such a thing, Bahá’u’lláh instance, Bahá’u’lláh’s statement in says, is *mahdúd*, or limited, by the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* in which He stresses limitations pertaining to the *hudúdát-i-imkáníyyih*, the contingent realm, or the constraints of God’s ontological distinction from gency. According to *mumkinát* or contingent beings, insofar as they have an intrinsic dependence upon Him: “No tie of direct intercourse alone transcends such limitations. As such, Bahá’u’lláh here can possibly bind Him to His creatures explicates the ontological gulf between God and (mumkinát) . . . inasmuch as by a word His creation in the Persian text by of His command all that are in heav-explicit-*

en and on earth have come to exist, being “in and by His wish, which is the Primal while Will itself, all have stepped out of utter necessary nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible” (63). constraints of In yet another work, Bahá’u’lláh again stresses, using precise metaphysical language, that God utterly transcends contingent existence. He writings thus explicitly validates, beyond any repeats a mere coincidence of terminology, the in content of Avicenna’s central distinction between that which is necessarily existent in itself, being God, and contingent what exists within the constraint of dependency, contingent being, namely, the creature. Bahá’u’lláh thus asserts: “the requirements, there habitation wherein the Divine Being dwelleth is far above the reach and ken (Some of anyone besides Him. Whatsoever Mufávadát 4). in the contingent world can either be the con- expressed or apprehended, can never argue for er transgress the limits which, by its ontologically inherent nature, have been imposed upon it. God, alone, transcendeth principles Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

ly characterizing creation as the station of the contingent,” He implicitly affirms the existence of God by saying that He alone transcends such contingency. This language of necessity and contingency with its accompanying logic continues through the of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who even kind of argument from contingency which reasoning similar to appears in the eloquent brevity of gle sentence: “So long as the world is characterized by and so long as this dependency is of its essential must be One Who in His own Essence is independent of all things” Answered Questions 6; That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appeals to contingent nature of the world to God’s existence, as an dependent reality, shows that He dates the basic metaphysical

underlying Avicenna’s argument for God as “necessary” and “One Who in His own Essence is independent of all things”—the significance of such an expression is utterly lost without an understanding of that metaphysical world-picture of creation’s inherent contingency and world-picture rationally argued for by God’s ontological necessity. Avicenna and an appreciation of its attendant terms of contingency and necessity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá furthermore uses the very term necessarily existent (*vujúb*) This fact illustrates the relevance of in explicit reference to God, such as analyzing the Avicennian positions when He says that God is absolutely affirmed in the Bahá’í Writings to one and indivisible insofar as the divine reality “admits of no division, for contained in theological teachings division and multiplicity are among the characteristics of created and hence point can them. contingent things, and not accidents Another example of this the terms be seen when, right next to impinging upon the Necessary Being necessary and contingent, Bahá’u’lláh calls God *qadím* and (*vujúb*)” (Some Answered Questions creation *hádith*: “there can be no tie of 127; *Mufávadát* 27). Similarly, direct inter- course to bind the one ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that such things as true God with His creation, and no “we affirm for creation to be among the resemblance what- ever can exist between the requirements of origination we deny in transient (hádith) and the Eternal God; for to be sanctified and exalted contingent (*mumkin*) and the (*qadím*), the Absolute

beings,” of referring to sary” and “One Who in His sense is independent of the significance of such utterly lost without an of that metaphysical rationally argued for by an appreciation of its of contingency and necessity. illustrates the relevance of the Avicennian positions the Bahá’í Writings to theological teachings them. Another example of this be seen when, right next to necessary and contingent, calls God *qadím* and “there can be no tie of course to bind the one His creation, and no ever can exist between the (hádith) and the Eternal contingent (*mumkin*) and the

characteristics of the Necessary Being (vájib)” (Gleanings 66; Majmú‘iy-i-Al- (vujúb)” (Some Answered Questions 340). Though qadím 339; Mufávadát 204). He asserts, more-translated as over, that “whatever is originated, in philosophical-respect to its existence and conditions, that we consider requires the effluence of being that emanates from the Necessarily Existent” comes from (Khitábát 2:6, provisional translation).<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Avicenna’s modal metaphysics is not merely incidental to these passages from Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The significance of calling creation “the contingent world,” in the sense of a cause’s effect, as Avicenna explains, that Bahá’u’lláh here employs the term qadím in reference to God and hádith with respect to created

24 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

things, insofar as according to both Avicenna, but also affirms the meaning Avicenna and Bahá’u’lláh creation is underlying it. “That primal Essence,” Bahá’u’lláh assures us in the Lawh- ceaselessly dependent on Him—as will i-Tawhíd, “subsists (qá’im) by virtue of its own self” be explored in Part Three of this article. Thus, Bahá’u’lláh not only stresses Mubárahik 313, provisional transla-

the necessary existence of God and the Obligato-  
 contingency of His creatures, but also Bahá'u'lláh, one  
 alludes to His being essentially prior to my  
 to them, as the ultimate and uncondi- my  
 tioned cause of all other things at all times, as Avicenna argued.  
 Moreover, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in chapter (al-qayyúm)"  
 eighty of Mufávadát or Some Answered Ad'íyy-  
 Questions, Himself provides a detailed addition,  
 presentation of essential and temporal the  
 priority, as well as the dependent and distinguishes  
 originated nature of an effect (hudúth), between the everlasting  
 existence of that precisely mirrors Avicenna's own the soul, which is nonetheless  
 contin- gent, temporal and thus dependent on  
 explanations; this again indicates His support for the metaphysical account of a cause, and the eternal existence  
 of causation underlying Avicenna's argu- God, which is necessary, absolute,  
 un- conditioned and essential to  
 ment for God. In this light, Bahá'u'lláh Him, and  
 likewise uses the term hudúth to refer thus in need of no cause. He  
 states:  
 to created things' essential contingency  
 and their fundamental insignificance When the soul attaineth the Pres-  
 when compared with God's necessary ence of God, it will assume the  
 and unconditioned existence: "how form that best befitteth its  
 immor- tality and is worthy of its  
 utterly contemptible must every con-  
 celestial habitation. Such an existence  
 tingent (hudúth) and perishable thing  
 is a contingent and not an absolute  
 appear when brought face to face with existence, inasmuch as the for-  
 the uncreated, the unspeakable glory of mer is preceded by a cause,  
 the Eternal" (Gleanings 187-88; qtd. the latter is independent  
 whilst  
 in Dávúdí 131).

there-

Even when Bahá'u'lláh uses terms strictly

other than *vájib* in reference to the nature of God's existence, the evident *Majmú'iy-*

meaning remains that God is necessarily existent in Himself and essentially independent—an indication that “absolute

He not only uses the terminology of which

Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

literally signifies essential existence. con-

Because God exists necessarily of Himself (1:58–59).

self without need of anything external we

to Him, His existence is essential to His Bahá'u'lláh,

nature, and is accordingly absolute, as recognizes

Shoghi Effendi perceptively translated, distinction

insofar as it is not contingent on, or ex-

conditioned by, anything whatsoever. the

Since this “essential existence” is not above points

preceded by or dependent on a cause—understanding

whereas non-essential existence is—Avi-

Bahá'u'lláh is clearly distinguishing for God's

between existence which is essential of

to something and thus necessary, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's state-

existence which is incidental, derived favor

from a cause, and thus contingent to a clarifications of

thing. As such, it is this necessary exis-

of. Absolute existence is

confined to God, exalted be His glory. (Gleanings 157;

*i-Alváh-i-Mubárah* 164–65)

The term translated as

existence” is *baqáy-i-dhátí*,

25

in being causally dependent and

ditioned (*Muntakhabátí*

From the above points, therefore,

may safely conclude that

along with 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

and affirms the Avicennian

between contingent and necessary

istence, and identifies God with

Necessarily Existent. The

also showcase how an

of the metaphysical principles

cenna uses in his argument

existence illuminate the meaning

Bahá'u'lláh and

ments—Their own arguments in

of God's existence and

His nature.

tence, not dependent on a cause, which the Nec-

He says is “strictly confined to God.” Avicenna propos-

In this passage, therefore, Bahá’u’lláh carefully explicates the with God, metaphysical notions of contingent and God of necessary being, and what they entail concept of for the nature of God and His creatures, clearly and consequently affirms the concep- necessarily and tual core of Avicenna’s argument for yet God and subsequent conception of the justification Divine in its essential form. Similarly, metaphysics, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes a precise distinc- existent in itself tion, like Avicenna, between the condi- as tional and hence contingent existence term di- of creatures and the necessary exis- following part tence of God, when He explicitly states explore in one place that existence is “of two emerg- kinds,” that of God and that of khalq or necessi- creation. While the existence of God, divinity He explains, is preceded by and depen- in dent on no cause whatsoever, being ab- mean- solute and eternally and independent- ly subsistent, the kind of existence creatures possess is radically different as well as

Nevertheless, the concept of

essarily Existent that

initially seem too conceptually

bare to be easily identified

particularly the full and lively

Bahá’u’lláh. Though the

God presented by Bahá’u’lláh

entails that He exists

not merely contingently, we have

to see the full rational

for why, in Avicenna’s

something necessarily

should be recognized as divine and

the single reality worthy of the

vinity. The object of the

of this paper, therefore, is to

how a rich theological picture

es from the idea of absolute

ty, and how the attributes of

can be logically deduced therefrom

Avicenna’s system. We will see,

while, an even greater convergence

between Avicenna’s arguments and

Bahá’u’lláh’s statements,

the explanations of the latter's son and contingent beings. The prime method of establishing God's successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of establishing God's attributes, therefore, in both the Bahá'í Writings and Avicenna's work, is the apophatic approach of negative theology, by which In the foregoing pages, we reviewed properties that are characteristic of created and contingent beings as Avicenna's argument for God as the negated and contingent beings as such are negated from God. In this light, Necessarily Existent, and demonstrated that in Bahá'u'lláh's view God, as transcends the is the one reality that Avicenna stresses, is indeed characterized by necessary existence. What conditioned, contingent, caused, and thus mutable order of nature, and is remains to be shown, therefore, is absolute and sanctified from the multi-plicity of attributes that are twofold. First, we must elucidate the distinctive of contingent beings. By this rationale behind Avicenna's assertion method of negation, a fuller understanding that the Necessarily Existent is indeed God by explaining how he deduces emerges of what necessary existence further divine attributes from the idea logically entails, and what it must pre-clude, with the result that one of necessary existence. We will do this comes to know God by virtue of what He is by considering the divine attributes of simplicity, singleness, immutability, eternity, perfection, goodness, not, such as when one asserts that (not is eternal (not in time), necessary intellect, will, and infinitude, each of contingent), one (not multiple), and so on. which is significant in Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and Avicenna's thought. A related principle to bear in mind—one whose justification will Second, we must ascertain whether Bahá'u'lláh accepts Avicenna's concept of become evident once the count of the divine attributes, in order simplicity has been discussed—is to determine further how Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna the that for Bahá'u'lláh affirms Avicennian principles and how divine attributes treated in this

part understanding those Avicennian principles illuminates the nature, and rational character, of Bahá'u'lláh's own teachings on the nature of God. Such, then, is the object of the second part of this part that paper.

are not discrete and separate entities that characterize God. Each rather, is a different necessary existence. We saw, for stance, in this article's first part that the Necessarily Existent has no cause.

In order to contextualize the discussion of divine attributes that follows, we can note at the outset that a conceptual analysis of the Necessarily Existent shows the stark disparity and categorical distinction between it and Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

If it needed a cause to exist, it would not be necessarily existent in itself. Insofar as we conclude that there is a first causeless cause, we can determine that it is identical to the Necessarily Existent, for it would require

a cause if it were merely possible in itself. And yet, although being necessarily existent and being independent of any cause are distinct propositions, the reality they point to is the same, as each predication is fully identical to, or convertible into, the other. Similarly, each of the attributes spoken of will not constitute a discrete entity in God, and, but will serve as a way of deducing Bahá'u'lláh. In the logical consequences of necessary

S

The above point—that in God is no multiplicity—is especially parent from an understanding of attribute of simplicity. It is first because it is arguably the most vital to comprehend in order for one to understand the God of Avicenna likewise, the God of sum, simplicity means that the

existence. This is by way of negating and from the Necessarily Existent the attributes peculiar to contingent beings, stands as described above, rather than affirming of it a plurality of discrete properties, as Avicenna stresses: ontological disjunctions and various internal as- God has attributes whose meaning But, is negative, such that when we say that God is “one,” for example, we mean that His reality is such that He has no peer, or that He is not composed of parts. Similarly, when we say He is eternal, we mean that His existence has no beginning, but these two attributes—oneness and eternity—do not bring about any multiplicity in His essence. (Dánishnámih 381) It is in this light that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, as seen earlier, that such things as sustain “we affirm for creation to be among the requirements of origination we deny in God; for to be sanctified and exalted above all imperfections is one of the

necessarily Existent is incomposite absolutely one in its essence—it has no component parts. Simplicity in contrast to complexity, which entails the composition of multiple as well as a variety of real aspects cohering within an entity. as Avicenna explains (Dánishnámih 368–69 and 374–75), the Existent must be simple because it has no cause for its existence, nor for being the way that it is. For if the necessarily Existent were composed of different parts, then it would depend on those parts, and on some by which they would cohere, in order to exist. In such a case, its would be contingent and not necessary—contingent, that is, on a range of parts and on something to them to come together so as to the subsistence of the complexity. If this were so, then it would be possibly existent in itself and necessary. It would not be



Metaphysics, that it would still be dependent for its existence on the composition of separate elements as well as some external principle to unite those elements; it thus assimilates would not be fundamental and necessary in itself. Consequently, something cannot be composed of necessary entities and remain necessarily existent in itself.<sup>8</sup> other, whether in actuality or in potentiality,

7 This same logic, as we discussed even as he expresses in the Dánish-earlier, showed us that composition is a feature strictly confined to contingent beings. Composition entails the existence of something prior to the composed thing, something more basic which supports, causes, and sustains its existence. The Necessarily Existent, then, must be entirely void of such composition.

8 Avicenna's demonstration that in principle there could only be one necessarily existent reality is discussed in the Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

itself but must be actualized by a cause; insofar, then, as a contingent being can be actualized

something is either actual or and that causation, change or nation involves the potential. In fact, Avicenna this Aristotelian insight into sion of existence into the necessity and possibility. For na, whatever can possibly exist be said to exist in some way or other, whether in actuality or in potentiality,

námih: "When it is possible thing to exist but it still the possibility of its is nonexistent is called (363). When a possibly existent comes into existence, it passes potentiality into actuality. such a thing does not have actuality in

section "Singleness."

29

a cause to become actually

If that potential in it were

change or revert to nonexistence, it is by a cause, then the being of the  
Nec-  
not pure, self-subsistent actuality, but essarily Existent would not be  
fully  
rather is partly actual (as actualized by necessary in itself but  
necessitated by  
its cause or causes) and partly potential a cause. This, of course, is a  
contra-  
due to its inherent contingency. diction. Alternatively, if one  
part of its  
Consequently, things that are caused existence were actual in itself, and  
an-  
or mutable are composites of actuality other part potential, the former  
would  
and potentiality, actual and potential have no need of the latter to  
exist. That  
existence. That is, a contingent being, former would then be the true  
Neces-  
say a tree, is actually one way and sarily Existent, in which case it  
could  
potentially another. Part of a tree's not be subject to an external  
cause to  
contingency entails that it has poten- join it to something only  
tially  
tially—it can potentially exist or not existent, nor would it make  
sense to  
exist; it can potentially be fertile green say that what is necessary in  
itself de-  
or withered brown; it can potentially pends on a part that is only  
possibly  
grow or diminish. Conversely, it actu- existent in itself.<sup>9</sup>  
ally is one way or another at any par- Hence, the Necessarily  
Existent is  
ticular time, and that current actuality no composite of actuality and  
poten-  
is made actual, or necessary, by some tiality, but fully actual and  
necessarily  
cause or other. The tree, accordingly, is so—not upon the condition of  
anything  
not purely actual or necessary in itself, else; it is thus wholly  
unconditioned,  
but is subject to causes and has poten- absolute, and free of any  
metaphysical  
tials that may or may not become ac- composition. The simplicity of its  
ex-  
tualized. Metaphysically, therefore, the istence inevitably entails that it  
is one

tree is a composite of actual and potential existence: existence as necessitated by its causes and existence as merely possible in itself. But Avicenna writes in *ash-Shifá*, “Whatever is necessarily existent by its own essence is necessarily existent in every aspect” (30). This is because if the Necessarily Existent had any potentiality, if any part of its existence were not already fully actual and necessary but potential and contingent, it would not be necessarily existent in itself. In itself, that part would only be possibly existent and would require basic elements.

thing and one thing only, in actuality and necessity—pure with no potentiality. In classical terms, it is pure act with no potency. Similarly, Avicenna explains that the Necessarily Existent could not be a composite of matter and form: 9 Likewise, and stated the Necessarily Existent can have potentiality, for then it would have part and a potential part, and not be fundamentally irreducible and independent of the composition of more

30 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

There cannot be any multiplicity actualized in the Necessarily Existent, such that its existence becomes actualized due to a multiplicity of things, even as the body of man is. Nor can things be divisions within it, each part subsisting in its own right, like the wood and clay of a house. Nor can there be divisions within it that are conceptually separate though not in essence, even

that receives the form and is by it, as wax receives the impression of the seal. Lastly, the final cause of the seal. Lastly, the final cause purpose of a thing, or its end, the that it is directed towards by its particular nature, the which constitutes its good.<sup>10</sup> The Necessarily Existent, in not depending upon causes, clearly does not have an existence that is by virtue of any one of these four

as matter and form are conceptually separate in natural bodies, for in that case the essence of the Necessarily Existent would be a composite and admit of association with causes, as has been shown. (Dánishnámih 374)

es. As such, the Necessarily could have neither a material nor formal cause: it could not be comprised matter, some basic stuff with the potentiality of being actualized in a particular form. If this were the case, it would not be necessarily, but only possibly,

The full significance of the Necessarily Existent's not being a composite of matter and form similarly depends on some understanding of Aristotelian metaphysics and its view of causation, immaterial, for, the basic structure of which Avicenna adopts and defends. In brief, the Aristotelian account presents four kinds of cause: the efficient, the formal, the material, and the final. The efficient cause is already familiar from the discussions in Part One; it is the agent, the source of a change in a thing (such as when a stove imparts heat to water) or the existence of a thing (as when the motion of the hand creates the motion impossi-

composite of discernible discrete or of actuality and necessarily Existent cannot be a of matter and form. It follows ly, then, that it must be otherwise, it would be a entity composed of two parts: matter and form. Matter represent its potentiality, form ality, and it, as a being whose has been realized, would be on those causes, the material and the formal cause, as well as agent, the efficient cause, to the substrate of matter into some crete form. This, of course, is

of the key being held). The formal cause, however, is the essential form whatsoever. and nature or functional organization of a thing, which makes it actually the 'Abdu'l-Bahá thing that it is. Conversely, the material Aristotelian theory of the four causes; see chapter eighty of Mufáavadát.

Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

31

Given, therefore, that the Necessarily Existent is immaterial, it cannot even be conceived as a uniform and homogeneous substance existing in three-dimensional space; rather, it is something that altogether transcends Water space and the material world. Consequently, it is void of all the incidental attributes particular to material entities, which include subsisting in space; being situated in three dimensions; exhibiting weight, mass, position, and locomotion; and so forth. Immaterial-Avicenna is thus a logical consequence both of necessary existence and simplicity. There remains, however, yet another and even more fundamental level. This is at which the Necessarily Existent is

ble for the Necessarily Existent, is dependent on no cause

10 Significantly, likewise validates the

attributes peculiar to water: its inherent nature. Water, as H<sub>2</sub>O, has that neither of its elements, and oxygen, has alone, and its attributes are not a mere sum of and oxygen's discrete properties. Water has a unique set of properties, being capable of existing in gas, and solid states in a narrow range of temperatures. Water is thus ly or intrinsically different from elements.

The important point is that

na recognizes that, for any being, whether it exists must be a distinct consideration from what definitionally constitutes what it is.

because there is nothing entailed

by properly understood as absolutely simple. This involves Avicenna's famous distinction between essence and existence. For Avicenna, contingent beings are composed of essence and existence, and their essence is conceptually and metaphysically distinct from their existence. In other words, for Avicenna, the fact that something is distinct from what something is. The essence of a thing is its quiddity, its *máhiyyat*, the whatness that defines it. An essence that makes an entity the thing it is and not some other thing. For example, the essence of a triangle—triangularity—investigating determines that any triangle has three sides and three sides only, internal angles whose sum is 180 degrees, and so forth. A triangle is not a square; the two shapes are essentially different. To use a more concrete example, the essence of water could be construed as that reality by which it manifests the

the essence of any contingent being that will demonstrate to someone it exists in actuality. The essence of a human being, for example, may be defined, as it was classically at since Aristotle, as a rational animal. If the essence of the human being, is to be a rational animal, it is this remains a fact even if all beings become extinct. Likewise, if humans had never emerged, that would not have changed the fact that the human essence is to be a animal. One cannot know whether any human exists simply by what constitutes the human essence; instead, one must empirically mine whether humans exist in the present, or deduce their existence directly from their effects, their existence is not logically necessary but contingent and incidental to their essence.

Avicenna, in addition, has a briefer proof of the distinction between essence and existence in *ash-Shifá*. His essence. It is thus that saying “the essence is an existent” differs from saying “the essence is an

essence.”

proof rests on the idea that, if essence and existence were not distinct, then even some of the simplest propositions ex-

would revert to bare tautologies. He distinct in itself. Because of the distinc-

explains: tion between essence and existence, a

contingent being cannot derive exis-

It is evident that for everything there is a reality particular to it, and this is what constitutes its essence. Likewise, it is clear that the reality particular to each thing is distinct from its existence. This is because it is intelligible to say that the reality of something does exist in a concrete way, or as ap-

prehended in the mind, or absolutely as common to both. But it is vain and useless to say that the reality of something is the reality of something, or that the reality of something is a reality. (24)

Though Avicenna continues with his explanation, his main point is that, while a statement such as “the essence of man exists (either concretely or as conceived by a mind)” is meaningful in that the predicate reveals something more about the subject, to say “the essence of man is the essence of man” or

immediately

a particular triangle. Because contin-

Though Avicenna continues with his explanation, his main point is that, while a statement such as “the essence of man exists (either concretely or as conceived by a mind)” is meaningful in that the predicate reveals something more about the subject, to say “the essence of man is the essence of man” or

immediately

immediately

immediately

immediately

immediately

immediately

immediately

This distinction between essence and existence moreover clarifies why a contingent being is only possibly

istent in itself. Because of the

tion between essence and existence,

tence from its own essence; it therefore does not have existence in and of itself, that is, from its own nature

essence. It must therefore receive existence from something other than its essence, from something beyond itself: an external cause. As a case in point, although triangularity is the essence of a triangle, and although no

can exist without that essence, what Avicenna would call the formal cause, no concrete triangle can exist without an efficient cause, some external

imparting existence to it, say, the

metrician who draws it and creates it

gent beings evince, in this way, a

distinction between essence and

tence, they are only possibly and

necessarily existent, insofar as

not exist simply given what they

Accordingly, every existent

being evinces a fundamental

tion, a composition that

“the essence of man is an essence” is dependent, a mere restatement. The predicate, in the that case, reveals nothing more about existence. the subject. This shows, for Avicenna, that there is a distinction between essence and existence. Otherwise, to say relies that a particular essence exists would not convey anything more about that Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

points to the conditional, and derivative nature of its being: composition of essence and A composite of essence and existence is not metaphysically fundamental and self-sufficient, but rather on something else for its being and origination.

It then follows that, unlike each predicate member of the totality of contingently for any existent beings, the Necessarily Existent could not be such a composite of recall, essence and existence. As Avicenna Bahá’u’lláh deftly argues in the Dánishnámih: Avicennian “Whatever has an essence other than its “essential own existence is not necessarily existent. For if the essence of a thing is not its own existence, its existence would beings, have the characteristic of being an incidental, and not essential, feature to it. Avicenna Any incidental feature, moreover, has a necessarily excuse” (377). The Necessarily Existent essence except is thus nothing other than necessary is not necessarily existent, nothing other than absolute being. Therefore, it has no essence (Dánish-

here is simply identical to the in a way that would not hold contingent being. In this connection, one may as discussed earlier, how implicitly confirms this proposition by restricting existence” to God; because sence is His existence, His is essential to Him. Contingent in contrast, have a merely or incidental existence, as explains: “Whatever is istent of itself has no existence, and . . . whatever essarily existent of itself has therefore, only incidentally”

distinct from its existence, and in this in validasense one may say that the Necessarily that “[t] Existent has no essence, insofar as it contingent does not have an essence distinct from accident among its act of existence. In this connection realities of Avicenna writes: “The Necessarily Answered Ques- Existent has no essence; it is rather 203). In this from Him that existence emanates onto associated with those things that have essences. It is contingent with pure being from which all privation refers to that and description is negated” (ash-Shifá essential 276). Yet Avicenna also writes that, contingent in another sense, the Necessarily Ex- them- istent’s essence is its existence: “The their existence Necessarily Existent has no essence incidental to them, apart from its existence” (ash-Shifá Avicenna both 274). In the Necessarily Existent, then, there is no distinction between what it Necessar- is and the fact that it is; what it is is its incomposite existence. It is therefore absolute and could not unconditioned Being. Thus, to say “the attributes. Necessarily Existent exists” is equiv- such as alent to saying “the Necessarily Exis- composite tent is necessarily existent”; the subject of rationality

námih 409). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, tion of this point, thus states his common existence (of beings) . . . is only one others that enter upon the created things” (Some tions 337–38; Mufávadát sense, the essential is the necessary, and the the accidental, which here which is incidental, and not or inherent, to a thing. Such beings do not have existence of selves or essentially, is “accidental” or as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and explain. Since the essence of the ily Existent is its very existence, it follows that it have a plurality of essential Contrary to contingent things a human being—which is a of the essential attributes

and animality by virtue of the intellect can be nothing in it that is actualized by any external cause. and the body, respectively—the essence of the Necessarily Existent could The essential simplicity of the Necessarily Existent thus entails not be a composite of different metaphysical parts or attributes, for then is nothing else than the absolute act that essence would be something other of being. In it there is no junction of physical parts, no admixture of than the single and incomposite reality physical parts, no admixture of actuality and potentiality, no of necessary existence. As Avicenna combination of discrete attributes, no explains (Dánishnámih 374), if the cohesion of Necessarily Existent did have multiple form and matter, no union of essence and existence. It is instead discrete attributes, its essence would be something absolutely one and indivisible, actualized by virtue of those attributes, simple and uncomposed. Accordingly, there is and that essence would thus be dependent on those parts, and a cause to unite nothing more fundamental, more basic, more ultimate to reality than the those parts. And this, as we have seen, simple reality that the Necessarily Existent is. It is categorically and non-compositely necessary existence, like any contingent being by virtue of its inherent necessity, and whatever attribute is properly ascribed to it is in fact identical to that absolute oneness, and it is due to its utterly simple essence that it is necessary existence and does not indicate an actual multiplicity within it. Consequently, the thing truly ultimate. Consequently, the Necessarily Existent is not just one being among beings, for in that

case it  
 composition of essence and attributes. would merely be a limited and  
 contin-  
 Its attributes are either identical to gent instantiation of existence,  
 superior  
 its essence, or it transcends attributes only in relative degree to other  
 beings.  
 altogether, at least in the sense that Rather, its simplicity entails  
 that the  
 contingent beings have attributes. Con- Necessarily Existent is not  
 something  
 sequently, given that the Necessarily that has or instantiates existence  
 as be-  
 Existent is “necessary in all aspects,” it ings do, but instead is Being  
 itself, sub-  
 likewise cannot admit of any incidental sisting of itself, dependent on no  
 other.  
 or non-essential attributes or features. It is thus wholly unlike all other  
 things  
 As Avicenna asserts, any incidental and unique—an attribute that  
 will have  
 feature would require that an external its full discussion under the  
 coming  
 cause had actualized something contin- subsection, “Singleness.”  
 gent in the Necessarily Existent, since This, then, is how Avicenna  
 deduces  
 no incidental feature is essential to the the simplicity of the Necessarily  
 Exis-  
 tent, and hence of God. But how  
 being of its possessor. But we have  
 does  
 seen that it is “necessary in every as- Bahá’u’lláh affirm God’s  
 simplicity in  
 pect” and fully actual, and thus there addition to His necessity? There  
 are,  
 Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna 35  
 indeed, many instances in His writings insofar as His existence, as seen  
 above,  
 and those of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which di- is essential to Him.  
 Bahá’u’lláh fur-  
 thermore suggests, in affirming  
 vine simplicity is either implicitly—as  
 that  
 mentioned above—or explicitly con- God is “one in his works”  
 (vâhidan fî  
 firmed. In one of His tablets, for exam- af’álihi) that God does not  
 engage in  
 ple, Bahá’u’lláh firmly asserts that God a multiplicity of actions or

works, as  
 “in truth, hath, throughout eternity, contingent beings do, and thus  
 does not  
 been one in His Essence, one in His at- admit of the multiplicity of  
 potentially  
 tributes, one in His works” (Gleanings enacting one thing and then  
 actually  
 193; Muntakhabátí 77). More tellingly, enacting it, of potentially being  
 one  
 Bahá’u’lláh writes the following in the way and actually another.  
 This in ac-  
 Lawh-i-Madíniy-i-Tawhíd or the Tablet cord with Avicenna’s  
 position that God  
 of the City of Divine Unity: “Thou art enacts, and is identical to, His  
 single  
 then witness that God is one in His at- and absolute act of existence, and  
 that  
 tributes, and that [multiple] attributes He is thus exempt from a  
 multiplicity  
 are debarred from entry into the court of contingent actions, which would  
 in-  
 of His sanctity . . . Recognize, more- volve the actualization of  
 potentiality  
 over, that the multiplicity of various in Him.<sup>11</sup> Bahá’u’lláh  
 therefore clearly  
 designations and attributes shall never affirms that God does not have  
 various  
 be joined unto His essence, for His at- parts or composition, discrete  
 proper-  
 tributes are verily His essence itself” ties or separate qualities, and  
 confirms  
 (Má’idiy-i-Ásmání 4: 329–13, provi- that He is one absolutely  
 and categor-  
 sional translation). ically. In this way,  
 Bahá’u’lláh affirms  
 In these passages, Bahá’u’lláh as- the notion of God’s simplicity  
 in addi-  
 serts that God is one and does not have tion to His necessity.  
 plurality of attributes, for whatever Furthermore, if each of God’s  
 attri-  
 attribute may be properly ascribed to butes is identical with His  
 essence, as  
 Him is identical to His single essence. Bahá’u’lláh states, then  
 logically each  
 Consequently, it seems His intent in one of them is identical with, or  
 con-  
 these passages is not merely to stress vertible to, any of the others. It

follows, that there is only one God. As we saw God has no with Avicenna, the intent behind essentially stating that God is one in essence, attributes, and acts seems rather Bahá'u'lláh's to disallow any notion that there is any multiplicity in God at all. His essence is one; His attributes are one; His acts are one. Therefore, in God there are not multiple attributes and discrete properties; there is only His essential being, the which for Bahá'u'lláh is His existence, Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna.

36

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

God's being complete actuality, sheer perfect necessary being without any addition of potentiality or contingency or any composition therewith. God is, in other words, pure act insofar as He is necessary existence, the very act of absolute being. If God is truly one, His essence Reality is could be no more distinct from His existence than His action could be distinct from either His essence or existence. He is at once necessary existence and clearly the act of being, insofar as His reality assumed then, that for Bahá'u'lláh attributes distinct from His and utterly indivisible being, just for Avicenna. Moreover, statement that God is "one in His is fully intelligible from the 11 The section "Creation and Cosmology" will explore the question the Necessarily Existent performs the creative act according to both He and Avicenna are in concord, as shall be shown. The context of this Tablet that Bahá'u'lláh was asked the meaning of the following originating with Plotinus in the Enneads (5.2.1): "The Simple all things," which was affirmed by the prominent early modern Persian philosopher Mullá Sadrá. That the Reality (Basít al-Haqíqat) is understood to refer to God is

ty as the Necessarily Existent means Bahá'u'lláh, that His essence is to be. Bahá'u'lláh's statements are therefore manifest expressions of the idea of divine simplicity, as is clear after considering an account of Avicenna's explanations for why the Necessarily Existent must be simple. Understanding Avicenna's Bahá'u'lláh ex- logical analysis of necessary existence and simplicity thus illuminates the philosophical context and content of Bahá'u'lláh's own statements. Even if the logical consequences of these passages failed to prove definitively that Bahá'u'lláh affirms Himself re- God's simplicity, His remarks on this theme in His Lawh-i-Basít al-Haqíqat Bahá'u'lláh thus or Tablet on the Simple Reality would be sufficient to show that He in fact so strongly supports the doctrine of divine simplicity as to take it as a given. Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh stresses in that philosophers, Tablet that divine simplicity should not be construed as entailing any kind of pantheism or monism, a view in which the distinction between the necessary

throughout the Tablet, and Bahá'u'lláh's incidentally, even refers explicitly as the Necessarily this work. Bahá'u'lláh's is to explicate Plotinus' ment and Mullá Sadrá's that precludes any pantheistic In His interpretation, plicity affirms God's simplicity denies that He has any parts or ipates in the multiplicity of things. Rather, God is the existence itself with all its from Whom the existence of His tures proceeds, while He mains one and undivided among things or in Himself. states: Thou hast written that an hath asked for an explanation of the statement of the "the Simple Reality is all Say: Know that the meaning of "things" in this connection nothing else but existence and

and the contingent collapses, and God becomes identical with the creation that proceeds from Him. In this too, thereof. This Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

the perfections of existence qua existence, while the meaning of “all” is the possessor

37

“all” admits of no division and of Insightful eyes no parts. Thus, the Simple Reality, signs of because it is simple in all aspects, the is the possessor and totality of all limitless perfections, as it hath been said, “there is no limit to His from handiwork.”

vision of the seer.

behold, in all things, the

the One, for in all things are

divine names manifest, while God Himself hath ever been, and shall forever be, sanctified

limitation, as

ascent, descent, and

In the Persian tongue,<sup>12</sup> it may be said that the intent of the philosopher in the above passage in the

well as connection and association [with any other thing]. All

regard to “things” is the perfections of existence insofar as it is

things, in contrast, abide in

7:140–41, pro-existence, and his intent as to “all” is a possessor, that is, the One who is the possessor and totality of interpretation, “the

(Má'idiy-i-Ásmání

visional translation)

In Bahá'u'lláh's

all limitless perfections in a simple manner. They have put forth

Simple Reality is all things”

possession of divine simplicity and on the independent of any of the

God, the Simple Reality, is the

“potency” and “intensity” of incidental attributes

sor of existence and its

existence.<sup>13</sup> Here, the philosopher's contingent intent was not that the Necessarily position, quantity, temperature, texture,

so far as it is absolute existence

dent of any of the

Existent hath permeated or is disseminated. For

of being found diversely in

entities (such as place,

tity, temperature, texture,

vided among limitless entities. Ex-  
non-com-  
alted is He above that! Rather, it  
God  
is as the philosophers have stated:  
which other  
“The Simple Reality is all things,  
His reali-  
and not any single one of them,”  
substratum to,  
and in another place, “The splen-  
would require  
dors of the Simple Reality can  
inter-  
be perceived in all things.” This  
complexity, and  
perception is conditioned by the  
material  
and composite which could take part in

12 Here, Bahá’u’lláh switches from  
world. This

Arabic to Persian, and largely reiterates the  
absolute  
same point.

existence and

13 This is a reference to Mullá Sadrá,  
have seen

for his philosophy made use of the ideas of  
must be

the relative intensity (tashdíd), as well as  
potentials

the differentiation (tashkík), of existence as  
being or be-

beings proceed from the absolute existence  
causes.

of God.

38 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

Indeed, for Bahá’u’lláh and Avi-  
Existent.

cenna, God is something fully one and  
complete in His necessary being, abso-  
attribute

lutely simple and non-composite, from  
of

Whom the existence of other things  
discuss, for

Bahá’u’lláh, the simple and  
posite nature of God is absolute;

is not the basic stuff out of

things are literally made, and

ty is never a part of, or a

the contingent order. This

that God’s simplicity become

mixed with limitless

that He be something basically

the material and composite

would certainly contradict the

reality of God’s necessary

thus His simplicity, for we

how the Necessarily Existent

wholly actual being with no

and no aspects receptive to

coming contingent on external

to God as the Necessarily

However much simplicity may  
seem to be a rather abstract

of God, it is the most fundamental

the attributes that we shall

proceeds, while He Himself remains two reasons. The first is that it enables absolute, simple, and indivisible. And one to understand precisely why God so Avicenna writes in this connection: as the Necessarily Existent is the absolute terminus of explanation: “Everything is from Him, and He is there is not like anything which proceeds from simply nothing more basic and fundamental than He is Himself, and there and is not any one of the things that are is thus nothing—even theoretically— upon which He could depend. posterior to Him” (ash-Shifá 283). Because Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings on the simplic- tween His essence and His attributes, or His essence and His existence, we have no need to ask why He is one assertion that in God there is no plu- way and not another, or whether He rality of attributes, and that each of His attributes is consequently identical could exist or not exist, insofar as He is necessarily existent in with His essence, He writes that “the Himself. The second reason to devote so much essential names and attributes of God attention to simplicity is that it are identical with His Essence, and His enables one to deduce additional attributes of Essence is sanctified above all under- God, and also to understand that these standing” (Some Answered Questions seem- 168; Mufávadát 105). Elsewhere, ingly additional attributes are not separate properties but merely as we saw earlier, He asserts that the represent different ways of considering Godhead “admits of no division, for what the same reality, termed the division and multiplicity are among the Necessarily Existent, logically entails. the characteristics of created and hence Simplicity, then, enables one to understand how contingent things, and not accidents impinging upon the Necessary Be- God’s attributes could be

identical  
ing” (Some Answered Questions 127;  
another, as  
Mufáavadát 27). The Bahá’í Writings,  
Avicenna state, and  
therefore, confirm Avicenna’s notion  
proper-  
of the simplicity of God. Logically,  
what is necessarily existent of itself  
cannot have parts of any kind, physi-  
to say  
cal or metaphysical, and Bahá’u’lláh  
singleness, it  
and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá accordingly affirm  
are some  
God’s essential and absolute oneness,  
God’s  
in addition to Their explicit references  
explicitly  
Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna  
39  
mentioned by Bahá’u’lláh or ‘Abdu’l-  
Bahá’í Writings.  
Bahá. These include Avicenna’s deduc-  
Clearly,  
tion that in God there can be no dis-  
within the  
tinction between His essence and His  
been  
existence—that He just is His being.  
one thing  
What Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
necessarily existent of it-  
do state unequivocally is that God is  
question  
the Necessarily Existent and absolutely  
one and simple, there being in Him no  
to the at-  
multiplicity and division, and that His  
now  
attributes are one with His essence. The  
potential absence of an explicit state-  
ment on such matters as the identity of  
God’s essence with His existence does  
not imply, however, that They do not  
Exis-  
uphold its truth, for it follows logically

to His essence and to one  
Bahá’u’lláh and  
are not a collection of distinct  
ties in actuality.  
But before we proceed to what  
Bahá’u’lláh and Avicenna have  
about God’s attribute of  
should be noted that there  
statements from Avicenna on  
simplicity that may not be  
throughout the  
But a question remains.  
there can be no multiplicity  
Necessarily Existent, but has it  
shown there is one thing, and  
only, that is  
self? This, of course, is a vital  
for the monotheism of Avicenna and  
Bahá’u’lláh, and it is hence  
tribute of singleness that we must  
turn.  
S  
The singleness of the Necessarily  
tent means that there is not, and

cannot  
from what Bahá'u'lláh says of God's  
necessarily existent  
necessity, essential existence, and sim-  
com-  
plicity, His oneness in essence and at-  
Avicenna's  
tributes. As discussed above, to be nec-  
essarily existent logically implies being  
follows  
incomposite and simple at the deepest  
We  
level, that of having a complete unity  
Existent  
of essence and existence. It is thus that  
neces-  
Bahá'u'lláh uses the term "essential  
parts, various  
permanence or existence" (baqáy-i-  
features,  
dhátí) with reference to God. In sum,  
then  
if this existence is essential to God and  
Avi-  
thus an essential attribute, and if God's  
twenty-two of  
attributes are identical to His simple  
"Metaphysics" that  
essence, it follows that Bahá'u'lláh  
being with  
upholds Avicenna's position that God  
existence—  
is the Necessarily Existent whose  
essence is His existence. If God's es-  
characteris-  
sence were not His existence, His ex-  
There  
istence would not be essential to Him  
dis-  
and would therefore proceed from an  
they  
external cause—making Him a con-  
instanti-  
tingent being. Avicenna's argument,  
otherwise,  
therefore, illuminates the importance  
example,

be, more than one  
being, and that it is unique and  
pletely without like or peer.  
demonstration that the Necessarily  
Existent is single in this sense  
from its necessity and simplicity.  
have seen that the Necessarily  
is nothing other than its own  
sary existence, without  
discrete attributes, incidental  
or potentiality of any kind. How  
could there be more than one? For  
cenna reasons in chapter  
the Dánishnámih's  
if there were more than one  
the attribute of necessary  
say two—then each one would have  
to have some additional  
tic that the other did not have.  
would have to be something that  
tinguished one from the other, so  
could be considered multiple  
ations of the same nature;  
they would be identical. For

from each other by virtue of the fact the Necessarily Existent, and the Nec-  
Nec-  
that each one is capable of evincing essarily Existent would thus have  
to be  
a plurality of attributes, qualities, and a composite of actual and  
potential ex-  
cidental features. One is standing in istence—existence as it is in  
itself and  
position a, the other in position b; one existence as caused by another. In  
this  
is six feet tall, the other is five feet; case, it would be a composite  
being,  
and so on. Although each person has and any composite being is only  
con-  
the same human nature, each one rep- tingly existent, in being  
dependent  
resents a separate and distinct instanti- on parts, as has been shown. Thus,  
as  
Avicenna points out in chapter  
ation of that nature. Existence, in other  
sev-  
words, is imparted to the same human en of Book One in ash-Shifá,  
there is  
essence in two discrete instances. simply nothing by virtue of which  
one  
necessarily existent being could be  
But because the Necessarily Exis- ferent from another—each, being  
dif-  
ferent is absolutely simple and necessary  
only  
in all aspects, one necessarily existent simple existence, would be  
perfectly  
indistinguishable and thus  
being would be identical to another in  
identical.  
Therefore, it is simply incoherent  
every respect; one would have no es-  
to  
say there could be more than one  
sential attribute the other did not itself  
nec-  
essarily existent entity.  
possess. Each would be immaterial, as  
was shown in the previous section, so  
Moreover, since the essence of  
the  
Necessarily Existent just is its  
neither could occupy a different posi-  
exis-  
tence, it follows that same  
tion in space. Both would be wholly  
essence  
could not have more than one  
actual, so one could not have a poten-

instantia-  
 tial feature the other did not have. And  
 essence of a  
 since no necessarily existent being can  
 existence, it  
 be a composite of multiple attributes,  
 one  
 neither could possess an attribute be-  
 human  
 sides necessary existence the other did  
 and  
 not possess. As a result, there can be  
 Existent  
 only one necessarily existent being.  
 from  
 And since, as shown in the previous  
 es-  
 section, the Necessarily Existent is  
 existence,  
 necessary in every aspect and is sheer  
 existence. On  
 actuality with no potentials, it is im-  
 reasons,  
 possible for it to have any incidental  
 ex-  
 or contingent attribute (such as place,  
 position, quantity, quality, or time) by  
 speaks of  
 which it could be distinguished from  
 needing  
 another necessarily existent being. For  
 cause,  
 such an incidental attribute, in order to  
 there  
 arise, would require a cause external to  
 number  
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

tion of existence. Since the  
 contingent being is not its  
 can be made existent in more than  
 instance, just as there are many  
 beings, water molecules, trees,  
 so forth. But the Necessarily  
 does not have an essence distinct  
 its own existence, and so the single  
 sence could only have one  
 for it is identical to that  
 account of these and other  
 there can only be one necessarily  
 istent being.  
 Therefore, when Avicenna  
 the sum of contingent causes  
 an external, necessarily existent  
 it could not be objected that  
 could, even in principle, be a  
 41  
 He is, and hath from everlasting  
 been, one and alone, without  
 or equal, eternal in the past,  
 nal in the future, detached from  
 things, ever-abiding, unchange-  
 able, and self-subsisting. He

of necessarily existent beings sustain-  
 ing the contingent world. There is but  
 peer  
 one absolute reality, then, which con-  
 eter-  
 currently sustains the entire contingent  
 all  
 structure of being, and which imparts  
 existence to it absolutely and inex-

hath

haustibly. It is as though there is but one spring from which all the waters counselor of being flow, or but one root by which all the branches of existence are sustained. The oneness and singleness of universe the Necessarily Existent is accordingly the a logical consequence of its necessity, they its simplicity and the identity of its essence and its existence. There is nothing like it, for all other things are contingently existent and have being only in-derivatively, and thus are much more like one another than they could ever resemble that absolute source of all being. Avicenna, through this means, is able not only to infer the existence of that divine reality transcendent above nature, but also to affirm that such an subject ultimate reality must be absolutely one forgotten and single, unique and matchless. The central claim of all monotheistic faiths are is thus rigorously upheld by the rational philosophy of Avicenna—that there revelations is only one God, incomparable, single, 192–93; and peerless.

Muntakhabátí 75–76)

This claim, too, is central to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. There is hardly declares in the any work by Him that does not stress, Avicenna with the unshakable conviction of of the certitude, the oneness of God and the incomparable, the transcendent nature

assigned no associate unto Himself in His Kingdom, no

to counsel Him, none to compare unto Him, none to rival His

To this every atom of the

bearth witness, and beyond it

inmates of the realms on high,

that occupy the most exalted

and whose names are remembered before the Throne of Glory.

Bear thou witness in thine

most heart unto this testimony which God hath Himself and for Himself pronounced, that there is none other God but Him, that all else besides Him have been created by His behest, have been fashioned by His leave, are

to His law, are as a thing

when compared to the glorious evidences of His oneness, and

as nothing when brought face to face with the mighty

of His unity. (Gleanings

And what Bahá'u'lláh

poetic strains of the prophet,

na reiterates in the sober tones

philosopher:

of His being. Bahá'u'lláh thus affirms, It has thus been established for you that there is something necessary of God as a natural concomitant of necessarily existent. Likewise, it has

His divine nature: been shown that the Necessarily  
42 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

Existent is one. He is thus single; nothing shares with Him His station, and nothing else is necessarily existent. He alone, therefore, is the principle by which the existence of all other things is necessitated, whether directly or through an intermediary cause. And since the existence of all other things proceeds from Him, He is the First. By "first" we do not mean an attribute additional to His necessity, such that the necessity Existent.

of His existence becomes multiple. Rather, we mean that He is the First in the sense of how all other things stand in relation to Him.

(ash-Shifá 274) Whatever admits of change must also admit of having a cause, of

I being in one condition by virtue of a certain cause, or lacking that

The simplicity and singleness of the Necessarily Existent distinguishes it as utterly unlike any contingent being and transcendent above the entire order of the contingent realm. And among the attributes and inherent conditions of contingent beings is change and alteration, becoming and perishing. But since the Necessarily Existent has no likeness to contingent beings and contingent attributes, it cannot admit of any alteration, or be receptive to any change.

Avicenna's proof for the immutability of the Necessarily Existent in the That is, in order for the Necessarily Existent to change, there would have to

Dánishnámih is remarkably brief, but reality that be some aspect or part of its since he has previously established its was not necessary in itself but rather necessity and simplicity, its immutability need only be shown to be logically contingent upon being actualized by entailed by those two notions. Since some external cause. Such a being, Necessarily however, would not be the Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 43

Existent, which is absolutely simple and that God whom He has affirmed to not a composite of actual and potential be necessarily existent.

'Abdu'l-Bahá existence. The Necessarily Existent is thus validates the logical method un- therefore immutable and unchanging. derlying Avicenna's own conclusion.

The immutability of the Necessarily Avicenna's method, in turn, elucidates the rational structure of the Bahá'í likewise affirmed by Bahá'u'lláh and theological claim—a trend observed

'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states explicitly and decisively: Of course, to say that the Necessarily

sarily Existent is unchanging is not to For the essence of the Godhead imply that it is stagnant, lacking need-

there is no ascent or descent, no ed activity or dynamism. Rather, it is entrance or egress. It is sanctified itself the sheer act of being, and thus of

from time and place. It is ever in unbounded vitality and life. For there the apex of sanctity, for change to be any alteration in the Necessarily

and alteration are impossible Existent, therefore, would mean for it for the reality of the Godhead. to quit its station as the ultimate reality,

Change and alteration and motion the ground for all dynamism in the con- from one condition to another are tingent realm. And it is only because it

incidents particular to contingent is the unchanging and absolute ground and originated phenomena. (Kh- of being that it can sustain the chang-

itábát-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá 2:131–32, ing realm of contingent becoming. The

provisional translation) Necessarily Existent is not stagnant, then, but rather constant, and in that  
 Indeed, change is a fundamental feature of the contingent world, the realm of becoming, and thus is far removed from the Necessarily Existent, which is absolute being without any aspect of becoming. Any change, moreover, proclaims:  
 is dependent on what already is, and that therefore only absolute, immutable being could be the ultimate ground and support of the changing realm of contingent beings. The vital point here is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá not only asserts the immutable nature of God; He argues for God’s immutability by noting that mutability is foreign to God precisely because it is characteristic of contingent beings and thus impossible for

constancy any change would no added virtue, but would rather signify a deficiency commensurate with that of the realm which it sustains supports.  
 Bahá’u’lláh accordingly “Praise be to God, the Eternal perisheth not, the Everlasting that clineth not, the Self-Subsisting altereth not (Al-Báqí bi lá Dá’im bi lá zavál, al-Qá’im tiqál)” (Epistle 1; 1). He is báqí and thus abides bi lá faná’, without death. He and thus perpetual and constant, bi lá zavál, without decline, or extinction. He is qá’im and

44 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

subsists dependent on no other, bi lá constancy intiqál, without change or alteration. eternal is one of the various senses of the word E qadím that Avicenna applies to the Necessarily Existent. In the Dánish-The Necessarily Existent is thus immutable. However, it is also commonly understood that God is eternal, and

being, the immutability, the of what is truly God. As such, námih he explains that the Existent alone has the full of qidam, eternity; for anything

that this is asserted by Bahá'u'lláh without power reservation. Indeed, when we consider it the Necessarily Existent, we see that this eternality is entailed in the very conception of necessary existence. For what- According to the Necessarily Existent, the ever exists necessarily of itself, and no is immutable, must also exist without sixth-century beginning or end, and is not subject to the passage of time, being beyond possession any measure of motion and change. at a The Necessarily Existent never began to exist, and it can never fail to exist. repeatedly Moreover, there can be no change in one the condition of its existence, and time indivisible, thus has no hold or power over its sta- unchangeable reality. There is no mo- place” tion for the Necessarily Existent, and provisional so within it there can be no difference Necessar- between the past, the present, and the place, it future. No alteration or finality awaits extended it, just as no origination or beginning would precedes it. likewise In it there is rather an everlasting present of the fullness of its existence. here The present that belongs to it is one

exists through the sustaining of something beyond itself, even if had always contingently existed in manner, is in the realm of of hudúth (382–83). Necessarily Existent, dependent on other, alone has what the ry philosopher Boethius eloquently defined eternality as: “the of endless life whole and perfect single moment” (Book 5, ch. 6). As to Bahá'u'lláh, He affirms the eternality of God, in place writing: “One and He hath ever subsisted within His tion sanctified from all time and (Má'idiy-i-Ásmání 7:8, translation). To say that the ily Existent is sanctified from being immaterial and thus not in three dimensions (since that require it to be composite), affirms one of Avicenna’s theological arguments, but what is important is Bahá'u'lláh’s

affirmation that God is  
of constancy, permanence, unceasing  
is  
actuality, and absolute being; it is a  
the  
present that consists in a timeless and  
immutable act of existence, a present  
Bahá'u'lláh's  
that has no likeness to the temporal  
are too  
order of the contingent realm. Eter-  
we  
nality, then, in a word sums up the  
that  
necessary existence, the transcendent  
intercourse  
Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

45

to bind the one true God with His cre-  
Avicenna's  
ation, and no resemblance whatever  
“for  
can exist between the transient (hádith)  
“among the  
and the Eternal (qadím), the contingent  
defi-  
(mumkin) and the Absolute (wájib)”  
283). That  
(Gleanings 66; Majmú'iy-i-Alvâh-i-  
requisite for  
Mubárákih 340).

the complete flourishing of a  
human  
being that exist only potentially and  
P not actually or necessarily, and  
their  
actualization not only requires some-  
In the foregoing pages, we have seen  
also may  
that the Necessarily Existent must be  
case he  
simple, single, immutable, and eter-  
imperfection  
nal. By logical extension, then, it is  
sound-  
ultimate, incomparable, absolute, un-  
education,  
changeable, everlasting, and the source

sanctified from zamán, or time. He  
thus eternal, entirely unbound by  
temporal-spatial conditions of con-  
tingent beings. Though  
references to God's eternality  
numerous to quote adequately here,  
may again consider His statement  
“there can be no tie of direct  
A human being, to use  
example, admits of imperfection,  
many things,” he writes,  
perfections of his existence are  
cient in him” (ash-Shifá  
is, there are many things  
the complete flourishing of a  
human  
being that exist only potentially and  
not actually or necessarily, and  
their  
actualization not only requires some-  
thing outside that person but  
simply fail to occur, in which  
or she would suffer sheer  
and deficiency. Such things as  
ness of health, prosperity,  
virtue, and love are needed for

human  
 of all other reality. Such attributes alone life and existence to be  
 complete, or  
 and in themselves distinguish it above perfect in the relevant sense.  
 But a hu-  
 all other things. Through an under- man being depends on external  
 causes  
 standing of what necessary existence for these things or may  
 altogether fail  
 logically entails, therefore, we see that to achieve them, and furthermore  
 may  
 divinity may well be rightly ascribed to lose them in time. No human  
 being,  
 the Necessarily Existent. But its divine nor any other contingent being,  
 can be  
 character will be much more evident perfect in any essential sense,  
 for in  
 once its subsequent attributes, starting and of themselves human beings do  
 not  
 with perfection, are established. even have existence, this having  
 been  
 Avicenna states, in chapter six of acquired through external causes,  
 and  
 Book Eight of ash-Shifá's "Metaphys- thus they are deficient and  
 imperfect in themselves.  
 ics," that the Necessarily Existent is But the Necessarily Existent,  
 perfect, and that perfection follows in itself pure existence and  
 being  
 from its necessary being. Not only is without any potential remaining  
 fully actual  
 it perfect; its perfection transcends the actualized, is *támm al-vujúd*,  
 to be  
 kind achievable by any contingent be- plete and perfect in its  
 "com-  
 ing. For Avicenna, perfection (*kamál* needs nothing and depends on  
 existence." It  
 or *tamám*) refers to completeness and in order to enjoy that fullness  
 nothing  
 actuality, as opposed to deficiency and and there is no higher state of  
 of being, actuali-  
 unrealized potentiality. For something ty which it might attain.  
 actuali-  
 to be perfect, then, means that it is  
 Therefore, in  
 complete and free from deficiency in it there can be no lack or  
 deficiency,  
 respect to what it is and what is proper no unrealized potential or

possibility,  
to its existence.  
is

for that would assume that there

46

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

something proper to it and needed by  
recall, in  
it that it does not already have by itself  
Bahá'u'lláh's state-  
and necessarily of itself. Such cannot  
al-Haqíqat,  
be said of the Necessarily Existent,  
section on  
which is itself independent, subsistent  
Bahá'u'lláh  
being, single and without parts. But  
phrases, such  
not only is it perfect in itself; it is, in a  
being," when the  
certain sense, fawq at-tamám, "above  
Necessarily Ex-  
perfection." "For not only does He pos-  
perfect in His  
sess His own being," writes Avicenna,  
nothing deficient  
"but the existence of every being itself  
being and the  
flows from the abundance of His being,  
Bahá'u'lláh  
belongs to Him, and emanates from  
Him" (ash-Shifá 283).  
The Necessarily Existent, therefore,  
has a transcendental perfection, for by  
explanation  
it is the being of all other things created  
philoso-  
and sustained, and their own contingent  
is all  
perfection realized and made manifest.  
mean-  
There can be no limit or deficiency to  
connection  
its being, and thus it is perfect and the  
and  
source of all perfections in the realm of  
qua  
contingent existence. In addition, inso-

and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We may  
this connection,  
ments in the Lawh-i-Basít  
which was discussed in the  
"Simplicity." In that work,  
mirrors Avicenna's own  
as "the perfections of  
latter writes that the  
istent is "complete and  
existence, for there is  
in Him in respect to His  
perfections of His being."  
states:  
Thou hast written that an inquir-  
er hath asked for an  
of the statement of the  
phers, "the Simple Reality  
things." Say: Know that the  
ing of 'things' in this  
is nothing else but existence  
the perfections of existence  
existence, while the meaning

of far as it is immutable, the Necessarily thereof. This Existent could never become some-division and of thing less than it is, and could thus Reality, never suffer, even theoretically, any aspects, deficiency or lack. Its perfection, therefore, is inviolable, supreme, and truly hath necessary, while that of a contingent limit to His being is quite naturally only possibly (Má'idíy-i-Ásmání existent, corruptible, and conditioned. Perfection in the full sense of the word, then, not only applies to the Necessarily Bahá'u'lláh uses the phrase "perfections of being," as Avicenna himself does. This shared of it than anything else, for it is, in a meaningful sense, perfection itself. Bahá'u'lláh Such, at least, is the basic sense in which Avicenna regards the Necessarily-absolute ly Existent as perfect, and this concept is explicitly affirmed by Bahá'u'lláh the indivisible Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

'all' is the possessor 'all' admits of no parts. Thus, the Simple because it is simple in all is the possessor and totality limitless perfections, as it been said, "there is no handiwork." 7:140) Here we see how phrase "perfections of cenna himself does. This shared points to the fact that both and Avicenna are explaining a ent concept of God, a God of and necessary being, who is dental perfection, and

47

source of all perfections in His cre- Bahá'u'lláh, is ation. His perfection is His being, and we can His being His perfection. behind 'Abdu'l-Bahá, too, affirms the per- goodness to fection of God and even God's identity consider with the theology of not possible here. Nonetheless, analyze the basic reasoning Avicenna's ascription of the Necessarily Existent, and

with his perfection. In chapter twenty-seven of Mufáavadát or Some Answered Questions, He states definitively that “God is pure perfection and the creation is absolute imperfection,” God postulates (such being, in other words, kamál-i-mahd or absolute perfection, and the contingent world nuqsán-i-sirf or sheer deficiency. Moreover, He remarks there that Avicenna “the contingent world is the source of deficiencies and God is the source of perfection. The very deficiencies of the contingent world testify to God’s things, and perfections.”

From these passages, it is evident that the Bahá’í Writings affirm the rational basis of Avicenna’s insistence of each that God, since He is unconditioned being, must also be absolute perfection. The Necessarily Existent is perfect, and it is, in a sense, perfection itself by virtue of its absolute and incorruptible being. How-  
 that are desirable in themselves, and  
 G  
 oth-

how this further aligns his vision with that of the  
 Since Avicenna works within Aristotelian philosophical and accepts its basic as the role of actuality and ity, form and matter, the four etc.), Aristotle’s account indispensable in illuminating na’s own position. In the Ethics, Aristotle, after having the Platonic account, considers the good is said of many that it thus does not have a single, or univocal, meaning. A man is good, a horse is good, a meal is on, but the respective goodness is not identical in meaning, but different character. Nonetheless, is an analogous relationship among these respective goods. The good, every case, is what is sought.  
 ever, among goods there are those those sought rather as a means to

er things. So the goodness of a meal  
 Goodness is no less a divine attribute  
 also  
 than perfection, however, and so we  
 affords. But  
 must consider whether the Necessarily  
 eudaimonia—  
 Existent is good, insofar as the good is  
 well—  
 linked with the monotheistic concep-  
 itself for  
 tion of God. Yet since the good is such  
 end  
 an equivocal term, applied in different  
 goods, and  
 ways to different things, an exhaustive  
 human life.  
 treatment of the good in Avicenna’s  
 proceeds to  
 philosophy, and its correspondence  
 eudaimonia,

48

The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

and settles on a life lived in accord  
 what  
 with reason that evinces fundamental  
 pure  
 virtues. The human good, therefore, is  
 To  
 a manner of life that actualizes or per-  
 that  
 fects the inherent potentials of human  
 its  
 existence.  
 its  
 This is not the place to explicate Ar-  
 istotle’s ethical theory. What is vital for  
 es-  
 our purposes is his notion that some-  
 privation of  
 thing that is sought may be termed  
 of a  
 good, especially that which is sought  
 integri-  
 for its own sake, for every living thing  
 goodness,  
 has its fundamental end in the flourish-

is as a means to nourishment and  
 by virtue of the pleasure it  
 Aristotle singles out  
 happiness, flourishing, or living  
 as that which is desirable in  
 human beings; it is sought as an  
 and not as a means to other  
 is thus the highest good of  
 From this point, Aristotle  
 analyze what constitutes

being. Thus, being, in fact, is  
 is sought. Being, therefore, is  
 good and absolute perfection.  
 wit, the good, in general, is  
 which everything seeks within  
 own limit, and that by which  
 existence is made complete. Evil,  
 conversely, has no definite  
 sence. It is rather the  
 a substance, or the privation  
 substance’s wholeness and  
 ty. Being, accordingly, is  
 and the perfection of being is

the  
 ing condition of its own being. In addi-      goodness of being. And that  
 Being  
 tion to this notion, in Avicenna's writ-      which is untouched by  
 privation,  
 ing we find affirmed the Neoplatonic      neither the privation of  
 substance  
 idea that evil does not in itself have any      nor that of something belonging  
 to  
 positive existence but, rather, it is lack      substance, but which is rather  
 per-  
 and deficiency—the privation of being      petually in actuality—that  
 Being  
 and of its perfections, even as blindness      is pure good. A contingent  
 being  
 is a privation in the eye, as Plotinus ex-      in its essence is not pure  
 good, be-  
 plains in the *Enneads* (1.8.9). The good      cause its essence, simply by  
 virtue  
 is thus the eminent presence of some-      of itself, does not have  
 existence.  
 thing, of being and perfection, insofar      Its essence, therefore, is  
 subject to  
 as the latter are desired for their own      privation, and that which is  
 sub-  
 sake. With these two notions in mind,      ject to privation in a certain  
 sense  
 we can consider what Avicenna writes      is not clear in every aspect  
 from  
 in *ash-Shifá* regarding the goodness of      evil and deficiency.  
 Therefore, ab-  
 the Necessarily Existent:      solute good is nothing other  
 than  
 the Necessarily Existent in its es-      sence. (283–84)  
 The Necessarily Existent, in its es-  
 sence, is pure good. For the good,  
 in general, is that which all things      Thus, for Avicenna, the Necessarily  
 desire, and that which all things      Existent is pure good in itself,  
 insofar  
 desire is being, or that perfection      as it is pure being and absolute  
 perfec-  
 of being which accords with the      tion, which is precisely what is  
 sought  
 manner of a thing's existence.      as the good by every being,  
 insofar as  
 Nothing desires privation as such,      every being seeks its own  
 flourishing,

but only insofar as the nonexistence of a certain thing is conducive to being and the perfection of

Necessarily Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

Existent is pure good insofar as in it that there is no privation or deficiency, and being thus in it there can be no evil, which is existence, and the privation of the good. the priva-

But the Necessarily Existent is also good in the sense that all other good proceeds from it. It is good, therefore, Avicennian not only when considered in itself, but of

also in its effects. Avicenna writes: describe, in sum, how Avicenna affirms the goodness of Good is also said of that which with

bestows the perfections of things and their virtues. Now, it is evident that the Necessarily Existent hence

must be, by its very essence, that demonstrating which bestows existence onto all all other things, and that by which the perfection of anything is realized. It is not

is good, therefore, in this aspect as inevitable, even as within it there is no deficiency or lack. (ash-Shifá 284)

and for its potentials of life to tualized in ever greater stages of fection. Furthermore, the

49

an inevitable feature of anything exists contingently, for such a does not, in itself, have thus is necessarily subject to

tion of being and imperfection.<sup>14</sup> Regrettably, it is outside the

of this essay to give the full

answer to the so-called problem

evil. It is sufficient to

God: first, by identifying the good

being and perfection; second, by

ing that the Necessarily Existent

solute being and perfection, and

pure good; and third, by

that it is the cause and source of

er being and perfection, and hence

the cause of good, insofar as evil

a created thing but merely the

ble privation of existence inherent

any contingently existent being.

Significantly, these notions of the good are readily affirmed in Avicenna's view, if good is properly said of being and its perfection, then Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In Mufávadát (184) or Some the Necessarily Existent is supremely Answered Questions (304), good insofar as it, in its essence, is pure 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives His full support to the being and sheer perfection. Further- Neoplatonic account of evil as privation and, after more, it is by the Necessarily Existent giving a summation and defense of that any other thing has existence, and its central premise, concludes: it is by it that the existence of any thing is made complete, such as when an acorn grows into an oak tree, or an infant into an adult. In it there is no evil, no deficiency, no lack, no imperfection. Evil, similarly, does not proceed from moral as opposed to natural evil may be it. Evil, instead, is something without analyzed as a corruption or imperfection of the any positive existence or essence. It will contrary to the objective good and operates as the privation of being and flourishing of human nature. Though there are flourishes in a thing, such as when evil actions, they spring from decomposition results in the death of corruptions or imperfections of human nature and an organic being. But this evil is merely result from having a damaged or disordered character.

50 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

merely in non-existence. For example, death is the absence of life: presentation of God that In any case, it is implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's When man is no longer sustained by the power of life, he dies. Darkness is the absence of light: When God is wholly good. The goodness of God, consisting in His perfect and inexhaustible being, is expressed in personal terms, even as light is no more, darkness reigns. Bahá'u'lláh re-



tongue

good.”<sup>15</sup>

could advance some praise

of the

Best Beloved of the worlds . . .

15 Incidentally, neither Avicenna’s but thou knowest full well

that the

nor ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements on evil invisible Essence is

sanctified of,

entail that there is “no such thing” as evil. transcendent above, and

removed

Although metaphysically evil is non-be-

ing and imperfection, it is a feature in the

world in the same sense that there are such on. Though these things are not

substances,

things as blindness, darkness, death, as so they can be meaningfully

referred to.

Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

51

from all in the realm of the visible. mindless principle, devoid of con-

(qtd. in Dávudí 85, provisional consciousness. Avicenna, like

Bahá’u’lláh,

translation) describes the Necessarily Existent

as having munificence and supreme

But even as God, according to generosity; for Avicenna, He is

indeed

Bahá’u’lláh, ultimately transcends the javvád, all-bountiful and

munificent.

knowledge and descriptions of His This characterizes the goodness of

the

creation, He nonetheless is the “Aim Necessarily Existent, which

consists

and Desire of all things” and the “Best in how it bestows existence

onto all

Beloved of the worlds,” and thus the things, as an intelligent and

voluntary

ultimate object of desire and love— act, done not for the sake of

itself but

the highest good. For as pure being for the good of created things. It

is, fur-

thermore, difficult to conceive

some-

perfection for which all things long, thing as God that itself is devoid

of any

and as the source of all existence, He knowledge. Therefore, if the

Necessar-

ily Existent is to be regarded as

divine,

which all conceivable good proceeds. it must have intellect and volition, and a goodness consonant therewith. Since God is the source of all being and therefore of all good, Bahá'u'lláh We will thus consider how Avicenna deduces the intellectual nature of stresses His loving kindness, His mer- the Necessarily Existent, and further the cy, and His providence, and it is in cor- relate his views with the teachings of these personal terms that He expresses Bahá'u'lláh. of the supreme goodness that is God. He writes, as quoted earlier, that God “res- I cuing” all things “from the abasement Though the attribute of simplicity of remoteness and the perils of ultimate was paramount in showing the ultimate extinction . . . hath received them into and incomparable nature of the God was His kingdom of incorruptible glory. Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna, it Nothing short of His all-encompassing attribute of intellect and of grace, His all-pervading mercy, could have possibly achieved it. How could knowledge that the fullness of His divine it, otherwise, have been possible for nature is revealed. For without such a thing as in- telled, the Necessarily Existent, itself the worthiness and capacity to how- ever supreme, would seem to amount emerge from its state of non-existence to some kind of force requisite into the realm of being?” (Gleanings for the existence of all things, but for the 64; Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárákih which itself could not be meaningfully regarded as 338). God. If Avicenna's God were such as But if God's goodness is spoken of in terms of generosity, munificence, identical this, however, it could not be mercy and love, then He cannot be a to the omniscient God of Bahá'u'lláh.

52 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

To consider Avicenna's Necessarily is rath- Necessarily Existent, however, Existent as void of consciousness, er the transcendent cause of all

physi-  
 however, would be a grave mistake. cal systems and contingent  
 entities and  
 The attributes of necessity, simplicity, thus cannot be construed as  
 something  
 singleness, immutability, eternity, existent within such systems or as  
 de-  
 perfection, and goodness all together scriptive of them.  
 point to a reality that is not unknow- The Necessarily Existent,  
 therefore,  
 ing and uncomprehending, but which is not a body or any corporeal  
 reality; it has no mass or dimension,  
 in its very nature is all-knowing and or position, shape or  
 location  
 all-encompassing in its comprehen- is it the activity and operation  
 delimitation, nor  
 sion, which is itself pure consciousness exhibiting such attributes. Its  
 of things  
 and intellect, and which consequently together transcends material  
 being al- realities,  
 is eminently worthy of the term divine. Avicenna's demonstration of the while being their ultimate cause.  
 realities, If,  
 Avicenna's demonstration of the intellective nature of the Necessarily then, the Necessarily Existent is  
 If, not  
 intellective nature of the Necessarily matter, could it be mind?  
 Existing is brief, but he bases his argu- According  
 Existing is brief, but he bases his argu- ment from prior principles in his theory to Avicenna, simply by virtue of  
 According  
 ment from prior principles in his theory of the faculties of the mind. In chapter transcending matter and all material  
 tran- attributes, it could be nothing  
 of the faculties of the mind. In chapter six of Book Eight of ash-Shifá's "Meta- 'aql-i-mahd, pure  
 attri- physics," he points out that the Neces- sarily Existent is wholly immaterial, this might not seem immediately  
 sion, else except  
 physics," he points out that the Neces- sarily Existent is wholly immaterial, intuitive, to recognize the  
 sion, sarily Existent is wholly immaterial, intuitive, to recognize the  
 intu- and that its existence is disassociated  
 and that its existence is disassociated Necessarily Ex-  
 Necessarily Ex-  
 from matter in every respect. We saw istent's nature as intellect is  
 inevitable  
 the reasons for this in the discussion once its radical immateriality is  
 con- sidered in juxtaposition with its  
 of the earlier attributes, especially sim- other  
 other  
 plicity, for if the Necessarily Existent essential attributes.

Incidentally, that were a corporeal entity, it would be a immaterial substance extended in three dimensions. It consequently would be composed of matter and some form to actualize the potentiality of that matter into a realized kind and arrangement. This especially would characterize it as a contingent entity, however, which is impossible for the Necessarily Existent. A modern person, moreover, could not construe the Necessarily Existent as energy of some kind, for the concept of energy simply refers to the work or activity exhibited in and by physical systems, which are contingent entities. The Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna from its instantiation in particular horse physical manifestations, such as individual human beings. Such concepts, for Avicenna, would constitute form that is not joined with matter, form must, which exists not concretely as a particular but in an intellect as a universal. material But the Necessarily Existent cannot be a mere intelligible form conceived recall

the Necessarily Existent is in itself has profound one's worldview, for if the Existent does exist, then is false; if materialism is false, explanations of reality, and mind, need not, and should not, be fined to what exists in matter. If, then, the Necessarily is immaterial, how should it be scribed? Among immaterial things, there are indeed concepts and tions that the human mind after considering the universal of a thing, such as humanity, as

house; the intelligible form of a cannot win a race. The Necessarily istent, however, is a cause in and supremely so. It, therefore, be some inert, immaterial idea. It then, be pure intellect, unbounded by the realm of contingent, existence.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the reader may

by a contingent mind, for then it could not be the ultimate cause of all existence. What is more, Avicenna rejects the Platonist notion that abstractions, such as “the Beautiful,” “the True,” and “the Equal,” exist independently of concrete reality or any intellects to conceive of them, and any such thing, consequently, could not be the Necessarily Existent. It follows for Avicenna, then, that the Necessarily Existent, in being wholly immaterial, must be pure intellect. This follows because it could not be a mere ma‘qúl, an intelligible reality, dependent on or subsisting within an intellect. The Necessarily Existent, therefore, must be a fully independent ‘áqil or agent of intellection and knowledge. It is, in the perfection of its immaterial being, a comprehending reality rather than a comprehended object.

from the section on the Necessarily Existent is not from its act of being; it is pure act. Therefore, this act of the Necessarily Existent is one of actuality. What, then, is the actuality, the mode of existence of a wholly immaterial reality? The immaterial action conceivable is intellection, knowing and understanding as opposed to sensing and perceiving. If intellection is the act proper to something immaterial, the Necessarily Existent must be intellect, insofar as there is nothing material in its being. Furthermore, the Necessarily Existent is the creator and source of things, which possesses all the “perfections of being” unitedly in a way. The infinite creative power that originates and sustains all contingent existence cannot be reduced to any one immaterial form that does not possess, in a higher way of pure unity, all the perfections present in

the existentials and abstract objects—or minds and intellects. But things within the former category of immaterial reality seem causally inert: the number 100 does not put a hundred dollars in one's pocket; the idea of blue cannot paint a

contemporary theistic philosophers; see Craig.

54 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

immaterially, through an act of perfect intellection, and thus be the source of their realization in the contingent order of existence. The Necessarily Existent, therefore, could not be an immaterial reality, like a mathematical abstraction, which in itself is bereft of knowledge and consciousness, but must be pure intellect enacting perfect knowledge and comprehension. Thus, by virtue of its absolute immateriality, Avicenna regards the Necessarily Existent as 'aql-i-mahd, pure intellect. At this stage, the justification for Avicenna's characterizing the Necessarily Existent as divine, as truly God, stands ever more revealed. For

tence of the fathomlessly vast cosmos. But Divine Intellect conceivably comprehend all the perfections of being 16 A point familiar to some God immediately knows Himself, is thus conscious of Himself in the fullness of His being. As Avicenna states in chapter twenty-nine of the *Námih's "Metaphysics,"* something intelligible, as sensible, is that it be matter and its concomitants. When form actualizes matter, the thing exists materially and is perceived by the senses; it is extended in three dimensions, and can be seen, felt, smelled, and heard. But the thing is apprehended by the intellect, the form is considered separate from a material instantiation, and thus intelligible, but not sensible. The

what, other than God, could the Necessarily Existing be—that supreme intellect which is the self-subsistent cause. In order, and creator of all things, that source by which is absolutely one, incomparable, from unique, eternal, immutable, perfect, abstracted and wholly good? One may question being the actual existence of this reality, but matter is one cannot question that it deserves the there name God. For the Necessarily Existing could tent, in being pure intellect, cannot be self-apprehension. a mere what, but is properly a who in the fullest significance of that word. As the object, such, for the sake of brevity, the Necessarily Existing will henceforth be called so God interchangeably and referred to as known He. Being immaterial, God, of course, aspect of is not a body and thus free of sex and is gender; nonetheless, in being intellect, in- God cannot properly be referred to as to the an it, for that would imply He is void. Furthermore, of mind. since God has no parts, His essential But if God is pure intellect, what does act He intellect? According to Avicenna, very

say, of food is not sensible; it thought of as an abstract it cannot be smelled or tasted. then, for something to be grasped by the intellect, it must be removed matter and considered as an form. An intellect, therefore, in immaterial and removed from immediately known to itself, for is no impediment, no matter, that obstruct direct

Hence, God knows Himself. He is at once knower, ‘áqil, and object of His knowledge, ma‘qúl. course, God is absolutely simple, God as the knower and as the is identical; there is not one Him that knows and another that known. In knowing Himself, the intellect that knows is identical intellect that is known.

being cannot be distinct from His of knowledge, so He is also the

act of self-apprehending intellection;  
it

He is knower, known, and knowing all  
at once and in perfect unity—intellect,  
intellection.

intellection, and intelligible. So God,  
as pure and absolutely simple intellect,  
universal

is His knowledge just as much as He is  
His necessary existence, His simplic-  
ity, His singleness, His immutability,  
His perfection, and so forth.  
regard

The nature of God's knowledge is  
explored to great depth in chapter six  
of ash-Shifá's "Metaphysics," in which  
of ev-

Avicenna analyzes the implications of  
God's knowledge. Since in God there  
is perfect unity, He must be identical  
to His act of intellection; He is His  
knowledge. His knowledge, therefore,  
by

must be as absolute, as necessary, as  
uncaused, and as immutable as He is  
in Himself. God, then, cannot come  
of

to know something, for that would  
necessitate a change in His essence,  
which is impossible. Nor could God  
contemplate a number of separate  
things in changing sequence, as human  
beings do, for that would degrade His  
im-

simplicity. His knowledge, therefore,  
cannot be like human knowledge inso-  
effect.

far as it utterly transcends contingen-  
cy, mutability, and multiplicity. How,  
then, could God know anything other  
than Himself? In one sense, God only  
knows Himself, but in knowing Him-  
self He knows Himself as the cause of  
in-

all things, and He thus knows them in

to attribute imperfection to Him,

is likewise improper to ascribe to  
Him multiple acts of

Rather, the Necessarily Existent  
intellects all things in a

fashion. And yet no particular es-  
capes Him: "Not even the weight  
of an atom, in the heavens or on  
earth, escapes him"<sup>17</sup> . . . In

to how this can be, when He ap-  
prehends His essence and appre-  
hends Himself as the source

ery existent thing, He apprehends  
the principles of all beings and  
what proceeds from them; nothing  
whatsoever exists except insofar  
as its existence is necessitated

Him through a cause—as we have  
shown. The confluence of these  
causes results in the origination

particular things. The First knows  
these causes and their interrela-  
tions; He thus knows the necessi-  
ty of what results from them, the  
intervals of time between events,  
and their recurrences. For it is

possible that He should know the  
cause and not the necessary

He thus comprehends particular  
things insofar as they are univer-  
sal. (ash-Shifá 288)

Thus, God knows things not by sense  
perception, but through His perfect

tellecual knowledge of Himself as

the  
an eternal, universal way. In describing ultimate cause of all particular  
things  
God's knowledge and omniscience, and their necessary interactions,  
in be-  
Avicenna writes: ing the eternal source of their  
existence.  
His knowledge of all things, then, is  
Even as affirming a plurality of  
acts to the Necessarily Existent is  
17 A reference to the Qur'án, 34:3.  
56 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

universal and eternal, identical to His God's attributes are identical  
to one an-  
unchanging knowledge of Himself other and to His essence—that He  
is ab-  
as the source of all things. He knows solute unity. Among the attributes  
that  
things by virtue of being their creator, Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly  
affirms of God,  
even if through secondary causes, in a of course, is His unbounded and  
all-en-  
manner very roughly analogous to how compassing knowledge, His complete  
a novelist knows, in a universal way, and universal wisdom. He writes of  
all the particulars of her novel, the ac- God in the  
Lawh-i-Madíniy-i-Tawhíd,  
tions of the characters, and the neces- saying: "He is the Ever-Abiding  
who  
sary effects of those actions in the plot, perisheth not, from Whose  
knowledge  
by virtue of being the ultimate creator nothing can escape, Whose grace  
en-  
of the novel. It is in this way that Avi- compasseth all contingent being,  
Who  
cenna affirms the omniscience of God. knoweth all the secrets of  
men's hearts  
This is not the place, however, to and everything that proceeds from  
explore the many implications of Avi- them" (Má'idíy-i-Ásmání  
4:314, provi-  
cenna's account of divine knowledge sional translation). If  
knowledge is an  
and omniscience, especially as God's attribute of God, and if God's  
attributes  
knowledge relates to particular things. are, as we have seen, identical to  
His  
My purpose is rather to show that Avi- Essence, then His essence is not

onto-  
 cenna demonstrates that the Necessar- logically distinct from His  
 knowledge or intellection any more than it  
 ily Existent is God in the full sense of  
 is dif- ferent from His perfection,  
 divinity, by establishing that the Nec- or immutability. Therefore, if God  
 goodness, sentially is His knowledge, it  
 ecessarily Existent is pure intellect and  
 es- sentially is His knowledge, it  
 omniscient intelligence. Had Avicenna  
 follows under Bahá'u'lláh's  
 rejected God's personal<sup>18</sup> and omni- teachings that He  
 scient nature, the Necessarily Existent is immaterial intellect, who alone  
 fully comprehends His own being.  
 of his philosophy would not correlate On this theme  
 with the God of Bahá'u'lláh. That Avi- Bahá'u'lláh states in  
 cenna instead affirms this personal and the same Tablet:  
 omniscient nature of God yet again He is the Eternal from Whom  
 indicates the theological harmony that nothing can depart, unto Whom  
 exists between Avicenna's thought and Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. nothing can be joined,  
 Who is, in  
 We saw earlier that Bahá'u'lláh val- truth, the Exalted, the  
 Omnipotent, the Supreme. Nothing but His own  
 idates the Avicennian position that God Essence can acknowledge His  
 is simple and non-composite. As such, oneness, and nothing but  
 Bahá'u'lláh explicitly affirms that  
 His own  
 Being can in truth recognize Him.  
<sup>18</sup> In the sense of having conscious- All that hath been originated and  
 ness, knowledge, and intellect, not in the called into existence in this  
 world  
 sense of being like a contingent human hath been created only at the  
 word  
 person.  
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 57  
 of His behest. None other God is within Him, His essential attribute  
 of knowledge, would be contingent on,  
 there but Him, the Almighty, the and in need of, other things,  
 Munificent. (Má'idíy-i-Ásmání  
 which is  
 4:314, provisional translation) impossible. But if God knows, as  
 Avi-  
 cenna argues, not through a contingent

If, according to Bahá'u'lláh, God perceives any particular thing, but rather through a direct knows, is known to Himself, and is self-apprehension of Himself as absolute identical to that attribute of knowledge and as the universal cause and existence and as the universal cause and source of any kind of contingent being edge in perfect oneness and simplicity, it follows that Avicenna's analysis of any kind of contingent being what-of God is correct, namely, that God is soever, who encompasses within Him-self and in utter unity all intellect, intelligible, and act of intellection, in absolute unity. Here we see then 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement is not only intelligible but that Bahá'u'lláh not only confirms the accuracy of Avicenna's view; Avicenna's analysis provides a framework by which one can understand the philosophical significance of Bahá'u'lláh's attribute of goodness examined in the own statements, insofar as Bahá'u'lláh previous section, we now see how one can explicitly states that God's attributes deed construe God's goodness in in-are one and identical to His essence. personal terms, as per-sonal terms, as This proposition from Bahá'u'lláh is cenna both do. This is because Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna both do. This is because intelligible if one accepts Avicenna's unchanging and absolute creation God's things, His bestowal of existence argument that to be necessarily existent all things, is effected by Him of all He is intellect and is to be immaterial, that to be immaterial is to be intellect, and that to be in- consciousness—and thus in insofar as He is intellect and tellect is to have knowledge. God thus remains one, His attributes being identical to His essence and to one another. and not unwitting compulsion. Insofar,

Furthermore, Avicenna's account of God's knowledge is in accord with, good and and even makes philosophical sense of, He is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation in chapter described eighty-two of Some Answered Questions that God's knowledge is not dependent on objects of knowledge. That in- is, 'Abdu'l-Bahá insists that, although limitations of God has knowledge, He is not dependent on anything external to Himself in order to have that knowledge. If He were thus dependent, then something

then, as God is pure good and sheer perfection, the source of all all perfections—and insofar as intellect—He may well be as all-bountiful and munificent. terms, of course, can only be to Him by analogy, for His bounty finitely transcends the human generosity. A further of this point, however, leads us sarily to the attribute of will.

58 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

W not to will; and yet it is not incidental, for it is necessitated by its essential nature. As to incidental acts, Throughout Bahá'u'lláh's writings, these occur when there is neither intent, nor and indeed in each of the Abrahamic strict necessity, but some element of religions, there is much mention of chance or an incidental confluence of God's will. It is indeed by virtue of causes and potentialities, or when God's having will that His creative act persons are compelled to act by an external power or agent, and not according to their of devotion can be applied to Him. own nature or will. How, then, does Avicenna deduce the attribute of will, of volition, from the nature of the Necessarily Existent? In When one acts knowingly, however—when one acts with an understanding of the act and oneself as the author of that act, non-accidentally and without compulsion—then such that for neither Bahá'u'lláh nor Avi-

an act, cenna can God's will be an attribute will." actually distinct from the others, on willful account of His simplicity. Therefore, even as God's necessity is His simplicity, which is His immateriality, which and is His intellect and knowledge, so is (takhayyul), God's will, for Avicenna, identical to ascribe to His knowledge. God. A voluntary act done in accord To understand this, one may con- sider how Avicenna makes clear in geometri- the Dánishnámih, specifically chapter draws thirty-three of its "Metaphysics," that will concerns the manner by which an agent acts. Avicenna immediately distinguishes between acts that are incidental to nature, due to will, or due to "accident," i.e. incidentally. Regarding "Singleness." acts due merely to nature, one could present the example of the Sun, which illumines the earth by the necessity of its inherent nature; we may well presume that the Sun does not choose to do so, nor does it understand what it is doing, nor does it understand itself as the agent of that effect. The Sun's action is therefore due to nature, and Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

says Avicenna, "is not devoid of Avicenna subsequently divides or voluntary actions into those done due to reason and knowledge, those done due to supposition (gumán), those due to imagination and it is the first that he will with knowledge, Avicenna states, is like that of the physician or cian, who applies a treatment or a figure according to what they intellectually. In regard to God, His act cannot incidental to Him, for He has no incidental attributes, as we saw in the tions "Simplicity" and He is purely His own essential and cannot be affected by anything whatsoever, for what He is is and immutable. Therefore, His act not be incidental to Him or or conditioned by another. His act cannot mechanically be merely due to His nature, for that imply that His act could be separate

or independent from His knowledge, whatsoever which is impossible because of His simplicity. The act of God as the Necessarily Existent, therefore, must be done in knowledge, for He is Himself pure intellect and comprehends Himself in the fullness of His being. He it is thus knows that He creates all other realities, and that He ultimately causes and sustains their existence. Likewise, that He knows His creative act, and Himself (Dánishnámih as the author of that act, and moreover acts without external compulsion. He therefore acts willfully and voluntarily. Consequently, since God perfectly knows and fully wills what Avicenna calls the “order of the good” (nizám-i-khayr) that proceeds from Him, the creative profound and fundamentally unmerited share of existence that all things receive imply that of Him, He is the author of a voluntary action of boundless generosity and purpose bounty. Since He understands this, the bestowal of being from God is a manifestation of His goodness, His bounty, and His providence. To state the matter again, God, in the supremacy of His being, is not compelled by anything outside of Him. The creation of the all world, therefore, proceeds according to His volition from the superabundance good,

hand, has no needs or desires ever. Avicenna writes:  
We find that the Necessarily Existent, Who is perfect being, or Who rather transcends  
has no goal in His action, and likewise unbecoming of Him that He should know something as being of utility to Him, such  
He should desire it.  
394)  
In other words, God is complete perfect self-sufficient existence. thus desires nothing, and has no aim—in human sires to be realized through the act. His will, therefore, is not lent to desire, for that would there is something in God that be actuated by a final cause, a external to Him.  
Avicenna further writes in the Dánishnámih:  
The Divine will is nothing other than God’s knowledge of how the order of the existence of things must be, and His knowledge that their existence is

of His self-subsistent existence. rather  
 Nonetheless, Avicenna is explicit in His affirmation that God's will should exist of  
 not be likened to human volition. Hu- the  
 man beings have needs and entertain His  
 ends because they are not complete and perfect in their existence. They will something because they desire that thing, and the realization of an end is for their own sake. God, on the other  
 60 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

though not for His sake, but  
 for themselves, for the meaning of "goodness" is the  
 everything as it must be, and  
 providence of God consists in  
 knowledge of how things must be, such as the best ordering of the limbs of man and the motion of the heavens. (394–95)

The purpose of this passage is to state account  
 that, while in human beings intellect is with  
 something distinct from their will for to divine  
 the things they desire, in God there is a show  
 complete unity of attributes. Thus, His really  
 nature as pure intellect is identical with God's  
 His being a voluntary agent of His ac- intellectual  
 tion, which is nothing else but the per- es-  
 fect knowledge He has in His essence Con-  
 of the eternal procession of existence attributes  
 from Him according to the "order of also be  
 the good." His will is His knowledge, will a  
 and His knowing act is necessarily vol- particu-  
 untary, even as there is nothing outside changing  
 of Him that could compel Him, just Avicenna  
 as He has no desire or end He needs

His works; that is, Avicenna's  
 of God's will is in accordance  
 Bahá'u'lláh's commitment  
 simplicity. Avicenna is able to  
 how God's attribute of will is  
 identical to His knowledge, how  
 knowledge consists in His  
 being, which in turn is His very  
 sence as the Necessarily Existent.  
 sequently, God is one in His  
 and essence. But if God must  
 "one in His acts," He cannot  
 number of particular things at  
 lar times, as conditioned by  
 circumstances. Therefore, as  
 says, He wills one primary act

eter-  
to realize that could somehow influ- nally—the very act of His  
self-sub-  
sistence His action. His will, therefore, is sistent and necessary  
existence—and  
as absolute and unconditioned as His from this voluntary and  
intellective  
knowledge and essential being. act there proceeds, in a universal  
way  
Avicenna’s account of Divine will— as governed by His providence, a  
sin-  
while persuasive, coherent, and consis- gle effect: the cascading sequence  
of  
tent with his account of God’s other beings in the contingent  
world.<sup>19</sup> This  
attributes, especially His simplicity—is universal and eternal creative  
act is  
subtle, even abstruse, and no doubt de- thus one, and is identical to  
God’s will  
serves a more comprehensive treatment and His knowledge. We see once  
again,  
of its own. The brief discussion above, therefore, how Avicenna’s  
analysis il-  
however, should suffice to ground an luminates the rational basis and  
philo-  
exploration of the theological harmony sophical content of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s own  
statements.  
between Bahá’u’lláh’s and Avicenna’s  
Third, Bahá’u’lláh  
accounts of divine will.  
moreover affirms  
First, both Avicenna and Bahá’u’lláh Avicenna’s notion that God  
has no need  
posit that it is proper to speak of God or desire for things outside  
Himself,  
and thus He does not create the  
as having will, as demonstrated by  
world  
Bahá’u’lláh’s oft-repeated statement for His own sake, out of  
desire. He cre-  
regarding God, “yaf’alu má yashá” ates for the good of the  
creature, and  
(He doeth whatsoever He willeth). Sec-  
ond, Avicenna’s account conforms to 19 How the multiple  
entities of the  
Bahá’u’lláh’s statement, discussed in world proceed from the  
simple being and  
the section on “Simplicity,” that God is unitary act of God shall be  
examined in the

one in His essence, His attributes, and  
“Creation  
and Cosmology.”

Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

61

out of His knowledge of the order of the  
Bahá'u'lláh's and

good in the contingent realm. For God,  
is to

as we have seen, is in Himself perfect  
paper.

being, and thus stands in need of noth-  
divine

ing whatsoever. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,  
complete

Bahá'u'lláh appeals to this fact when  
attributes.

He says that people ought to accept the  
religion of God for their own benefit,  
and not because He has any need of  
worship. “This is the changeless Faith  
by defi-

of God,” Bahá'u'lláh says in reference  
no limitations.

to His own revelation, “eternal in the  
conception

past, eternal in the future. Let him that  
infinity, His

seeketh, attain it; and as to him that  
on

hath refused to seek it—verily, God is  
power,

Self-Sufficient, above any need of His  
each of

creatures” (85–86, 173). Similarly, in  
omni-

the Kitáb-i-Íqán Bahá'u'lláh states:  
omnipresence,

“that ideal King hath, throughout eter-  
nity, been in His Essence independent  
proper

of the comprehension of all beings, and  
Exis-

will continue, forever, in His own Be-  
positions,

ing to be exalted above the adoration of  
Bahá'u'lláh

third and last part of this paper,

ment, however, of

Avicenna's account of creation

be found in the final part of this

Until then, we must consider the

attribute that will close and

our discussion of God's

I

That which is infinite must be,

inition, not finite; it has

The classical monotheistic

of God often stresses His

lack of any limit, whether imposed

His being, His knowledge, His

or His goodness. The idea of

the omni- attributes, whether

science, omnipotence,

or omnibenevolence, thus follows  
from divine infinity. It is thus

to speak of how the Necessarily

tent, according to Avicenna's

must be infinite, and how

every soul” (52–53, 34).  
infinite.

likewise supports God’s

Thus for Bahá’u’lláh, as for Avicenna, God could not have willed the existence of the world through any need on His part, or any desire for something to know and love God. Does this contradict that would have made His existence Bahá’u’lláh’s other statements and imply more sound or complete. God already that God wanted or needed recognition is perfection, or even above perfection, lies

But here we should also consider

identical

the infinite is, by extension,

tence of the world through any need on

His part, or any desire for something

to know and love God. Does this contradict

that would have made His existence

Bahá’u’lláh’s other statements and imply

more sound or complete. God already

that God wanted or needed recognition

is perfection, or even above perfection,

or worship? That the human purpose

lies

fawq at-tamám. God’s creating is thus

in the knowledge and

recognition of God

done not for Himself but for the sake

does not entail, in fact, that

this recognition

of His creation and His knowledge of

benefits Him in any way

whatsoever. Rather,

the order of the good that creation con-

er, the duty of recognizing God is

solely

stitutes; hence, He is all-bountiful and

for the good of the human being.

Since a

supremely generous.<sup>20</sup> A fuller treat-

human being is a rational animal,

the high-

est good of the intellect is to recognize God

<sup>20</sup> A reader may here wonder about

as the source of all being and as

goodness

those instances in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings,

itself. Though God is

above worship, the

such as the Short Obligatory Prayer, in

knowledge of Him is the highest

good of

which He says that humanity was created

the beings that He created to be

rational.

62 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

with the supremely transcendent, for

and dimension.<sup>21</sup>

Bahá’u’lláh routinely emphasizes

By the same argument, we

realize

the incomprehensible transcendence

there is no limit to God’s power,

for all

of God, how He surpasses every cat-

power proceeds from Him, and He de-

egory of contingent existence, and

rives His power from no other.

Indeed,

eludes any direct apprehension of His

a thing has power, or the ability to

act

essence.

in a certain way, by virtue first of

ex-

First, we should reflect on the inevitable conclusion that God, as the

isting and then of existing as the kind of thing it is. Both these facts,

how-

Necessarily Existent, submits to no creative

ever, are contingent upon the

physical limit. This is because He is of

act of God, His ceaseless bestowal

not material and has no extension in three dimensions. As such, God cannot have any spatial delimitation. He cannot have a certain form, shape, or con-

existence. God therefore has a power in Himself that knows no limitation, whereas the power of contingent beings is limited by their essential

figure, imposing on Him the limitation of being materially present in a particular location in space. Nor could God, to do

tingency and ontological poverty. We should not understand omnipotence, however, as meaning "the ability

as discussed earlier, be physically exten-

anything whatsoever," for that,

taken

tended throughout all material reality, could

literally, is not an attribute that

enveloping and penetrating discrete Existent.

be ascribed to the Necessarily

objects. This would imply taking on exist

He cannot, for instance, cease to

the accidental qualities and limitations of mutable, contingent realities, changing with them and taking on their multiplicity. As the immaterial, Bahá'u'lláh says,

or choose to do so, since He just is necessary being, nor could He in any way descend into the conditions of the created order; as

simple, single, and necessarily exist- incarnate

"the Unseen can in no wise

tent cause of all contingent realities, men"

His Essence and reveal it unto

God cannot be conceived of in this

(Gleanings 49; Muntakhabátí 19).

Nor

way. God accordingly is omnipresent only if "presence" does not signify

21 I must here admit that

Avicenna,

occupying or filling a point in space specifically

as far as I can tell, does not

as a body does. Rather, since what- omnipresence in

treat the idea of God's

ever exists has its being from God, as it

ash-Shifá or the Dánishnámih. But

there is no place where the supremely infinite creative, ceaselessly sustaining, and one of boundless ontological power of God's is not evident and intimately operative. He thus is everywhere in this sense, but not in the manner of occupying material space and having mass. Necessarily Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna should we expect that God can bring forth logical impossibilities into being, for rather an impossibility, in its proper sense, is merely semantic incoherence. As such, contingent God cannot create four-sided triangles or married bachelors. Impossible things simply cannot exist; power is that set over the possible, not the impossible, as Avicenna himself notes (McGinnis 187). God, therefore, is infinite in power, when power is understood functionally. He is thus omnipotent, as Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly proclaims. God likewise is infinite in His knowledge. He knows all things by virtue of being their eternal and universal

was illustrative of the idea of and immateriality, I here adapted Thomas Aquinas' arguments for omnipresence found in the *Summa Logica* (1:8:1–2), an argument that compatible with (perhaps even by) Avicenna's account of the

63

omnipotent, omniscient, and so The Necessarily Existent has, or is, the superabundance of perfect being. This is because, unlike beings, He has no essence distinct from His existence. A contingent being, contrast, has a particular essence, which makes it what it is—that necessarily defines, distinguishes, limits it.

For example, the powers and functions of a rose bush, stemming from the irreducible fact of its necessarily limited—they are not of a dog, a dolphin, or a human being. The rose bush's existence is limited

sal cause as pure intellect; His knowl- due to the kind of thing it is; it  
 can only  
 edge is therefore perfect and complete. exist according to the limitations,  
 and  
 There consequently is no limit to His inherent potentials, of what it is.  
 It can  
 knowledge, and He may well be called only act in conformity with the  
 limita-  
 omniscient. Nor is there any limit to tions of what it is. Consequently,  
 its ex-  
 His goodness. For if evil is privation istence as a rose bush cannot  
 transcend the limitation of its "rose"  
 of being, He is absolute good in that  
 essence. And since a rose's essence is  
 He is absolute being. And insofar as distinct from  
 all possible good proceeds from Him, its existence, it is astoundingly  
 limited  
 and insofar as creation is a supremely in its being, for it has no  
 existence of  
 bountiful act on His part, there is no itself; its essence requires an  
 external  
 limit to His goodness, and He is thus bestowal of existence, and even  
 when  
 omnibenevolent. that essence is made existent, it  
 is in-  
 But God's infinity can be expressed herently limited in the operations it  
 can perform.  
 on an even deeper level, beyond omni- But God has no essence distinct  
 presence, omnipotence, omniscience, from His necessary existence.  
 and omnibenevolence; it can be ex-  
 Hence, there is in Him no essence that  
 pressed at the level of being itself. A contingently exists; He therefore,  
 only as  
 little reflection will show that there we have seen, exists of Himself.  
 can be no limitation to the being of  
 But more profoundly, His being is not  
 the Necessarily Existent. Perhaps we limited, is not circumscribed or  
 lim- ited, is not circumscribed or  
 then should resurrect an admittedly ob- delimited,  
 delimitated, by any essence distinct from His  
 secure word, and term Him omniëssent, existence.  
 exis- tence. His being then has  
 "all-being" or "all-existing," under the  
 no limit, no  
 same paradigm by which one calls Him limitation, no condition, no

restriction.

Whereas every contingent being is a  
entirely. Avi-  
finite being, the Necessarily Existent  
has thus  
is Himself infinite being. As infinite  
has no  
being, He naturally can act as the in-  
no quan-  
exhaustible, the all-bountiful source of  
location, no  
the existence of all that is brought forth  
contrary—ex-  
into being, and all that is sustained in  
does He  
being.

(ash-Shifá 282).

By virtue of the identity of God's  
has  
essence with His existence, He tran-  
existence  
scends all categories to which con-  
definition.  
tingent beings belong. This follows  
of God's  
because a contingent being, in having  
con-  
an essence that can be considered in  
genus and  
isolation from its existence, has an es-  
subject to any  
sence that can be defined by the logical  
terms of genus and differentia—that  
intellect com-  
is, what general category something  
its  
belongs to and what distinguishes it  
particular  
within that category. For instance, a  
animal  
triangle belongs to the genus of "plane  
imagined par-  
figure," and has the differentia of hav-  
intellect compre-  
ing three closed sides; a triangle is

transcends kind and type  
cenna accordingly writes: "It  
been made clear that the First  
genus, no quiddity, no quality,  
tity, no spatial or temporal  
equal, no partner, and no  
alted and glorified is He—nor  
have any definition"

That is, the Necessarily Existent  
no essence distinct from His  
that could be subject to a  
This is yet another indication  
infinitude—His being cannot be  
tained by kind and species,  
differentia, nor can it be  
reductive analysis.  
But insofar as the  
prehends a thing by considering  
essence abstracted from a  
instance—the concept, say, of  
in contrast to any seen or  
ticular animal—the  
hends a thing by separating that

thing thus defined as a closed plane figure conceptually from its own particular having three sides. The existence of existence. Likewise, the intellect com- prehends an essence by defining any particular triangle is limited to and it; by regarding it as belonging to a general type, a genus; and by itself, however, does not have a logi- recognizing it as distinguished within that cal genus-differentia definition.<sup>22</sup> Now, a differentia. But since God has genus by even if only one triangle existed in all no es- sence distinct from His concrete reality, it could still be defined particular exis- tence, and accordingly does not as belonging to a general kind, and as belong to any genus or have any distinguished by a specific differentia. differentia, it follows from Avicenna’s But since God has no essence distinct reasoning that He must uniquely transcend from His existence, He has no limit in the power of the human intellect to the sense of a standard definition. He comprehend His reality. com- is not even “one of a kind,” but rather Significantly, this is a central aspect of Bahá’u’lláh’s the- ology—that God transcends all other

<sup>22</sup> Avicenna’s idea that existence is things not only in the order of being, but also in the order of thought an irreducible or basic concept is discussed and in the first section of this article.

Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

65

intellective apprehension. One can God defies comprehension because come to the recognition of God’s exis- He transcends the limitations of finite reality. In this spirit, Avicenna tence only indirectly, and not through writes that “when you recognize Him, He actual perception or comprehension of is described, after His individual His essence. This is well expressed by exis-

‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He writes in His address to Auguste Forel: to say, one can form a conception of God, not Now concerning the Essence of Divinity: in truth it is on no account determined by anything by apart from its own nature, and of can in no wise be comprehended. recognizing For whatsoever can be conceived are by man is a reality that hath limitations and is not unlimited; it is circumscribed, not all-embracing. It can be comprehended by man, and is controlled by him . . . How then can the contingent conceive intimate, the Reality of the absolute? . . . Thus man cannot grasp the Essence of Divinity, but can, by his reasoning power, by observation, by his intuitive faculties and the revealing power of his faith, believe in God, discover the bounties of His Grace. He becometh certain that though the Divine Essence is unseen of the eye, and the logical (mantiqíyyih) principles.” This existence of the Deity is intangible, yet conclusive spiritual proofs chapter two assert the existence of that unseen Reality. (Tablet 15–16; Min Makátíb Hadrat ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Avicenna’s. Rational 259)23

tence, by the negation of Him” (ash-Shifá 283). That is by direct comprehension of His transcendent essence, but by affirming essence in its transcendent nature, negating from it all the attributes contingent things, and by that positive assertions about God on the order of analogy. On this ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that no soul has ever fathomed the reality of the Essence of the Divinity so as to be able to describe, praise, or glorify it . . . Yet we ascribe certain names and attributes to the reality of Divinity and praise Him for His sight, His hearing, His power, His life and knowledge. We affirm these names and attributes not to affirm the perfections of statement indicates port, as likewise evidenced by of Mufávadát or Some Answered Questions, for philosophical arguments for tence of God, such as recognition of God is, however,

fully com-

plementary with an experiential and inward

23 Here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in Per- apprehension of the presence of  
the Di-

sian that one can believe in God through vine, as indicated by

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s men-

qavá‘id-i-‘aqlíyyih va nazaríyyih va tion here of “intuitive

faculties” (tulú‘át-i-

mantiqíyyih, literally through “rational fikríyyih) and the

“revealing power of his

(‘aqlíyyih), theoretical (nazaríyyih), and faith”

(inkisháfát-i-vijdáníyyih).

66 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

God, but to deny that He has any single is to deny Him multiplicity; to  
imperfections. say He is immutable is to negate from

When we observe the contin- Him any change or motion; to say He

gent world, we see that ignorance is eternal is to assert that He does

not

is imperfection and knowledge is exist in time and is not subject to

alter-

perfection, and thus we say that ation or decay; to say He is good is

to

the sanctified Essence of the Di- understand that in Him there can be no

vinity is all-knowing. Weakness privation of being such as contingent

is imperfection and power is per- entities undergo; to say He is pure

in-

fection, and thus we say that that tellect is to clarify the implications

of

sanctified and divine Essence is His immaterial being; lastly, to say

He

all-powerful. It is not that we can is infinite is the logical conclusion

of

understand His knowledge, His negating from Him the deficiencies of

sight, His hearing, His power, or contingent being, for whatever exists

His life as they are in themselves: contingently is limited and

finite—God

This is assuredly beyond our must therefore be infinite. Even when

comprehension, for the essential one ascribes necessity to Him, one

names and attributes of God are comes to this through the recognition

identical with His Essence, and that there must be a reality that is

not

His Essence is sanctified above all contingent.

understanding. (Some Answered Expressing this theme,

Bahá’u’lláh

Questions 168; Mufávadát 105) Himself writes in the

Lawh-i-Basít al-

Haqíqat, with respect to God: “Exalted We see here that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is do- above ing precisely what Avicenna has de- scribed: employing the via negativa of apophatic theology—recognizing God through negating of Him what He is not, denying that He is at all simi- lar to contingent reality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provisional first recognizes implicitly that God, as absolute being, is necessarily existent God’s and not contingent and dependent. From that premise, He deduces divine attributes through a two-fold process transcen- of negation and analogy. He specifical- explains in ly negates from Him those deficiencies of contingent reality, and thus asserts things. God’s perfection. Accordingly, to say revealeth God is simple is to assert that He is non-composite; to say He is one and Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna these signs are reflected and can be Bahá’u’lláh, seen in the book of existence, and the His beau- scrolls that depict the shape and pattern contained and of the universe are indeed a most great glory— book” (Tablets 60; Ishráqát 116). And Lambden in this connection Bahá’u’lláh fur- “radiant ther relates, again in the Lawh-i-Basít ‘light’, ‘brillian- al-Haqíqat: “God Himself hath ever ‘excellence’, ‘goodli- been, and shall forever be, sanctified (13).

is He, and again exalted is He, being incarnate in anything whatso- ever, or bound by any limitation, or joined to anything in creation! He hath ever been sanctified from, and transcendent above, all else besides Himself” (Iqtidárát 108, translation). No human conception, therefore, could be identical to infinite being, however much all things, in having received existence from Him, are signs of that dent reality, as Bahá’u’lláh the Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih: “God is immeasurably exalted above all things. Every created being however His signs which are but emanations from Him and not His Own Self. All 67 All-Glorious. Thus, for God’s majesty, His jalál, and ty, His jamál, are at once exemplified precisely in God’s His bahá—which Stephen has perceptively glossed as ‘glory’, ‘splendour’, ‘cy’, ‘beauty’, ‘ness’, ‘divine majesty’”

from ascent, descent, and limitation, Bahá'u'lláh ex-  
 as well as connection and association art  
 [with any other thing]. All other things, in contrast, abide in the sphere of their testified, specific limitations” (Iqtidárát 106, provisional translation). In both Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna, God's consequently, there is a wonder and an object of awe expressed before the impenetrable resplending of the Divine, the unfathomable infinity of God, who is at once recognized as the illimitable source of all things, and as the ultimate, the God—pro-  
 Bahá'í Faith  
 ty. This wonder and awe experienced before the Infinite is further expressed in what could be termed the epithets of praise, those titles that particularly extol God's exaltation above all praise, His sublimity, His majesty, and His glory, as well as His all-arresting splendor and all-entrancing beauty. And here too is light often the chosen clear-eyed philosopher takes up the pen to compose an almost hymn-like conclusion to his analysis of the Divine. The heart is as

On God's majesty, claims in a supplication: “Thou art He to Whose power and to Whose dominion every tongue hath testified, and Whose majesty and Whose sovereignty every understanding heart hath acknowledged.” And as to beauty, He implores: “Let the mine ardent quest be Thy most precious, Thine adorable, and Beauty.” But it is alone God's His bahá, from which the very Bahá'u'lláh—the Glory of proceeds, and the name of the originates. “Lauded be Thy proclaims Bahá'u'lláh, “O the God of all things, my Glory and Glory of all things” (Prayers and Meditations 248; 178; 59; Munáját 121; 45). Even here, in the epithets of praise, Avicenna is in harmony with Bahá'u'lláh, as the

For Bahá'u'lláh, God's sublime majesty on the one hand—as the supreme Infinite. reality—and His splendid beauty “no higher on the other—as the object of all desire and perfect goodness and boundless intellectual unity—combine in His name al-Abhá, the every

moved, it seems, as the when it contemplates the “There can be,” he says, beauty or glory (bahá) than the Divine Essence is sheer being, absolute good, free from

68 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

manner of deficiency, and one in every aspect. Beauty and absolute glory belong to the Necessarily Existent, who is the source of the beauty of all things and their glory. And His glory consists re-

T A A  
C  
To understand Avicenna's view on God's creative act we must first call the substance of his argument

in this, that He is precisely as He ought to be” (ash-Shifá 297).

God's existence in Part One of

this

article. Nowhere in his reasoning did

C C Avicenna claim that there had to be a definite point in the past at which the

In the preceding parts, we have seen the significant extent to which Bahá'u'lláh's existence must be

universe came into being and that, consequently, God's

affirms Avicenna's theological positions, and likewise how much Avicenna's account of divine attributes even in

invoked as a first cause in a

temporal view, for

sense. Rather, in Avicenna's

accord with the explicit and implicit existence content of Bahá'u'lláh's statements.

anything whatsoever to exist,

from the Necessarily Existent. In other words, any

this moment, requires that

God is the Necessarily Existent, absolutely one in His attributes and essence, transcendent and metaphysical-

emanate or proceed to it

contingent being, in the here and now,

essarily Existent. In other

is in need of an ultimate cause for its

existence, and thus in need of the

existence, and thus in need of the

Necessarily Existing, because the totality of any causal structure, of any causal structure, a chain, depends on a first cause, but in a purely atemporal sense. Even as the first gear of a series of gears of how God creates the universe, and his assertion that God's creation has parts motion simultaneously with the no temporal beginning and is thus, in movement of the subsequent gears, or a sense, co-eternal with Him. We will even as light proceeds simultaneously therefore proceed by first considering with the inherent incandescence of the Avicenna's notion of a creation that Sun, so does God impart being to the eternally emanates from God. Then, in entire contingent order of reality. God thus creates everything, that is, the following section, we will explore existence to all things, as gives now as He ever did in the past or will continue to do in the future. how the writings of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirm the core metaphysical elements of Avicenna's position, and how Avicennian thought, Accordingly, for Avicenna, at any moment in the contingent world, God in turn, helps one understand the philosophical content of Bahá'u'lláh and He Himself, is imparting existence to it. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements on God's in being pure existence, is alone possessed of that infinite creative creative act. Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna power rays exist simultaneously with the Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 69 to bestow existence. This universe, in contrast, is only contingently existent though they are dependent on it. and depends on God to have any existence. Simply stated, if God at one point were not creating, and then His existence whatsoever. In this sense, there-

cre- fore, God's creative act does not refer Him- exclusively, or even primarily, to any past state of the universe. He creates then, all things and sustains their being, as an ultimate cause, even in the present. pro- The question that remains, therefore, states is whether the universe has a begin- at ning—whether, in other words, God's even now creation had a beginning, or if it, like Avicenna Him, is everlasting into the past and fu- could ture. Avicenna's position, as mentioned which several times before, is that there can there be no beginning to God's creative act. The core to one of Avicenna's sever- writes al arguments on this theme, as found in Book Nine, chapter one of ash-Shifá's "Metaphysics," is that God himself not is unchanging and eternal. Since He Himself is immutable, and since His creative act cannot be conditioned by any external stimuli, it follows that God would neither change His will to so. create nor could something affect His it, will. Here we may recall that God's will and creative act are no different had from His knowledge or intellection; His intellection of things from eternity is the cause of their origination, even disposition, as the knowledge and apprehension like,

ative act had a beginning, He self would have undergone a change, which is impossible. It follows, that He has always created and that the existence of things has always ceeded from Him. Avicenna thus that, since God is immutable, if He one point were not creating, there would be no creation. concludes, therefore, that there not have been any point during God was not creating, nor could be a moment when He commenced creation. Accordingly, Avicenna in ash-Shifá: A sound intellect, which has been prejudiced, will admit that if the Divine essence has never changed in any respect, then even now nothing would proceed from it, if formally nothing had done If nothing was proceeding from and subsequently something were to do so, then there would have to have been some new occurrence in the Divine essence, whether an intention, a volition, a an ability, a potency, or the

of a book in the author's mind is its (303) cause. But since God knows and wills immutably and eternally, it follows, for Avicenna's Avicenna, that God likewise creates any the world immutably and eternally. Consequently, His creative act has no beginning, and the world is accordingly co-eternal with him, even as the must

70            The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

issue forth a concurrent effect. If, then, Sim- the cause is present without that effect, this pa- but then later does produce that effect, against there would have to be some change vital either in the cause itself or something logic in external to it which affected its op- in eration. Since, regarding God, there validated is nothing internal to Him that could 'Abdu'l-Bahá's change, nor is there some external inci- dent which could affect Him, Avicenna aspect concludes that God's creation can have in ad- no beginning—nor, we may add, can the it have an end. In other words, given the fact of God's eternal, unchanging first will, such an eternally existent cause will necessarily result in an eternally paper present, concurrent effect that proceeds from it. The term that Avicenna uses fundamentally

which had not existed before.

Naturally, it is precisely point that no new occurrence, of kind whatsoever, is possible within God. He thus has always created. Avicenna argues further that the presence of the cause, there does abstruse discussions of time. ilarly, it is beyond the aim of per to defend Avicenna's view any possible objections. What is here is that Avicenna's basic the argument above, as we will see the next section, is routinely in Bahá'u'lláh's and writings. In the meantime, then, we will consider another important of Avicenna's views on creation dressing the question of just how world emanates from God. To frame this question, we may consider something of a dilemma. It has been stressed throughout this that God, as understood by Avicenna and Bahá'u'lláh, is



Him, a single effect of the absolute whatever is not	existence, and . . .
act of His existence, something that is itself has	necessarily existent of
not a physical composite of form and inci-	existence, therefore, only
matter (ash-Shifá 328). For Avicenna, existence	dentally. But since this
therefore, what immediately proceeds there	is incidental to something,
from God is only one being, a fayd, this	must be an essence to which
an effluence or emanation which is such that	existence is incidental,
immaterial like Him and accordingly existent	an entity is contingently
an intellect, for the same reasons outlined in the earlier section on this very	in respect to its essence,
its cause, subject. This intellect, then, is the first	ily existent in respect to
that being or created entity to emanate from	and unable to exist without
contin-	cause. Therefore, since the
God, first not in the sense of time but existence	gently existent receives
of ontological rank. Given that it is an	from the Necessarily
Existent, it	is one thing insofar as it
intellect and the first created entity, it is	has exis-
naturally known as the First Intellect,	tence from its cause, another
thing	in respect to itself . . .
or ‘aql-i-avval in Persian.	should be an intellect, it
if this thing	one aspect insofar as it
Though the First Intellect is one	possesses
and immaterial, it is nonetheless not	knows God
absolute unity, as God is Himself. As	aspect
Avicenna explains in the thirty-eighth	inssofar as it knows itself.
(Dánish-	námih 409–10)
chapter of the “Metaphysics” in the	Dánishnámih, the First Intellect has
two aspects. In one aspect, it under-	can com-
stands itself as a contingent entity, in-	prehend its own essence and

therefore  
 so far as, in itself, it need not exist and its contingency, but it can  
 also contem-  
 plate its existence and thus  
 is thus only contingently existent. In  
 its deriva-  
 tive or conferred necessity as  
 another aspect, however, it is neces-  
 sarily existent insofar as it is directly  
 caused by another. Such an intellect,  
 therefore,  
 has some multiplicity; even  
 caused by or emanated from God. As  
 though it is  
 not a composite of matter and  
 a result, there is a kind of multiplicity  
 form, it is  
 in the First Intellect, for it is admittedly  
 existence. a composite of essence and  
 existence. As Avicenna explains in the  
 rest of the  
 chapter, it is true that only  
 which God, as the Necessarily Existent  
 one thing  
 proceeds from God, who is  
 in Himself, is not, as we saw in the  
 absolute  
 oneness: the First  
 section on "Simplicity." On this theme,  
 Intellect. It is subse-  
 quently from the First  
 and of the concomitant distinction be-  
 Intellect, howev-  
 er, that the rest of creation  
 tween essence and existence, Avicenna  
 proceeds, in  
 writes: increasing orders of  
 contingency and  
 72 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

multiplicity, insofar as the contingen- eternal creation: God, Himself pure  
 cy and multiplicity begins in the one unity and absolute being, enjoys  
 such  
 a superfluity of existence that it  
 entity of the First Intellect, and then  
 ema-  
 nates or "overflows" from Him as  
 compounds in the beings that emanate  
 an  
 eternal, constant act of creative  
 consecutively therefrom. grace  
 and providence; this fayd or emana-  
 The multiplicity of the contingent tion then proceeds through the First  
 world, in this case, does not emanate Intellect ultimately to create the  
 directly from the unity and simplicity lower  
 of God. Instead, Avicenna envisions a realms in their multiplicity,  
 diversity,  
 hierarchy of being, in which different and materiality.<sup>24</sup>

levels of being are established as the procession of existence descends from God. Consequently, material creation, note that which is subject to multiplicity, emanates from God only through a series of intermediaries, of which the First Intellect is the prime member. God is thus the ultimate ontological cause of the world but not its proximate, or immediate, efficient cause. Finally terminating in the material world, the levels of existence that descend further from the First Intellect become progressively more contingent, deficient, and imperfect, insofar as they have more privation of existence and being, while those closer in existential rank to the First Intellect and thus to God are more perfect and enduring, even immaterial. In this connection, one could suggest an analogy in which God Himself is thought of as a pure white, single, immutable light source, while the First Intellect is the emanated light that proceeds from Him; the lower levels of existence with all their multiplicity, meanwhile, are the refracted, polychromatic rays produced by the “prism” of increasing contingency and procession

Before we consider the harmonies between his cosmology and that of Bahá’u’lláh, however, I will Avicenna’s view, in its aspects, should be of interest for theist, insofar as he elegantly ciles the dilemma of how a realm of temporal existence and multiplicity could ever be created by or proceed from an ultimate reality that is dual and absolutely one: through an intermediary principle that reflects something of the nature of both. Nevertheless, Avicenna did relate the considerations above with since-outdated theories on the of the physical universe. Namely, Avicenna, not having the benefit of modern telescope technology, upheld the geocentric theory of Aristotle, who thought that the Sun, Moon, and planets revolved around the earth, each

24 Accordingly, the single God, which is identical to Him, is of self-subsistent existence, as the section “Simplicity.” this same act of existence there emanates a voluntary effect: the

privation. Such, then, is the essence of the First Intellect and then, through it, of Avicenna's emanative scheme of the sequence of beings in the contingent realm.

Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 73

its own "sphere" (falak in Persian and Arabic), while an outermost sphere compassed the cosmic frame. Accordingly, Avicenna thought that nine additional intellects proceeded after the First Intellect, each one producing a particular sphere, until the emanation of the last, sublunar sphere. The cease-intellect associated with this lowest sphere, the 'Aql-i-Fá'il or Active Intellect, then would produce all the multiplicity of the earthly realm and, most importantly, would actualize the many forms or essences of things in Bahá'u'lláh's the potentiality of matter (McGinnis 205).

of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. First, with regard to the eternity of the world, Bahá'u'lláh explains: "Know assuredly that creation hath existed from eternity, and will continue to exist forever. Its beginning hath had no beginning, and its end knoweth no end."

B ' ' ' A  
C  
The two essential elements of na's view on creation, as seen are first that God's creative act is eternal and that therefore the world is co-eternal with Him while being lessly dependent upon Him, and second that God creates via an of existence in a hierarchy of being through some intermediary principle. Both of these propositions find it support not only in writings but also repeatedly in

is of course apparent that the astronomical content of Avicenna's position is not confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh. Involve the Nonetheless, the purely metaphysical content of Avicenna's view remains attributed pertinent—namely, the core proposition that God creates the contingent world through an eternal emanation of existence from Himself through no the intermediary of the First Intellect. Accordingly, we will consider in the clear last and final section of this paper the Avicennian principles confirmed in Bahá'u'lláh's own cosmology.

words which He hath revealed: "God was alone; there was none else besides Him. He will always remain what

74 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

He hath ever been." Every discerning eye will readily perceive that immediate—the Lord is now manifest, yet there is none to recognize His glory. By this is meant that the habitation wherein the Divine Being dwelleth temporal is far above the reach and ken of generation, anyone besides Him. Whatsoever in the contingent world can either it be expressed or apprehended, can

His name, the Creator, presupposeth a creation, even as His

the Lord of Men, must

existence of a servant.

As to those sayings,

to the Prophets of old, such

"In the beginning was God;

was no creature to know Him,"

and "The Lord was alone; with

one to adore Him," the meaning

these and similar sayings is

and evident, and should at no

be misapprehended. To this same

truth bear witness these

of its ákhir, its end or

that Bahá'u'lláh states this

ly after confirming the limitless

tion of the world into the past and

ture, this sentence may be understood

as asserting that there is no

beginning to the world's

just as there is no temporal end to

progression or continuation. Hence,

is possible to render that sentence

as never transgress the limits which, beginning by its inherent nature, have been end imposed upon it (hudúdát-i-im-káníyyih). God, alone, transcends such limitations. (Gleanings or 150–51; Iqtidárát 72–73) absolutely dependent on God, who remains its

In the first sentence of the above paragraph, Bahá’u’lláh unequivocally asserts the perpetual duration of God’s if not creation, and subsequently connects the God’s nature as Lord and Creator with the notion that an everlasting and beginningless creation is a necessary effect of His own unchanging will and Bahá’u’lláh causal status; this logic is unmistakably similar in character to Avicenna’s atemporal arguments for the eternity of the world from the immutability of God. be no

The second sentence, however, is paradoxical at first blush: how can the cosmos have a beginningless beginning or an endless end? The apparent ambiguity of Bahá’u’lláh’s statement Majmú‘iy-i-Alváh-i-may be resolved if we consider the significant

follows: “There is neither a to the world’s generation nor any to its progression.” The important point, however, that creation does have a “start” avval in terms of its being concurrent cause; God is prior to totality of the world or His terms of ontological rank, even in time (recall the discussion in the first two sections of how a cause be concurrent with its effect, and “prior” to it in essence, time). In this connection, affirms the essential dependence of world on God, and thus its posteriority to Him, when He states in another place that “there can doubt whatever that if for one moment the tide of His mercy and (fayd) were to be withheld from world, it would completely (Gleanings 68; Mubárákih 342). Here, it is

cise wording of the original Persian, as that Bahá'u'lláh uses the term fayd, or literally emanation—as we saw well as the implications of the preceding sentence. The Persian text literally states that there is no bidáyat or beginning to creation's avval, its start or would at firstness, and no niháyat or termination nonexistent.

Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

75

With an appreciation of this point— creates the physical world. First, as to the unceasing dependence of the created world on God—we can understand Bahá'u'lláh's statement in the large excerpt quoted above that while God “preceded” by is existent now, His creation is void of existence or mafqúd. Bahá'u'lláh immediately qualifies this statement about by clarifying that God transcends all is a the hudúdát-i-imkáníyyih, literally all the limitations of contingency. Since the world exists only contingently and Wert dependently, in relation to God, who exists necessarily and independently, it is as though it were nonexistent; God is alone, in the specific sense that He is without peer or match in the manner of His being and existence. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá it, for

the world's co-eternity, careful to note that, though the may be without beginning time, it nonetheless is the causal power of God. He As regards thine assertions the beginning of creation, this matter on which by reason of the divergences in men's thoughts and opinions. thou to assert that it hath ever isted and shall continue to it would be true; or wert thou affirm the same concept as is tioned in the sacred Scriptures, doubt would there be about

reiterates this position when He confirms that “although the contingent world exists, in relation to the existence of God it is non-existence and nothingness” (Some Answered Questions 324; Mufáavadát 196).

it hath been revealed by God, Lord of the worlds . . . God and His creation had ever existed beneath His shelter from the beginning that hath no apart from its being

preceded by a Firstness which cannot be regarded as firstness . . .

From the above points, we may conclude that Bahá’u’lláh affirms (Tablets 140; Avicenna’s metaphysical position that the created world is beginningless and perpetual, but that it is always dependent, for its existence, on God, Who Bahá’u’lláh’s is its ultimate, unchanging and eternal cause. How, then, does Bahá’u’lláh additionally confirm the idea of creation as emanation? In this regard, the Lawh-i-Hikmat is relevant, for the underlying truth in that work Bahá’u’lláh not only affirms the co-eternity of the world with God, Who ceaselessly sustains it, but He also establishes the Word of God or Logos as an intermediary reality that emanates from the Godhead and could

Majmú‘iy-i-Alváh ba’d i-Aqdas 82)

Given the context of other statements, it is clear that above passage He affirms is eternal; He nonetheless creation account in the scriptures cause He supports the they uphold, namely, that created by God and is not eternal the sense of transcending the of mutability and being existent in itself and immutable, is fundamentally contingent and

not exist, even for a moment, without the sustaining providence of God, as erudite Bahá’í philosopher Nabíl-i-Ak-

Avicenna likewise states. Accordingly, Bahá'u'lláh, one can support the eternity of creation while also affirming the central content of the Biblical and Qur'anic accounts. With this understanding, the previously quoted statement from Bahá'u'lláh is altogether intelligible: "God was, and His creation had ever existed beneath His shelter from beginning that hath no beginning, apart from its being preceded by a Firstness which cannot be regarded as firstness . . .". Creation has ever resided "beneath His shelter"—that is, it is has always depended on God—"from the beginning that hath no beginning," which is to say forever into the past. The world, however, is preceded by the essential priority or "firstness" of God as its concurrently, Bahá'u'lláh confirms this reading in Bahá'u'lláh here affirms Avicenna's view that God precedes His creation as its cause but not in terms of being prior in a sequence of time, as

bar, who would have been well familiar with Avicenna's thought. Shortly after this point in the Lawh-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh describes the Word of God as the instrumental cause of the entire creation. He states that this all-compelling "Word of God" is "the cause of the entire creation," while all else besides it is a created thing an effect. The Word or "Command of God," He states furthermore, has never been severed or munqati' from the world, which recalls His statement, quoted above, that all created things would perish were the emanation of God's grace to be withheld for moment. The Word of God may thus be identified as that emanation, or as chief medium of the gracious emanation of being from God.

Significantly, Bahá'u'lláh confirms this reading in the Lawh-i-Hikmat when He says this Word is al-fayd al-a'zam, literally the supreme emanation, and the 'illat al-fuyúdát, the cause of the [subsequent] emanations. Bahá'u'lláh then concludes this

though there was some definite point in that this section of the tablet by stating the past “before” which there was no Word is “the Cause which hath pre-creation proceeding from God. Accord- ceded the contingent world—a world ingly, Bahá’u’lláh may be understood which is adorned with the splendors of the Ancient of Days, yet is as saying that the world is “preceded being renewed and regenerated at all times” by [an essential] firstness which cannot be regarded as [a temporal] firstness.” (Tablets 141; Majmú’iy-i-Alváh ba’d az Avicenna’s metaphysical analysis of statement is particularly pertinent. The world is concurrent causation and essential priority, as discussed in the first sec- literally described as being adorned tion, thus helps make intelligible what or muzayyan with at-tiráz al-qadím, Bahá’u’lláh was here expressing to His the vesture of eternity, and yet it is at Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna 77 all times regenerated (tajaddud) and describes the Primal when Bahá’u’lláh originated or created (hudúth). This is Will as the instrumental or mediating cause of the creation of the possible because the Word precedes world in the world in being its concurrent cause, the Lawh-i-Kullu’t-Ta’ám, a function that belongs to the Word of God and it is thus that which continuously sustains and generates it, thus allowing Lawh-i-Hikmat, for in the former He states that it is by means of it to be beginningless and perpetual. the Primal Will that God created the In sum, Bahá’u’lláh represents this heavens and earth. Similarly, Word as having emanated from God; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses the Word and the Holy Spirit as it is “the supreme emanation,” and it is moreover the cause of subsequent in chapter thirty-eight of Mufávadát or Some Answered Questions. “emanations,” which can be read as

the levels of contingent reality that Bahá'u'lláh's compose the rest of creation. It is thus intermediary-apparent that Bahá'u'lláh is describing co-eternity of a creation, even as Avicenna did, that the philosophy eternally emanates from God through Avicenna—an intermediary principle, which He clarified in the Word. The Word, then, is stunningly similar to the First Intellect described by Avicenna and, in any case, it is identical in function and operation but as the first emanation from God which the Word in turn emanates the subsequent levels of existence.

Let it be noted here that there is a general consensus among Bahá'í scholars that the intermediary principle which Bahá'u'lláh calls the Word of God in the Lawh-i-Hikmat is the same reality expressed by various terms throughout the Bahá'í writings, including the "Holy Spirit" (Rúhu'l-Qudus) and the "Primal Will" (Mashíyyat-i-Av-subsistent through valíyyih), as well as the "Realm of Revelation" or of "Divine Command"

In this connection, account of emanation, the intermediary principle, and the creation—affirming as it does philosophical arguments of itself reaffirmed and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings statements. In one instance, Bahá not only speaks of the emanation of the world from God, also explicitly identifies the Word of God or Primal Will with the First Intellect, while perhaps even

to Avicenna himself. thus asserts: "The emanation of creation from God is a process through emanation. That emanates from God" (Some Questions 234; Mufávadát qíyám can signify existence, such that upon God by being His emanation of existence. Bahá continues by

stating:

(‘Álam-i-Amr).<sup>25</sup> This is apparent

It follows that all things have

25 Keven Brown, “Brief Discussion emanated from God; that is, it is

of the Primal Will in the Bahá’í Writings”; Riaz Ghadimi, 662; and ‘Ali-Mu-

rad Dávúdí, *Ulúhíyyat va Mazharíyyat*, “Station of Unity.”

78 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

through God that all things have one defined in reference to time; there

been realized, and through Him has always been an originated creation

that the contingent world has come and contingent world. The world, then,

to exist. The first thing to emanate is contingent upon the ceaseless ema-

from God is that universal reality nation of existence from God through

which the ancient philosophers the First Intellect or Primal Will.

Just

termed the “First Intellect” and as Avicenna recognizes that the First

which the people of Bahá call the Intellect is in itself a

contingent being

“Primal Will.” (Some Answered and not equal to the

Necessarily Exis-

Questions 235; *Mufávadát* 144) tent, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

likewise clarifies

that, in itself, the First Intellect does not share the absolute

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then stresses the eter- ority or precedence of the

ontological pri-

Godhead: “Though the First Intellect is

mal Will, as well as the concomitant without beginning, this does not mean

co-eternity, and ceaseless dependence, that it shares in the pre-existence of

of the creation upon that intermediary

God (qidam), for in relation to the

principle, and ultimately God.

exis- tence of God the existence of that uni-

This emanation, with respect to versal Reality is mere nothingness”

its action in the world of God, is (Some Answered Questions 235–36;

not limited by either time or place refer- and has neither beginning nor end, God is for in relation to God the beginning and the end are one and the ontological- same. The pre-existence of God is relation to a both essential and temporal, while bestows the origination of the contingent Intellect world is essential but not temporal. (Some Answered Questions from 235; Mufáavadát 145) subordinate to it.

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that the origination of the world is not temporal but essential, He evidently means to confirm that the world is created by mentioned and and dependent on God; its dependence and contingency are essential to its nature. It is therefore, in its very essence, Bahá’u’lláh originated and not self-subsistent; in the other words, it is a contingent entity. (Kalimiy-i-‘Ulyá), Nevertheless, this origination is not Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna identical to Avicenna’s First Intellect. Consequently, Bahá’u’lláh affirms the ‘Aql-i-Fá’il or Ac-

Mufáavadát 145). Here, the word ring to the “pre-existence” of qidam, which, as explored in the opening sections, refers to the ical priority of a cause in concurrent effect to which it existence. Although the First is eternal, it is eternally the immediate effusion of being the Godhead, and thus ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tion of the Primal Will, a core of Bahá’í theology and with the First Intellect argued for by Avicenna, seems to demonstrate that the intermediary ciple of creation, which variously calls the Word of God, Most Exalted Word and the Primal Will, is in

core metaphysical content of Avicenna's cosmology, which we can break down into the following seven propositions that they share: (1) God, in being immutable, eternal, and absolute, eternally creates the world; (2) the world, accordingly, has no beginning or end in time; (3) the world nonetheless is ceaselessly dependent on God for its existence, insofar as it is a contingent entity; (4) God creates through the emanation of existence from Himself; (5) the physical world is not an immediate emanation from God; (6) an intermediary reality, whether called the Word, the Realm of Command or the Realm of the Kingdom, 'Álam-i-Amr and 'Álam-i-Malakút respectively, which is the first entity to emanate from the Godhead, first in the atemporal sense of perfect, ontological precedence (as the motion of the hand precedes the motion of the key it holds, not in time but in its causal operation); and (7) the First Intellect, which is the immediate emanation from the Godhead, in turn emanates the existence of all other things. That

tive Intellect, generates and sustains the existence of the material world. In the Bahá'í system, there is no such subsequent intellects. Bahá'u'lláh and state that the First Intellect or Will is in fact responsible for the creation of the physical world. It follows, then, that for the First Intellect additionally assumes the emanations performed by the Active Intellect under Avicenna's view. In connection, Bahá'u'lláh and have a cosmology that divides into three realms. The first is the Realm of God or 'Álam-i-Haqq, which is the level of reality strictly confined to the Necessarily Existent, who is immutable, and absolute. There is the Realm of Command or the Realm of the Kingdom, 'Álam-i-Amr and 'Álam-i-Malakút respectively, the station of the First Will, or Holy Spirit. Lastly, the Realm of Creation or

‘Álam-i-Khalq, Bahá’u’lláh and Avicenna should share which is the sum of contingent reality the seven propositions listed above is created and sustained by God through the intermediary of the First Intellect. Bahá’u’lláh largely validates the cen- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes this cosmolog- ical picture thus: tral tenets of Avicennian metaphysical theology, and that Avicennian thought helps elucidate the philosophical con- The Prophets . . . hold that there are the world of God, the tent of the Bahá’í Writings. This being world of the Kingdom, and the world established, there remains only one of creation: three things. The first additional point to address before we emanation is the outpouring conclude this section. grace of the Kingdom, which has ema- nated from God and has appeared in the realities of all things, even

80 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

as the rays emanating from the article to explain the concomitant as- pects of Avicenna’s theory of sun are reflected in all things. psychol- ogy and abstraction, it is sufficient to note that, for Avicenna, a Mufávadát 205–6) prophet is one who is naturally disposed, by the For Avicenna, what the Bahá’í Writings particular constitution and character of his soul, to receive more fully call the Realm of the Kingdom would er people the intellectual than oth- of the Active Intellect, and who er people the intellectual illumination of the Active Intellect, and who with the celestial spheres with which is thus able to understand the nature of things which is the realm beneath the last, in a flash of inspired intuition, and not

lunar sphere, is the physical world. merely through unaided sense perception and induction (McGinnis 147–48). Since Bahá'u'lláh rejects any geocentric astronomy, He naturally does not affirm the idea that there are multiple intellects emanating in succession as associated with the heavenly spheres. Similarly, in the Bahá'í prophet or Manifestation of God whose human soul is uniquely associated with the First Intellect, Primal Will, or Holy Spirit so as to I suggest, therefore, that the Realm “manifest” the attributes of Divinity, of the Kingdom, ‘Álam-i-Malakút or including inherent knowledge of the ‘Álam-i-Amr, in the Bahá'í system, natures and realities of things, in the may well be reduced to one universal reality, as ‘Abdu'l-Bahá calls it, Although Avicenna’s objective is to provide a rational explanation of the First Intellect and Primal Will. In Islamic prophethood consonant with his metaphysics and theology, his approach fulfills the direct creative activity that the Active Intellect performs in Avicenna’s cosmology. Aside from this minor point of difference, however, the superiority of the prophet to other human beings, Bahá'u'lláh’s and Avicenna’s cosmologies are markedly similar, as is evident and his resulting special association with the Active Intellect; this replaces a more conventional idea of popular faith, contrary to Bahá'í thought, that the prophet is no different than above. This commonality is even more apparent when we consider Avicenna’s arbitrary im-

account of prophethood. For Avicenna, position of God's directives  
 into his consciousness. This is yet another  
 the Active Intellect not only manifests ev-  
 the forms or essences of things in the idence, therefore, that for  
 Bahá'u'lláh the First Intellect in fact  
 material world, but it also actualizes encompasses  
 universal concepts in human intellects. the range of activity Avicenna  
 divided among the First Intellect or  
 Though it is beyond the scope of this Emanation,  
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 81  
 subsequent intellects, and the Active and wide-ranging, and indicates a  
 Intellect. It remains for later scholar- shared interpretation of reality as  
 a whole in its basic features.  
 ship to correlate as well as differentiate The sole purpose of this article  
 further the more abstruse and minute has  
 correlations of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings been to highlight this  
 harmony, insofar as it enriches the academic study  
 and Avicenna's philosophy. of  
 what Bahá'u'lláh means by God, but  
 C also because an understanding of Avi-  
 cenna's work and intellectual contribu-  
 In the foregoing sections, we have seen tion provides a framework by which  
 how the theology of Bahá'u'lláh val- one might better comprehend  
 the metaphysical significance of many  
 idates core features of the metaphysi- Bahá'u'lláh's theological  
 cal philosophy of Avicenna—that God statements,  
 exists as the one ultimate and uncon- such as His affirmation that God is  
 nec- essary or simple, that His  
 ditioned reality, necessarily existent, creatures are  
 simple, single, immutable, eternal, contingent beings, or that His  
 creation has neither beginning nor end.  
 perfect, and wholly good; omniscient  
 Howev- er, as expressed in the  
 in intellect and free in will; unlimited introduction—  
 in His being and thus truly infinite and and I stress this  
 unequivocally—the objective has decidedly not been  
 transcendent, as contrasted with the

either

constrained nature of contingently existing beings. Bahá'u'lláh affirms, moreover, as Avicenna argues, that these attributes are each indistinguishable in reality from the indivisible essence of God, which is necessary existence, imply insofar as to be necessarily existent theological teaching is to be simple, indivisible, immutable, perfect, wholly good, and finite. We have seen, furthermore, how Bahá'u'lláh confirms Avicenna's view that the world is eternal, though ceaselessly dependent on God, from whom the existence of all things emanates through the intermediary of the First Intellect or Primal Will. The metaphysical harmony between Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna is consequently not restricted to certain superficial or incidental features of their thought. The agreement between them is in fact fundamental

of God, which is necessary existence, imply insofar as to be necessarily existent theological teaching is to be simple, indivisible, immutable, perfect, wholly good, and finite. We have seen, furthermore, how Bahá'u'lláh confirms Avicenna's view that the world is eternal, though ceaselessly dependent on God, from whom the existence of all things emanates through the intermediary of the First Intellect or Primal Will. The metaphysical harmony between Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna is consequently not restricted to certain superficial or incidental features of their thought. The agreement between them is in fact fundamental

to state or to imply that positions are, in any way, derivative from Avicenna, or at all imitable to his influence as the philosopher in the Islamic tradition. Likewise, I have not intended to show that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are, by any means, restricted to those themes in Avicenna's philosophy which He affirms and validates, ever much one may esteem the importance of such metaphysical principles as necessary and contingent concurrent causation, or emanation. Nonetheless, I have endeavored to show—through citation and analysis of a diverse selection of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's works—that affirmations of Avicenna's ideas in the Bahá'í Writings are not due merely to an incidental convergence

of terminology, to the degree that Bahá'u'lláh lived in the Islamic world himself, and

Consequently, why should the

scholar study Avicenna

and inherited a certain intellectual and literary culture, but to demonstrate that Bahá'u'lláh's clearly stated views on God constitute a vindication of the metaphysical principles underlying Avicenna's argument for God's existence, and His nature, attributes, and creative act, in actual content and concept. Indeed, the Bahá'í Writings' affirmation of the content of philosophical-theological philosophy is incredibly rich in implication; it indicates that they validate the principles of rationality that underlie Avicenna's arguments, and that the content of Bahá'í metaphysics can be further understood through the study of the Islamic philosophical tradition, to discern areas of affirmation, as in the case of Avicenna, or difference, in the case of other Islamic thinkers.

take Bahá'u'lláh's theology particularly vindicative of his philosophy? Even if this were largely correct—though I think it slightly misses the mark—it still be fruitful to consider logical arguments and doctrines at source, so to speak, and to consider the rational basis, as Avicenna, of those logical doctrines that 'Abdu'l-Bahá so consistently affirm, in order to demonstrate, and to have a firmer understanding of, their essence, rigorous logic, and depth. Indeed, if Avicenna's ideas were so powerful as to have become mainstream, the need to understand Bahá'u'lláh himself would be commensurately intensified.

However, the real situation is much more complex. After Avicenna, philosophy or falsafih did indeed become especially associated with his ideas in the Islamic world, and more generally with the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic

to resolve possible misunderstandings as to what the arguments of this article actually entail regarding Avicenna's not relation to the Bahá'í Faith. One could wonder, for example, if it is warranted against to associate the relevant metaphysical principles that Bahá'u'lláh affirms with Avicenna especially, instead of seeing this affirmation as one pertaining to ideas that, by Bahá'u'lláh's time, had become mainstream in Islam itself due to the prevalence of Avicenna's thought over a millennium. Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna's ostensibly heretical notions opposed to such as the eternity of the world; his metaphysical characterization of the nature of God's knowledge; and his doubt, suggested in several places, as to the bodily presence resurrection, insofar as he defends a purely spiritual view of the afterlife affirmation of in his metaphysical works—in agreement with the Bahá'í perspective.<sup>26</sup> Ghazálí, in addition, argued for occasionalism—which holds that there are no necessary causal relations in nature, tradition Avicenna himself inherited, refined, and profoundly shaped. Nonetheless, subsequent thinkers only adopted and developed his ideas, but also challenged and argued against them. In the succeeding generation, for example, the widely known thinker Ghazálí composed a famous polemic against twenty ideas implied by or related to Avicenna's thought, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and he especially took issue with theologians were generally opposed to some of those relevant ideas Avicenna and the Bahá'í Writings affirm, such as the distinction between essence and existence, the absence of necessary causal connections in the world, and a robust affirmation of divine simplicity.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Ghazálí, in succeeding centuries, was often looked at askance in the Islamic world, or even thought of as a heretic. Jurisprudence became the chief

but only direct actions of God’s arbitrary will—against the Avicennian notion that natural entities have causative powers and necessary relations in their own right, even though they ceaselessly depend on God for their existence. It is the Avicennian notion, however, that the Bahá’í Writings affirm, as evidenced by the passages on causation were of- considered throughout this paper, and the following statement from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “By nature is meant those inherently beautiful properties and necessary relations derived from the realities of things” (Tablet 13). Furthermore, the generally fideistic school of Ash‘arite theology, from which Ghazálí more or less operated, became far more mainstream in Sunni Islam, the dominant branch of the faith, than Avicenna’s rationalist philosophy. And indeed, Ash‘arite-influenced “For the Ash‘arites, the divine attributes . . . are

pression of religion among scholars. Indeed, although philosophy—whether of Avicenna’s tially Aristotelian approach, Platonist “Illuminationist” (Ishráqí), or a synthesis of was indeed practiced in the Shia of Early Modern Iran by of Isfahan, its practitioners ten persecuted or condemned by ‘ulamá, even while the tradition itself, so ied by Avicenna, was “by and abandoned in the rest of the world,” as expressed by the Abbas Amanat (114). Accordingly, it not reasonable to diminish the to which Bahá’u’lláh and Bahá actually vindicate and date the arguments and

26 Fazlur Rahman expresses this . . . but more starkly, when he writes that “in gen- 27 As Marmura notes: co-eternal with the divine essence are not identical with it.

They are attributes

eral” Avicenna “taught that the resurrection ‘additional’ (za’ida) to the divine essence.

of the body was an imaginative myth with particularly for which the minds of the Prophets were in-rejection and spired in order to influence the moral character of the unthinking masses” (119). (141).

84

The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

characteristic of Avicenna himself and not Islamic theologians considered existence generally, regarding causation, contingent and necessary existence, the distinction between essence and existence, and God’s nature, attributes, and eminence, creative act.

Another objection, however, contend that this article has exaggerated the Avicennian character of the

principles discussed, insofar as certain Islamic philosophers and thinkers after recognize

Avicenna—such as Ibn ‘Arabí, Mullá Sadrá, Mír Dámád, Sabzivári, and more reason-

even Shaykh Ahmad Ahsá’í—have doctrine of

variously and to differing degrees Aris-

discussed some of the ideas treated in countless

this paper. It should be kept in mind, however, that this article does not and

make any exclusive claim in demon-

strating Bahá’u’lláh’s affirmation of

This point is quite basic,

understanding al-Ghazálí’s

condemnation of the

trine of an eternal world”

forms by Avicenna, such as the distinction between essence and

and contingent and necessary being, they are doing so as influenced

or indirectly by him, and arguably

of them enjoys the degree of

influence, historical relevance, and

synthetic genius Avicenna is generally recognized as possessing, with

possible exception, outside Islam,

Thomas Aquinas among medieval philosophers. Therefore, not to

the Avicennian character of

ples here discussed is no

able than to deny that the

the four causes,<sup>28</sup> for example, is

totalian, despite the fact that

subsequent philosophers, including Avicenna, have adopted, defended,

clarified the concept.

Moreover, certain other

philoso-  
 Avicenna's ideas, as though Avicenna      phers in Islam, such as  
 Suhravardí,  
 is the only philosopher who has argu-      are notable for starkly rejecting  
 the  
 ments validated in the Bahá'í Faith,      Aristotelian heart of  
 Avicenna's  
 nor does it suggest that the whole of      thought, even while the Bahá'í  
 Faith,  
 Avicenna's philosophy, beyond the      as convincingly argued by Ian  
 Kluge  
 matters explicitly treated here, has the      in "The Aristotelian Substratum of  
 the  
 imprimatur of Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed,      Bahá'í Writings,"  
 reaffirms the basic  
 Ian Kluge has done impressive work      metaphysics of Aristotle's  
 thought,  
 demonstrating the Aristotelian and      especially, I would add, as  
 developed  
 Neoplatonic principles affirmed by      by Avicenna. In addition, in  
 certain  
 Bahá'u'lláh, and this article is fully      respects it is the  
 particularly Avicen-  
 complementary to and supportive of      nian stance that the Bahá'í  
 Writings  
 such scholarship, insofar as Avicenna      affirm, in contrast to those of  
 later  
 himself inherited and further refined      thinkers: the Avicennian distinction  
 those traditions, and works within clas-      between essence and existence, for  
 sical theism more broadly, as shall be      example, came to be undermined  
 either  
 discussed below.      by an emphasis solely on essence (as  
 Nonetheless, when later philoso-  
 phers in Islam argue for or develop  
 ideas first articulated in their mature      28 Discussed in the  
 section  
 "Simplicity."  
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna      85  
 in Suhravardí's radical essentialism)      transcends all things in His  
 essence  
 or on existence (as in Mullá Sadrá's      and yet imparts to them  
 their very ex-  
 Heraclitan existentialism).<sup>29</sup> Likewise,      istence ceaselessly, and is thus  
 "closer  
 some subsequent thinkers, influenced      to a man than his life vein,"  
 as it is said

by Sufi mysticism, tended toward cer- in the Qur'án (50:16). Since  
the Bahá'í Faith evidently contributes to  
tain monistic or pantheistic ideas, at this tra-  
dition of classical  
variance with Bahá'u'lláh's teaching, find points of substantive  
theism, one could ity between Bahá'u'lláh  
in contrast to Avicenna's chaste insis- phers such as Aristotle,  
commonal- Augustinus—before  
tence on God's transcendence. Conse- Maimonides, Averroës, and  
and philoso- after him. Nonetheless, in the  
quently, Avicenna is well-deserving of abundance of Avicennian  
Plotinus, and that Bahá'u'lláh validates,  
explicit attention in Bahá'í studies, and between Avicennian philosophy and  
Avicenna—and the Bahá'í Faith  
it is with this aim that this article has rich field for future work and  
Aquinas, cial interest to Bahá'í  
focused exclusively on Avicenna, and connection, Avicenna may  
sheer to be one remarkably impressive  
only alluded to or briefly mentioned influential member of a broad,  
propositions multi-  
other philosophers. Again, it should faith philosophical-theological  
the affinities tradi-  
be stated that the purport of this arti- tion whose relation to the  
cle is not that Bahá'u'lláh's theology Bahá'í Faith  
should prove to be a should be a matter of  
is reducible to Avicenna's thought as and consideration.  
of spe- Despite the above points,  
an historical antecedent. It has argued ever, one may still wonder  
scholars. In this how-  
solely that Bahá'u'lláh's theology is af- whether  
firmative of, not derivative from, those recognizing the Avicennian themes  
and  
Avicennian ideas we have discussed.

in port what is called classical theism, Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysics is anything a view of God which recognizes Him more than a mere academic exercise. as the one metaphysically ultimate On the contrary, Avicenna's philosophy and absolute reality, who completely invests one with a powerful tool in understanding the conceptual, philosophical, metaphysical, and logical content 29 As discussed by Wisnovsky (111). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's position is decidedly Bahá'u'lláh's writings and implications of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The Bahá'í Writings' contingent beings existence "is only one affirmation of the distinction between accident ('arad) among others that enter essence and existence; of the two modalities of necessary and contingent upon the realities of created things" (Some Answered Questions 337–38; Mufávadát being; of the necessary existence of 203).

86 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021

God; of a robust account of divine sim- revealed to be non-negotiable tenets of Bahá'u'lláh's system, plicity holding that God's attributes are nowhere contra- Bahá'u'lláh's system, identical to His essence; of the eternal- dictated in His writings though expressed in various ways depending on the ity of God's creation; and of the role of in various ways depending on the char- acter of His particular audience. the intermediary principle of the First In this connection, it should Intellect or Primal Will—such central be ac- knownedged that there has been a affirmations are rendered intelligible, con- and their rational basis elucidated, trasting view, in the literature of Bahá'í scholarship, that Bahá'u'lláh through an appreciation of Avicennian "does not assert the truth of any particular metaphysics. meta- Avicenna can serve a vital role in physical position," and even

“denies

Bahá’í studies for yet other reasons, that metaphysics itself is the core of

however. First, Avicennian philosophy, religion” (Momen 38). It is naturally

with its insistence on rational demon- outside the scope of this article, in the

stration in addition to its conformity space of a conclusion, to address this

to Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, could well perspective fully, as it is expressed in

prove to be an invaluable resource the essay “The God of Bahá’u’lláh,”

for Bahá’í scholars as they undertake which differs from this paper’s account

the enterprise of articulating Bahá’í of the existence, consistency, and ro-

teachings, defending them, and clar- bust nature of definite metaphysical

ifying their rational structure, just as principles in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged when He It should first be noted that the thesis

stated that in this day rational argu- of “epistemological relativism,” which

ments (dalá’il-i-‘aqlíyyih) are requisite “The God of Bahá’u’lláh” argues is

for the people of the world (Some An- operative in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings,

answered Questions 8; Mufávadát 5). Avi- springs from a laudable goal of ex-

cenna’s argument for God’s existence, plaining how Bahá’u’lláh reconciles

for example, is in full harmony with different faith traditions with contrast-

Bahá’í teaching, clarifies the content ing metaphysical claims.

Accordingly,

of Bahá’u’lláh’s own theological state- it is suggested there that

Bahá’u’lláh

ments, and illuminates the reasoning in accomplishes this by generally teach-

support of God’s existence found in the ing that “religious metaphysical truth is

Bahá’í Writings. Second, one who has an individual truth which each person

a foundation in classical, and indeed sees from his or her own viewpoint”

Avicennian, philosophy will more easily realize that Bahá'u'lláh's writings kind of form a coherent and fully consistent no-metaphysical system. Matters such as revelation—and God's existence, necessity, simplicity, notes, in a and complete transcendence, as well as per- the contingent nature of the world, are of Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

(38).

Though there is indeed a

“perspectivism” implicit in the

tion of progressive

though Bahá'u'lláh clearly

number of places, that differing

spectives qualify the truth values

87

certain statements—it nonetheless does not en- seems to me that epistemological relativism is not plausible, in any strong simply formulation, vis-à-vis Bahá'u'lláh's that God alone teachings. This is because definite and things intrinsically metaphysical and onto- conditionally, logical claims, open to human knowl- absolute edge—such as the existence of God, cause, His transcendent reality, the station to of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation (Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárahik of God, the immortality of the human Bahá'u'lláh, soul, the reality of objective moral ob- tran- ligation, and many others—are essen- distinction tial, even foundational, to the Bahá'í Faith, and consistently stated as true monist without qualification. In addition, it Bahá'u'lláh's likewise seems to me that the thesis of

in the Bahá'í Writings,”

tail any monism or pantheism when read in context. Bahá'u'lláh

affirms in that passage

exists necessarily, while other

exist contingently and

by asserting that essential or

existence is not preceded by a

and that such existence is limited

God

165). This statement from

therefore, actually confirms the

scendence and ontological

of God from a creation that

tingently, and it is not at all a

position differing from

other statements.

epistemological relativism is supported by underemphasizing the remarkable conceptual consistency, over a life-writings, long ministry, of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, and by overemphasizing apparent disparities in them, which can be rather easily resolved, or even disappear, with Bahá'u'lláh reference to the evident metaphysical content of His explicit statements on the nature of God.

Consequently, and more generally, what is presented as two contrasting positions in Bahá'u'lláh's "theism" and "monism," are in fact one consistent position, variously described and elaborated: God, even as Avicenna logically deduced and repeatedly affirms, is the Necessarily Existent and thus exists without a cause or on any condition, whereas all other things are contingently existent and thus depend on God ceaselessly as their ultimate cause.

As a case in point, we may consider Momen's suggestion that some of Bahá'u'lláh's statements, such as Shoghi Effendi "absolute existence is strictly confined to God" (Gleanings 157; Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárákih 165) are monistic or pantheistic, and substantively differ from other statements from Bahá'u'lláh that support what the article calls the "theistic view of God," which holds that God completely transcends the world. This statement from Bahá'u'lláh, which we discussed in the section "The Necessarily Existent" (88 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 31.3 2021) removed

expresses this metaphysical Bahá'u'lláh—God's dence and ontological succinctly when he writes: So crude and fantastic a Divine incarnation is as from, and incompatible with, the essentials of Bahá'í belief as the no less inadmissible and anthropomorphic conceptions

Who is the Eternal Truth is the Power Who exerciseth sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation.

Much more, of course, might be said to do justice to the arguments in “The God of Bahá’u’lláh.” In closing, however, it should only be noted that, to the degree that there are explicit and implicit metaphysical principles in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, we may regard Avicenna as an important ally in approaching the Bahá’í corpus as scholars determined to discover and understand the precise nature of Bahá’í-Ver-

Their teachings on the nature of reality. It remains for future studies to illumine further what positions of past philosophers are affirmed by Bahá’u’lláh, az Makátíb-i- and how the philosophical tradition Hadrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá, vol. of classical theism can be used to explicate, articulate, defend, and clarify the metaphysics and theology of Bahá’u’lláh. We may, nevertheless, remain confident in the explicit content of Bahá’u’lláh’s unequivocal testimony to the existence, transcendence, singleness, and unity of the self-subsistent and infinite God, on Whom all things ceaselessly depend, from Whom they derive their being:

George Ronald Publishers, 1978. Amanat, Abbas. *Iran: A Modern History*. Yale UP, 2017. Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Avicenna. *An-Naját*. Dár Áfáq li

All existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the all things. This is what is meant by Divine unity; this is its mental principle. (Gleanings 166; Iqtidárát 158)

W C

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Khitábát*. lag, 1927. 2 vols. ———. *Min Makátíb ‘Abd al-Bahá’*. Editora Bahá’í Brasil, ———. *Muntakhabátí* 1. US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979. ———. *An-Núr al-Abhá fí ‘Abd al-Bahá*. tions, 1998. ———. *Selections from ings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. World Centre, 1982. ———. *Some Answered Questions*. Bahá’í World Centre, ———. *Tablet to Auguste Forel*. 1978. Amanat, Abbas. *Iran: A Modern History*. Yale UP, 2017. Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Avicenna. *An-Naját*. Dár Áfáq li

Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

Nashr wa at-Tawzí', 2020.  
———. The Metaphysics of The  
ing (ash-Shifá:  
Ed-  
89

ited and translated by Michael E. Marmura. Brigham Young UP, 2005.

———. Dánishnámiy-i-'Alá'í. Mawlá, 1394.

Bahá'u'lláh. Ad'íyy-i-Hadrat-i-Mahbúb. Faraj Allah Zaki al-Kurdi, 1339/1920.

———. Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988.

———. Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990.

———. Iqtidárát. Matba'at as-Sa'ádih, 1924.

———. Ishráqát va Chand Lawh-i-Dígar. Dutt Prashad Press, 1892.

———. Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Bahá'í World Centre, 1995.

———. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Bahá'í World Centre, 1992.

———. Kitáb-i-Íqán.

Mu'assasiy-i-Millíy-i-Matbú'át-i-Bahá'íy-i-Álmán, 1998.

———. The Kitáb-i-Íqán. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989.

———. Lawh-i-ibn-i-Dhi'b. Bahá'í-Verlag, 1981.

———. Má'idíy-i-Ásmání, vol. 4.

Mu'assasiy-i-Millíy-i-Matbú'át-i-Amrí, 1972.

———. Má'idíy-i-Ásmání, vol. 7.

Mu'assasiy-i-Millíy-i-Matbú'át-i-Amrí, 1972.

———. Majmú'iy-i-Alváh ba'd az

Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Lajniy-i-Nashr-i-Áthár-i-Amrí bih Lisán-i-Fársí va 'Arabí Langenhain, 1980.

———. Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárah (Cháp-i-Misr). US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978.

———. Munáját: Majmú'iy-i-Adhkár va Ad'íyyih min Áthár-i-Hadrat-i-

Bahá'u'lláh. Dár an-Nashr al-Bahá'íyyih fí'l-Barázíl, 1997.

———. Muntakhabátí az Áthár-i-Hadrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'í-Verlag, 2006.

———. Prayers and Meditations. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987.

———. Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988.

Boethius. The Consolation of Philosophy. Translated by H.R. James. Project Gutenberg [www.gutenberg.org/files/14328/14328-h/14328-h.htm](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14328/14328-h/14328-h.htm). Accessed 25 Feb. 2022.

Brown, Keven. “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Response to Darwinism: Its Historical and Philosophical Context.” *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions* 12, Kalimat Press, 2001, 5–133.

———. “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Response to the Doctrine of the Unity of Existence.” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3-4, 2001, pp. 1–24.

———. “Brief Discussion of the Primal Will in the Bahá’í Writings.” *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1990-1, pp. 22–27.

Cole, Juan. “The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá’í Writings.” *Bahá’í Studies* 9, Association for Bahá’í Studies, 1982, 1–38.

Craig, William Lane. “Does God Exist.” *Reasonable Faith*. [www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/does-god-exist1](http://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/does-god-exist1). Accessed 29 Jan. 2022.

90 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

Dávudí, Ali-Murad. *Ulúhíyyat va Mazharíyyat. Mu’assasiy-i-Ma’árif-i-Bahá’í*, 1996.

De Haan, Daniel. “Where Does Avicenna Demonstrate the Existence of God?” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2016, pp. 97–128. doi:10.1017/S0957423915000132.

Ghadimi, Riaz. *Farhang-i-Lughát-i-Muntakhabih*. U of Toronto P, 1986.

Hatcher, William S. *Minimalism*. Juxta Publications, 2004.

Kluge, Ian. “Apologetics: A Personal Vision.” *Association for Bahá’í Studies Annual Conference*, 1 September 2001, Seattle, WA. Paper delivered as part of the keynote panel “Defense of the Faith: Bahá’í Apologetics in Our Time.”

———. “The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá’í Writings.” *Lights of Irfán*, vol. 4. ‘Irfán Colloquia, 2003, pp. 17–78.

Lambden, Stephen. “The Word Bahá: Quintessence of the Greatest Name.” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* vol. 8, no. 2, 1997-8, pp. 13–45.

Marmura, Michael. “Al-Ghazálí.” *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, edited by Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor. Cambridge UP, 2005, 137–54.

McGinnis, Jon. *Avicenna*. Oxford UP, 2010.

Momen, Moojan. “The God of Bahá’u’lláh.” *Bahá’í Faith and the World’s Religions*, edited by Moojan Momen. George Ronald, 2005, 1–38.

———. “Relativism: A Basis for Bahá’í Metaphysics.” *Studies in Honor of the*

Late Hasan M. Balyuzi, edited by Moojan Momen. Kalimat Press, 1988, 185–217.

Morewedge, Parviz. *The Metaphysica of Avicenna: A Critical Translation-Commentary of the Fundamental Arguments in Avicenna's Metaphysica in the Dánish Náma-i 'alá'í*. Columbia UP, 1973.

Plotinus. *The Six Enneads*. Translated by Stephen Mackenna and B.S. Page. [classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.html](https://classics.mit.edu/Plotinus/enneads.html). Accessed 25 Feb. 2022.

Rafati, Vahid. "Lawh-i-Hikmat: The Two Agents and the Two Patients." *Andalib* vol. 5, no. 19, 2002, pp. 29–38.

Rahman, Fazlur. *Islam*. U of Chicago P, 1966.

Saiedi, Nader. *Gate of the Heart*. Wilfrid Laurier UP and Association for Bahá'í Studies, 2016.

Schaefer, Udo. *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture*, vol. 2, translated by Geraldine

Schuckelt and Gerald Keil. George Ronald, 2009.

Shoghi Effendi. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991.

Wisnovsky, Robert. "Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition." *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, edited by Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor. Cambridge UP, 2005, 92–136.

— Baha'u'llah and the God of Avicenna (Used by permission of the curator)