

Discourses of Knowledge

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This paper first suggests that many statements in the Baha'i writings are couched in the terms of a particular tradition, or intellectual/traditional, of the text. Such statements may assume some of the premises of the addressee, passing over them without necessarily seeking to challenge or affirm those premises in an absolute sense, in order to make an argument which the addressee can accept. Such premises may sometimes be factually true, in an empirical sense, while sometimes they may not be propositionally true, but may rather be true in a metaphorical and symbolic sense. This being the case, recovering the nature of the discourse being employed, or the intellectual context of the statement, can help one evaluate whether a given statement is meant to convey a propositional or a rhetorical truth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá adopted the particular parameters of Western modernist discourse about knowledge, specifically in terms of the debate of science versus religion. His statements are, therefore, germane to contemporary questions about academic, or materialist, methodologies and the Bahá'í view toward these modes of knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá often appears to give precedence to logical proofs and scientific method over traditional religious modes or explanations of reality, particularly in questions of fact and information, though not necessarily where ethics and morality are concerned. He would therefore seem to assert the validity of Western academic, or materialist, methodologies.

' ABDU 'L-BAHA

First we must speak of logical proofs.

- ' Abdu'l-Baha (c. 1905)

Modes of discourse

By My spirit and by My favor! By My mercy and by My beauty! All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written in this paper, "discourse" refers to a conversation which unfolds over time, one that is governed by a particular set of premises and

capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My concepts in the context of which given arguments and inquiries are voice.³

A discourse often implies or delimits the type(s) of methodology that will be considered valid in investigating or "proving" questions or problems. In its broadest senses, we might think of correspondents, and thus addressed himself to more than one discipline the entire intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment as scientific or course tradition, as defined above. For example in communicating academic discourse to a scientific discourse community, when Shiites or Babis, who expected an Eschaton in which the return questions are posed or particular data considered, most parties to the discussion will proceed with certain assumptions about the primacy of the twelfth Imam figured prominently, Baha'u'llah frequently mentions the Qa'im (mahdi), Husayn and 'Ali, etc. He did not begin of empirical evidence, the posing of falsifiable hypotheses, and the same assumptions, however, in communicating with need to verify data by experimentation. This does not mean that all Zoroastrians, who did not by and large revere Islamic figures and participants in the discourse will come to the same conclusions indeed would more likely have been offended by references to them. about matters under discussion, or that they will necessarily interpret 'Abdu'l-Baha's rhetorical principle explicit in a work written as a young man, in 1875:

It does mean that participants in the discussion will implicitly acknowledge certain premises and certain rules of evidence and argument. If for example a spiritually learned Muslim is conducting a debate with a Christian and he knows nothing of the glorious melodies of the Gospel, he will, no matter how much he imparts of the Qur'an and its truths, be unable to convince the Christian, and his words will fall on deaf ears. We might conceive of the Abrahamic religious traditions as belonging to a particular discourse. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the better versed in the fundamentals of Christianity than the Christian Baha'i Faith all agree on the divine missions of Abraham and priests themselves, and understands the purport of the Scriptures even Moses, and acknowledge the general principle of a personal God beyond history who intrudes into history to "reveal" itself to would indeed have no other recourse.⁴

humanhood through designated intermediaries. We might distinguish this discourse of the Abrahamic religious traditions from the Buddhist. Later in life, 'Abdu'l-Baha is reported to have said, in respond-

dhist or Hindu traditions, which conceive of salvation history and of ing
 lo his retinue's admiration for the effectiveness of his talks in
 the numinous in substantially different ways from the Abrahamic
 America, that they were effective because he took the exigencies of
 traditions, and look to an entirely different line of enlightened ones the
 time (eqtezti-ye vaqt) and the audience's perspective (mashrab-
 as guides to the ultimate nature of reality. e
 liozzar) into consideration. This report also suggests, however, that
 The manifestation (mazhar) of God, in Bab!\ 'i parlance, partici- ' Abdu '
 l-Baha learned from Bahll'u'lllh that this meant not simply
 pates in a human discourse by communicating transcendent truth
 respecting the audience by repeating the terms and assumptions of
 into a human language bound by culture and history, which never- its
 cherished discourse, but including a quality of transcendental
 theless is able to transcend time and place. As Babaáu 'llab alludes,
 truth:

in the Hidden Words:

50

51

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Bay611 bciyad be-mashrab-e hozzar va eqleza-ye vaqt Ms/rad, va hosn-e
 experience of newspapers. Baha'u'llah described them as " the mir-
 'ebcirat va e'teda/ dar adci'-e ma'tini va kalemal lazem, faqat harf
 ror of the world" (111er 'cit-e jahcin) and an "amazing and potent phe-
 zada11 nist. Hamishe dar 'Akka Mirza Mohammad-e 'Ali baya11ati ra
 nornenon" (zohur-ist 'ajib va a1nr-ist bozorg), while at the same time
 ke az man mi-shenid be- 'ayneha dar mavciqe '-e digar zekr migard
 lamenting that most things reported of himself in the newspapers
 [sic] va/i moltafet nabud ke hezaran heknm va masa/eh lazem ast, na
 were incorrect. He \varned journalists to be free of base or ulterior
 tanha goflan. Dar ayyam-e Baghdad va So/aymaniye, Shaykh 'Abd a/-
 Hosayn gofle bud ke Jamal-e Mobarak Kord-ha ra be-in vasile jam ' o
 motivations (az gharaz-e najis va havci) and, instead, aspire to justice
 jazb kardand, ke esrelahat-e 'oraja va sufiye ra bayan mi-11em11dand
 ('ad/ va ensaf). Jn this context, Baha'u'llah recommends the fol -
 Bichare Shaykh-e mazk11r raft va kciab-e Futuhath-i Makkiya ra payda
 lowing methodology or principle for journalists, which ought to
 va 'ebarat-e an ra heft nem11de, dar harja zekr knrd. Did hichkas gush
 apply equally to historians or those in any discipline seeking to write
 nemi-dahad. Khay/i ta 'ajjob knrd ke chera mardom gush nemidahandl
 about the historical truth:

Jamal-e Mobarak farmuda11d: "Be-Shaykh beg11 'id ma F111uha1-i
 Makkiya ra 11emi-khva11im, balke tiyat-e mada11iye ra elteqa mi-konim.

Dar om11r be-qadr-e maqdur tafahhos na11layad ta haqiqat-e an agcih
 Fos11s-e Shaykh rci nemi-gu 'im, bal ciz nos11s-e eliihiye hmf mi-
 shavad va benegarad.

zanim. "5

They should enquire into situations as much as possible and ascertain Discourse (bayan, also exposition, explanation, argument) must the facts, then set them down in writing.⁹

accord with the taste of the audience (hozzar, literally, "those present") and the exigencies of the time. Elegance of expression and telepresence Baha'u'llah himself also wrote a letter to the Times of London, is required in presenting (ada') meanings and ideas (kalamat, literally describing the persecution of the Baha'is in Iran, in which he asks "words"), [but] it is not merely speaking [with words]. In Akka, Mirza the newspapers and cities of the world to heed the "groan of the Mohammad-e 'Ali always repeated verbatim on other occasions what do you introduce."¹⁰

be heard from me, but he was not aware that great wisdom (hezarun Likewise, many of Baha'u'llah's moral exhortations could easily be extended to methodological premises, such as his injunction not just talk. Shaykh 'Abd al-Hosayn had said that in the days of the true seeker (siltakhs-e mojcihed) to cleanse his heart from every Baghdad and Sulaymaniyyih the Blessed Beauty attracted the Kurds remnant of love and hatred so that blind love will not lead him to err, by discoursing in the terms of the gnostics and of Sufism. This poor man will hatred prejudice him against the truth.¹¹ Likewise, we must Shaykh went and found a copy of the Futuhat-i Makkiya,⁶ memorized not blindly imitate the ways of our forefathers, ¹² but must see with its terminology, and used it everywhere. He found that no one would our own eyes and hear with our own ears. To do this, and retain our justice and was greatly surprised why people did not listen. The Blessed humanity, we must be fair and equitable in our judgment.:

Beauty said, "Tell the Shaykh that we do not read Futuhat-i Makkiya, but recite the verses of civilization. We don't speak from the text of the Qui an alisifii ya uli al-albab, man la instifa lahu la insaniya lahu Fusus of the Shaykh, rather we speak of the divine texts."⁷

Say; Observe equity in your judgment, ye men of understanding heart' Although obviously informed of and able to participate in sev-

He that is unjust in his judgment is destitute of the characteristics that eral different discourses, Baha'u'llah was visited by few Europeans distinguish man's station.¹³

during his lifetime, and does not seem to have been greatly preoccupied with addressing religious and philosophical matters in terms of Western discourse.⁸ The Middle East did have, like the West,

"Knowledge" in Baha'u'llah's writings

Knowledge ('elm) is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent on everyone. The knowledge of such science - In the West, the post-Enlightenment discourse of knowledge had on

ences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the several points contradicted religious dogma. traditional theology, or earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words.

notions about the authorship of the Bible. Therefore, science was

Great indeed is the claim (haqq) of scientists and craftsmen (saheblin-e 'olum va sanaye) on the peoples of the world ... In this, knowledge seemingly in combat with religious knowledge, and Western science is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, thinkers tended to dichotomize the two domains of knowledge.

of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. 17

Since the clash between science and religion did not affect the Islamic world to the same extent it did the Western world, 14

Elsewhere, Baha'u'llah writes:

Baha'u'llah does not speak extensively of science in apposition or opposition to religion. He viewed the ultimate purpose of knowl-

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both edge to be the moral improvement of humanity and the physical within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without

advance of civilization. Baha'u'llah describes the powers of human

knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as knowledge as ultimately proceeding from divine revelation or grace.

capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being

As such, the goal of acquiring knowledge should be to further its

with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquence. The progress of the possessors' progress toward God, not to veil him from divine truth:

quent speech. 18

Ya q(Jwm in 11a qadd(Jrn6 al- 'ull 1 n li- 'irfani al-ma 'ltim

These and other writings of Baha'u'llah will, no doubt, be mined

for further implications about the importance and the limitations of

We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learn-

knowledge. Furthermore, reading Baha'u'llah's statements about

ing be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge. 15 the

modes of knowing and the types of knowledge in the context of

Islamic philosophical and religious discourse¹⁹ might give us addi-

In his later writings, Baha'u'llah frequently mentions the important

insight into the bases of Baha'u'llah's epistemology. However, as

tance of acquiring knowledge and stresses the utilitarian and also

mentioned earlier, Baha'u'llah does not usually address the problem

transcendental value of the arts and sciences. In the sixth Tablet, for

of knowledge in terms of Western discourse on the conflict of sci-

example, Baha'u'llah declares:

ence and religion or the contradictions of faith and reason,²⁰ a dis-

course which remains a crucial methodological issue in the Western

Knowledge (dāna 'f) is one of the wondrous gifts of God (ne 'mat-ha-

intellectual tradition. Rather, the notion of the harmony of science

ye el6h1). It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it. Such arts and religion, which has come to be thought of as a central principle material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of the Baha'i Faith, seems to have been expounded most explicitly by His knowledge ('elm) and wisdom (heknwt) which have been revealed by 'Abdu 'I-Baha. During his travels in the West, 'Abdu 'I-Baha in Epistles and Tablets through His Most Exalted Pen came into contact with many Western intellectuals and religious whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts thinkers of various backgrounds. His statements on these occasions of the world are brought to light.¹⁶ extend and amplify his father's teachings by more directly engaging Western discourse and methodology on the question of epistemology (or how we may know things). and the methodologies of investigation and inquiry.

If 'Abdu'l-Baha did enter into discussions from the frame of reference of his audience (whether Shiite, Babi, Sunni, Christian, or within a particular discourse. Therefore, some of the points made secular Western), then it is necessary to avoid facile conclusions might variously be understood either as axiomatically true, relational about the propositional truth of each and every premise that he tively true, or metaphorically true. His comments on the types of states. When 'Abdu'l-Baha employs a particular discourse, he may knowledge and modes of acquiring them might intend a metaphorical not necessarily intend to validate it, as a "fact," or historical or physical reality, rather than a factual, scientific, or propositionally exclusional reality, because the logical conclusions of a given discourse do give mode of understanding ultimate reality. Indeed, even if some of not of necessity point to absolute truths. By analogy, a novel can these statements are meant to contain postulates of physics, chemistry, reveal emotional, spiritual, and social truths though it is entirely fictional, biology, history, etc., they may be simultaneously true with tional: its truths are not therefore propositional, but metaphorical. their apparent logical contraries (much as light can be understood Zarqilni quotes 'Abdu'l-Baha as saying that the talks he gave in the both as a wave or as photon particles). In any case, according to the churches and gatherings of America were in accordance with the principle of the harmony of science and religion which these statements receptivity of souls and the requirements of the age, at which point they themselves expound, theological statements must be understood a poem is cited: stood and construed in the light of scientific discoveries which may have some bearing on the same questions. Therefore, though they

The father sings la-la to lull his babe to sleep

Although his mind encompasses a world of knowledge.²¹

are certainly probative, I do not propose that we necessarily understand the following comments of 'Abdu'l-Baha as exclusive and So, when Baha'u'llah adopts a particular discourse- for example absolute ways, valid in every conceivable frame of reference, of the discourse of Islamic philosophy he employs in his Tablet of understanding the problem of truth and how human beings know Wisdom-we need not necessarily conclude that he is thereby validating it as propositionally, factually or absolutely true.²² Rather

Consequently, I do not read the passages that follow from than arguing that his audience's basic premises are imprecise or 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings as the basis for a Baha'i methodology or even false (a rhetorical strategy that might well distract listeners and epistemology that should be advocated in a doctrinaire or dogmatic engender resistance), Baha'u'llah would seem to let some of his fashion. Rather, I would incline to see them as parables and guides audience's postulates, assumptions, and even prejudices, stand.

to

how Baha'is ought to think through the modern discourse on the After all, these premises held by the audience are being used as conflict between science and religion, and more especially, the question analogs and metaphors to prove other points, and are, in themselves, of methodology in the study of the Baha'i Faith (or any other of secondary importance. Similarly, the parables of Jesus are not object of investigation, for that matter). Since academic methodology meant to provide his audience with factual details of conversations they operate largely within the discourse of the Western empirical or situations that actually took place. Rather they are hypothetical or allegorical tradition and the enlightening confrontation between science allegorical situations that point to spiritual truth. Likewise, when and tradition, 'Abdu'l-Baha's framing of comments in this context 'Abdu'l-Baha speaks of "ether" or refers to the Native Americans as ensures that they remain directly relevant to contemporary discourse. "the savages of America,"²³ we might examine these statements as course.

prevailing rhetorical assumptions, incidental elements of a particular discourse, rather than as absolute propositions about physical reality or historical truth.

A note on sources

sian.

Comparison with the Persian originals of the talks reveals the English interpretations to be generally accurate, though not always. As most of the passages in 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings relevant to the precise.

question of epistemology considered in this paper come from the notes taken in English during some of 'Abdu'l-Baha's talks

Answered Questions or Promulgation of Universal Peace, some first published in the journal Star of the West. These articles, remarks are in order about these sources. Some Answered Questions along with the notes from other talks, were later compiled by (Mofavaz/Jt), a record of the responses of 'Abdu'l-Baha to a range of Howard MacNutt who sought 'Abdu'l-Baha's permission to publish questions put to him by Laura Clifford Barney (later Dreyfus-Barney) in book form. Though 'Abdu'l-Baha was aware that there had been errors by the interpreters, he gave permission for the compilation to be completed, charging Mr. MacNutt with the responsibility addresses, both implicitly (by its insistent practice of logical philosophy of taking care to ensure that the exact text of the talks be accurately reproduced without error and deviation.²⁷ The resulting book, The know and discover the nature of reality, both physical and spiritual. Promulgation of Universal Peace, was first published in two volumes, Some Answered Questions was first published in London in 1908, appearing in 1922 and 1925, respectively. It was subsequently reissued with 'Abdu'l-Bahii listed as author and Barney as collector and in a one-volume edition in 1939, and again in 1943. A new edition translator of the Persian text. The Persian text was recorded by individuals of this book appeared in 1982. It included a new translation by Amin individuals accustomed to working as secretaries for 'Abdu'l-Baha, Banani, made directly from the Persian text of the talk delivered by since Barney did not wish to trust her personal notes. Barney gives 'Abdu'l-Baha on 23 April 1912 at Howard University. the names of these secretaries as Myrza Hadi, Myrza Mohseinne, This particular talk at Howard University, because it is translated from the transcript of the original Persian, can be considered line-by-line by 'Abdu'l-Baha, who occasionally corrected a word or an accurate record of what 'Abdu'l-Baha said. However, most of the a line with his reed pen, and then signed each lesson and stamped it with his seal, as he did with the tablets which he wrote or dictated notes recorded by various individuals, not of 'Abdu'l-Baha's words, of himself. There are reportedly at least three copies of manuscripts of course, but of the words of an interpreter. The English text, then, extant, all of which contain corrections by 'Abdu'l-Baha, himself.²⁵ cannot be considered a verbatim record of 'Abdu'l-Bahii's words, and The Persian text of the work was printed during 'Abdu'l-Baha's life-time, with the second edition published in Cairo by Faraj Allah Zaki ing to Zarqani,²⁸ the Persian texts of 'Abdu'l-Baha's talks, as al-Kordi as Al-Hikmah al-abha fi Mofavauit-e 'Abd al-Baha in 1920

recorded by the Persian members of 'Abdu'l-Baha's entourage, (1329 A.H.).²⁶ The Answered Questions is therefore considered as were generally presented to 'Abdu'l-Baha for his approval and cor-part of the authoritative scriptures of the Baha'i Faith.

The talks that 'Abdu'l-Baha gave while in North America are of His talks would of course be more reliable than one in English, recorded in The Promulgation of Universal Peace, a compilation of because he was not always accurately interpreted," as indicated in a stenographic records of speeches which 'Abdu'l-Baha delivered in letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 24 October 1947. A the United States and Canada. These records reflect what the note-letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated 24 June 1980, indicates that the "original authenticated text" of the Persian talk by various Persians in 'Abdu'l-Baha's entourage as he spoke in Persian has not been found, the existing English texts in Promulgation of Universal Peace and Paris Talks would have to be "clearly distinguished from those which form a part of Baha'i Scripture." These argumentation (adalle-ye 'aqliye), which is a self-evident mode of English notes of talks are not, therefore, Baha'i scripture. They may discourse, one open to discussion on shared premises and capable of nevertheless be used by the Baha'i community as long as these distinctions are maintained and "the degree of authenticity of every ground of logic:

document" is known and understood. The original authenticated This is a spiritual truth, but one which we cannot at the beginning put Persian transcription of the talks would, by contrast, seem to qualify forth for the benefit of the materialists. First we must speak of the logical proofs, afterward the spiritual proofs.³¹

Europe, America and Egypt has fortunately been published, and it contains most, though by no means all, of the talks appearing in Promulgation of Universal Peace.²⁹ For this reason, we will consider where he appears to privilege the logical mode of discourse as a the transliterated Persian text in conjunction with the English means of understanding apparent contradictions between science ever possible. and religion:

'Abdu'l-Baha's comments on epistemology

That which science and reason cannot support must be rejected as imitation and not reality. Then differences of belief will disappear.³² 'Abdu'l-Baha draws a distinction in some passages of Some

The authenticated Persian original of this is even more emphatic in Answered Questions between "logical" and "spiritual" proofs: the primacy it gives to science and reason. It might be rendered pro-

Tue p.roofs which we have adduced relative to the origin of the human species \Vere logical proofs. Now we will give the spiritual proofs, If one of the religious questions is contrary to reason, contrary to science which are essential. For, as we have proved Divinity by logical argument, it is pure fancy . . . that which science does not verify, reasonments, and have also proved logically that man exists from his origin does not accept, is not the truth.

and foundation as man, and that his species has existed from all eternity, now we establish spiritual proofs that human existence-that The Persian text reads:

is the species of man--is a necessary existence, and that without man the perfections of Divinity would not appear. But these are spiritual agar mas 'ale-i az masa "e/-e dini 111okha/ef-e 'aql bashad, mokluilef-e proofs, not logical proofs . . .30

'elm bashad, valmr-e mahz ast... anche 'elm tasdiq 11emi-kol1ad, 'aql qabul 11emi-konad. Iraqiqat nistr33

The reader \ViU remark that neither the logical proofs (the word used in Persiao for "logical" being 'aqli, with a semantic range of Baha' is themselves probably do not think of the harmony of science rational, reasonable, logical, mental), nor the spiritual proofs (the and religion in such stark terms of privileging science over scripture, word here translated as spiritual being elahi, meauiaq divine, but let's consider another passage from a talk given by 'Abdu'l-Lordly, belonging to the realm of God), is considered superior. Both Baha to the Church of the Messiah in Montreal, which, according to are presented as valid ways of establishing truth, effective in certain the Persian text of the talk, was a Unitarian church (kelisa-ye mova-

heddin):34

When we come to the end of this same section, however, Baha'u'llah has declared that religion must be in accord with science 'Abdu'l-Balla states that not everyone \viii accept the spiritual and reason. If it does not correspond with scientific principles and the

60 * FRANKLIN LEVVIS

DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE

61

processes of reason, it is superstition. For God has endowed us with cannot be carried out upon denominational lines. If the origins of the faculties by which we may comprehend the realities of things, world, for example, are to be determined on the basis of scriptural template reality itself. If religion is opposed to reason and science, accounts and theological traditions, then evangelical Christians faith is impossible ...

would have one reality, Native Americans another, liberal Christians yet another, Buddhists yet again another, and so forth. There is no 'Din bayad motabeq-e 'elm va 'aql bas/rad. Agar moiabeq-e 'elm va 'aql na-biisrad, owhlim ast, zira klroda áaql be ensan dade ta edrak-e way to adjudicate bet\ve.en competing faith claims, which rest on the Iraqa 'eq-e ashy a ' ko1lad, Iraqiqat be-parastad. Agar din moklralef-e authority of scriptures or traditions considered divinely inspired. 'elm va 'aql bas/rad, momken 11isr sabab-e etminim-e qalb slavad; Rational, scientific methodology, however, creates a common chwr sabab-e et11i11an nist, ow/ram ast ...lelrliza, bayad masa 'e/-e ground upon which the various faith communities can meet and dis-diniye ra ba 'aql va 'elm latbiq nemud, ta qalb etminan y tibad va cuss evidence according to experimentally or logically verifiable sabab-e son1r-e ensan slavad. standards, for all can participate in a shared discussion using these tools.³⁶

'Abdu 'l-Baha several times repeated in almost identical \vords Obviously, Baha'is, like other people of faith, must pursue such this idea that religion must conform to science, not the other way around. For example, the following passage:³⁵

means of debate in the public sphere, following shared methodolo- gies, with people who do not accept many-or even any--of the The fourth teaching of Bal1a'u'llih is the agreement of religion and same faith postulates. To do so, they must leave the comfortable science. God has endowed man \vilh intelligence and reason, whereby topography of their faith-based mental landscape, and explore the he is required to detennine the verity of questions and propositions. If common boundaries of discourse both within and outside the acad- religious beliefs aad opinions are found contrary to the standards of emy, among people of a variety of creeds, with a wide spectrum of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antitheá sis of knowledge is ignorance, and the child of ignorance is supersti- beliefs about the ultimate nature of life and whether God is still Lion. Unquestionably there must be agreement between true religion healthy, ailing or dead. Such "intellectual pioneering" on the part of and science. If a question be found contrary to reason, faitb and belief people of faith. is an opportunity for consultation and ecumenical in it are impossible, and there is no outco1ne but wavering and vaci l- association with people of different faiths and of no faith in the cru- lation.

cial public sphere where civil and secular society is created, and which best fosters multiple approaches to the independent investi- Ta '/im.- e chaharom -e Hazra.1-e Baha áAllah tinke din bayad mouibeq-e gation of truth. This does not require any of the parties to jettison 'elm btishad zir/J kl1odli 'aql be-ensti11 d/Jde 1/J haqa 'eq-e as hyti' ra their faith or supra-rational beliefs; it merely means that they bracket tahqiq namtiyad. Agar masa 'el-e diniye mokhti/ef-e 'aql va 'elm

these beliefs for the sake of discussion with people who do not begin with the same premises. As 'Abdu'l-Baha says, "first we must speak of logical proofs."

etmintin /rose/ gardad. Ha111isre motazalzel ast.

This rationalist mode of discourse is based on a culture of respect for the human mind. It is not completely value-free, nor does Baha'is and the Western academy

it require a purely materialist conception of the cosmos, though it does accommodate such premises. Committed Christians of a certain stripe in the United States sometimes disparagingly refer to this type of intellectual discourse as "secular humanism." Within the Baha'i community, there are also those who sometimes look upon intellectual pursuits with scepticism or fear. People who rely overmuch on the intellect, at the expense of the spirit, are perhaps thought to hold and promote a distorted view of truth, or to be blind to the true promptings of the meta-rational or non-material world. There are state-ments in the Baha'i writings to the effect that worldly knowledge lowers to confess in their obligatory prayers:

can act as a veil to blind its possessor to the truth- this not because I testify, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know ('irfan) Thee and to worship Thee

can lead to pride and hubris in those who possess it. However, both Baha'u'llah (e.g., in *Seven Valleys*, p. 5; *Kitab-i iqan*, pp. 192-93; *ashhadu ya ilah bi-ahli al-haqq wa 'irfanika wa 'ibadatika* and the *Jawahir al-asrar*), and 'Abdu'l-Baha (in *Some Answered Questions*), explain that the principle of independent investigation

To achieve this knowledge of God or Truth (ref'atce Haqq), a of truth requires that we be fair in our judgment, and not our person must rely upon his own efforts of insight, his heart and his love for or prejudice against particular people, and one presumes innate character (be-basar va qa/b vafetrat-e khod). It is insufficient ideas, turn us away from the truth.

to imitate what one has been told (che ke taqlid kefayat nanamilyad). 'Abdu'l-Baha, himself, visited universities and praised their scientific methodologies. At Stanford University on 8 October 1912,

Baha'u' Uah says in his Words of Wisdom, the root of the more experiential or logical knowledges, or sciences ('ilm).³⁹

"knowledge" is the greatest of human achievements. He used the

The greatest attainment in the world of humanity has ever been science-word 'ilm (Arabic, 'ilm), meaning acquired knowledge, or scientific in nature. It is the discovery of the realities of things . . . The

high-

ence.³⁷ This word 'ilm was traditionally used for the religious sci-

ent praise is due to men who devote their energies to science, and the sciences, that is to say, the knowledge of hadith and their transmission,

noblest centre is a centre wherein the sciences and arts are taught and of the Qur'an and the Sunna, among other things. Its primary object

studied. Science ever tends to the illumination of the world of humanity. It is the cause of eternal honor to man ...⁴⁰

was knowing the laws of Islam, expounded through established principles of jurisprudence (fiqh) which had been worked out and

The Persian is actually much more forceful, and it uses the word agreed upon as canonical. ³⁸ In the nineteenth century, however, as

"ulema" (Persian 'ulama, derived from Arabic), a word that is typically scientific and technical knowledge began to permeate the Middle

East from Europe, the word 'ilm, especially in its plural ('ilm), was

"clergy" or "learned divines," but which means "the learned," people often used to translate "science" or the physical "sciences." It has

people who have studied and mastered the sciences, foremost among now come to mean academic methods of study in general (fard-e

which was the science of hadith, the knowledge of the Qur'an, of 'ilm = scientific method) or bodies of knowledge, as in the academic

Islamic law, theology, (eventually also physics and philosophy, etc): discipline of political science ('ulum-e siyasi) or even more generally,

A 'zam manqabat-e 'alam-e 'ilmi, zira kashf-e ltaqiyeh-e the humanities ('ulum-e 'ilmi) and the natural sciences ('ulum-e

ashya 'a.vr... Ashrafjami 'ati ke dar 'alam tashkil mi-gardad jam 'iyat-tabi 'i).

e 'olama ast va ashrafmarkaz dar 'alam-e ensani markaz-e 'olama va This acquired human knowledge ('ilm) is distinct from 'irfan,

fard-e 'olama ast, zira 'alm sabab-e rowshani 'i-ye 'alm ast, sabab-e rahat the knowledge of spiritual recognition or insight, a word which

va asayesh ast. 'ilm sabab-e 'izzat-e 'alam-e 'ilmi ast.⁴¹

64 * FRANKLIN LEWIS

DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE * 65

On May 23, 1912, at Clark University, in Worcester, Massachusetts,

and upheld theories, such as evolution, that were opposed by religious orthodoxy, 'Abdu'l-Baha had used almost identical words. This talk is not

religious orthodoxy, 'Abdu'l-Baha's comments, in the context of those included in translation in Proclamation of Universal Peace; a pro-

days, suggest support for such methodologies.

visional rendering therefore follows the transliterated Persian:

At the Bethel Literary Society in Washington, D.C., 'Abdu'l-Baba specifically praised the technique of "inductive reasoning and Pas ma 'lum shod ke 'elm a ázam-e manaqeb-e 'cilam-e e11sani asr. 'Elm 'ezzat-e abadi asr, 'elm hayat-e sarmadi ast ...

research," through the process of \Which man is "informed of all that appertains to humanity." A scientific man using these principles Zira 'elm a11var as l va shakhs-e 'a/em mesl-e qendi/-e derakhshande "studies the human body politic, understands social problems and va IOban, Jami '-e khalq mayyet-a11d va 'olama zende . . .

\weaves the \web and texture of civilization." Indeed, science is the "very foundation of all individual and national development. With- t'.{as hahir-e 'olama 'e salaf ra mo/aheze konid ke serare-ye áezzat- out the basis of investigation development is impossible." He even esha11 az ofoq-e abodi derakhshande ast va ta abad al-abad baqi va puts it this way:

bar qaláar. l eJ111za 11ehtiyat-e sorur ra daram ke dar in dt!rr al-/0111111 hazer-am. Omid-am cho11a11 ast ke i11 markaz 'azim shavad va be-

All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this anv1ir-e '0/11111 Jan1i á-e afaq ra rowsha11 ko1lad, kur ha rci bina konad . .. power of intellectual investigation and research ... All other blessings

lira 'elm 1111r ast va jahl zolmar42

are temporary, this is an everlasting possession.45

So it is evident that knowledge is the greatest of the virtues of the

Baha'u' llah confirms the importance of this blessing, in the human world. Knowledge is eternal might, knowledge is everlasting Lawh-i Hikroat, where he enjoins upon us respect for the learned life . . . for knowledge is rays of light and the learned person is like a (the 'u/a111a ', the possessors of 'i/111, the same \who are denounced in bright and shining lamp. All creatures are as dead, and the learned ('olamli) alive . . . Consider the famous learned ones of the past and tile Kitab-i fqaan as "the learned divines"):

bow the star of their might shines from the borizoo of eternity and will

Beware O My loved ones, lest ye despise the merits of My learned ser- remain fixed and undying from the beginning to the end of eternity.

vants \vllon1 God bath graciously chosen to be the exponents of His Therefore, I am extremely happy to be io this academy (dar a/- Name, "The Fashioner" aroidst mankind.46

/0111111) .43 My hope is that this ceotr '>viii. become great and illumine all horizons with the lights of knowledge ("0/11111), give sight to the

In a talk in Minneapolis not regarded as authenticated because blind ... for knowledge is Ught and ignorance is darkness ...

the original Persian notes are not extant, •Abdu' l-Baba praised the During the course of !his same talk, 'Abdu'l-Baha praised the aca- philosophic methods practised by "the philosophers of Greece-

such as Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and others," who were "devoted to
democratic institutions of the United States, colleges and technical uni-
versities (madrasah-e dar al-funun-ha). He expressed the hope that
the investigation of both natural and spiritual phenomena."

other countries would follow this example and establish schools for

In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the heritage of
the training of children, and raise the banner of knowledge so that
tradition and former human experience; nay, rather we must exercise
the world of humanity would be illuminated and the realities and
reason, analyze and logically examine the facts presented so that
con-

mysteries of all beings become apparent and prejudices be dis-
fidence will be inspired and faith attained. Then and then only the
real-

peeled.⁴⁴ Since these same institutions were champions of academic
ity of things will be revealed to us.

methodologies (sometimes considered materialist methodologies)

Today the philosophy and logic of Aristotle are followed
throughout

the world. Because they were interested in both natural and divine phi-
losophy, furthering the development of the physical world of mankind

no outward form and no place and is not perceptible to the senses. For
as well as the intellectual, they rendered praiseworthy service to

example, the power of intellect ('aql) is not sensible; none of the
inner

humanity. This was the reason of the triumph and survival of their
qualities of man is a sensible thing; on the contrary they are intellec-
teachings and principles. Man should continue both these lines of

tual realities (haqqi 'eq-e ma 'qu/e). So love is a mental reality and
not

research and investigation so that all the human virtues, outer and
sensible (va hamchonin hobb niz haqiqat-e ma 'qu/e ast, materialist);

inner, may become possible. The attainment of these virtues, both
for this reality the ear does not hear, the eye does not see, the smell
material and ideal, is conditioned upon intelligent investigation of

does not perceive . . . In the same way, nature, also, in its essence is
an

reality, by which investigation the sublimity of man and his intellec-
intellectual reality and is not sensible; the human spirit is an intellec-

tual progress is accomplished. Forms must be set aside and renounced;
tual, not sensible reality ...

reality must be sought. We must discover for ourselves where and
what reality is. In religious beliefs nations and peoples today are in li-

This passage is taken from 'Abdu 'l-Baha's discourse titled "Out-
tators of ancestors and forefathers ... The requirement in this day is
ward Forms and Symbols Must be Used to Convey Intellectual Con-

that man must independently and impartially investigate every form of conceptions,"⁵⁰ which argues that scripture must be understood rationally.⁴⁷

symbolically, as a metaphor for an intellectual reality that is not perceptible to the senses (haqqa 'eq-e ma 'qill-e ast ke surat-e khatirijiye Faith itself, •Abdu'l-Baha is here quoted as saying, requires the investigation of reality (nadirad va makii. Investigation of reality (nadirad va ghayr nahsus-e ast). exercise of reason and logic.

•Abdu'l-Baha returns to this theme in another chapter of Some Types of Knowledge

Answered Questions, "The Knowledge of the Divine Manifestations." Laura Clifford Barney asks if the knowledge of the divine manifestations is limited, and •Abdu'l-Baha's reply should be noted here in

the knowledge ('ilm) being of two kinds- abstract (tasavvuri, conceptual or full:

suppositional) and empirical (talraqqoqi)-and he stressed the importance of the latter: "Complete knowledge is the experiential

Knowledge is of two kinds. One is subjective ('ilm-e vojudi) and the other is objective knowledge ('ilm-e sovarilsuri)-that is to say, realization of a thing, not the imagination of a thing."⁴⁸ In his table an intuitive knowledge ('ilm-e tahaqqoqi) and a knowledge derived from perception ('ilm-e lasawori).

Knowledge into two types, though these categories differ somewhat from

The knowledge of things which men universally have is gained by that above:

Reflection or by evidence-that is to say, either by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart. The circle of this that we have mentioned, and of others of which we are about to speak, knowledge is very limited because it depends upon effort and analysis so that the essence of the problems may be understood, is this: that human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses (ma'rifat-e ma'lisilse)-that is to say, things being, is intuitive ('ilm-e IOjilidi va tahaqqoqi asl); it is like the cognition which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, can perceive, which are called sense and consciousness that man has of himself.

Human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses (ma'rifat-e ma'lisilse)-that is to say, things being, is intuitive ('ilm-e IOjilidi va tahaqqoqi asl); it is like the cognition which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, can perceive, which are called sense and consciousness that man has of himself.

But the second sort of knowledge, which is the knowledge of things which are not perceptible to the senses (ma'rifat-e ma'lisilse)-that is to say, things being, is intuitive ('ilm-e IOjilidi va tahaqqoqi asl); it is like the cognition which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, can perceive, which are called sense and consciousness that man has of himself.

Human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses (ma'rifat-e ma'lisilse)-that is to say, things being, is intuitive ('ilm-e IOjilidi va tahaqqoqi asl); it is like the cognition which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, can perceive, which are called sense and consciousness that man has of himself.

Human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses (ma'rifat-e ma'lisilse)-that is to say, things being, is intuitive ('ilm-e IOjilidi va tahaqqoqi asl); it is like the cognition which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, can perceive, which are called sense and consciousness that man has of himself.

For example, the mind ('aql) and the spirit of man are cognizant of objective; and in the same way sounds are sensible because the ear perceives the conditions and states of the members and component parts of the

hears them ...

body, and are aware of all the physical sensations; in the same way, The other kind of human knowledge is intellectual (ma 'q11/tit)- they are aware of their power, of their feelings, and of their spiritual that is to say, it is a reality of the intellect (haqti 'eq-e ma 'qule); it has conditions. This is the knowledge of being which man realizes and

68

FRANKLIN LEWIS

DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE

69

perceives, for the spirit surrounds the body and is aware of its sensations and powers. This knowledge is not the outcome of effort and we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breath and prompting of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself..56

Modes of knowing

Evidently, then, though perception, logic, and tradition are all flawed modes of knowledge, it is necessary sometimes to use reason 'Abdu' l-Baha outlines four methods of acquiring knowledge, or as the primary or at least initial mode of discourse, because reason is a method that does not require equal stations of spiritual insight between the interlocutors, but provides a common ground, like the (mizan-e naql; less specifically, whatever human knowledge is physical senses, on which most observers can agree.

known through transmission, oral or written, and not through sense

Here is the closest we can come to certainty, by involving various perception or logic); and the comprehension which comes through the bounty of the Holy Spirit (Jayz-e Ruh al-qodos).53 The first three taken by Edna McKinney from a simultaneous translation given methods are fallible: the senses can be mistaken; logic and reason, while he spoke at Green Acre in Maine on 16 August 1912, explains: But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which conflicting conclusions; religious tradition, because it involves the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can interpretation, which requires the use of reason, is also faulty. These accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by various methods may be used separately, or in conjunction with one the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there certain issues. Reason is the method 'Abdu' L-Baha associates with

are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and manifest to the philosophers, and religious tradition with the theologians and perhaps the reason for this is that 'Abdu'l-Baha speaks of the clergy. Unfortunately, none of these methods are absolutely reliable. The mind ('aql) and the spirit (ruh) as separate entities, which is, of course, an established discourse of neo-Platonic thought. Within the Islamic tradition, they are both present at birth, but in an imperfect state, "only when man attains maturity do the mind and the spirit by divine grace (Jaz), and not by our own will and effort. 54 appear and become evident in utmost perfection. »58

At the Hotel Ansonia in New York on 17 April 1912, when Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Baha distinguishes between soul (nafs), spirit ('Abdu'l-Baha spoke of this fourth mode of knowledge it was trans-rit (ruh) and mind ('aql). Spirit appears to be a quiddity, a kind of essence of an ontological state. There is a vegetable spirit (ruh-e human heart." 'Abdu'l-Baha went on to say, however, the "satanic nabat), an animal spirit (ruh-e hayvan), a human spirit (ruh-e insani), a spirit of faith (ruh-e imani) and the holy spirit (ruh al-'Abdu'l-Baha then poses the question, how do we know, when our quod). The vegetable and the animal spirit are subject to composition and decomposition, and hence are not immortal; the human

Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena spirit, on the other hand, is defined by the rational soul (nafs-e these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and naceq), which distinguishes it from the animal spirit. The human

spirit and the rational soul are two names for one reality, the comprehension (qovve-ye modreke) which comprehends realities; "rational soul" being a term used by the philosophers. It is this that and memory (qovve-ye hafeze),⁶¹ which retains that which an individual allows us to discover the realities of things, but unless assisted by visual images, thinks, or comprehends. There is a further sense, the spirit of faith, our rational soul cannot become apprised of "the which mediates between the five outward or physical senses and divine secrets and heavenly realities" (mottale'at asrar-e elahiye va these inward powers of the mind. This faculty 'Abdu'l-Baha calls haqa'iq-e ahutiye). 'Abdu'l-Baha compares this rational soul to a "the common faculty" (hess-e moshtarak).⁶⁸ Of these five inward mirror, which no matter how polished, cannot reflect light until the powers, which operate hierarchically, the common faculty is the light of faith shines upon it. 59

first, transferring an impression of the physical senses to the imagination, Yet, the power within the human spirit is the mind or intellect which transfers thought, which is transformed into concepts ('aql). This intellect is like the light shining within the lamp of the apprehension, and is preserved in the memory. 69

rational soul/human spirit, or like the rays of the sun, with the sun. These powers are not possessed in equal capacity by all. The rational soul, which all humans possess alike, whether they are believers or deniers, faithful or wayward, is responsible for the discovery of all the sciences, arts, and affects the intelligence. 70 But, as we have seen above, this power is not knowledge, institutions, and discoveries. True, this power of knowledge is limited and makes its discoveries only through the toil of other qualifications other than the innate mental capacity and the investigation, and it is subject to error. In contrast, the universal degree of education. Of course, we do not gain knowledge of the divine intellect ('aql-e kolli-ye elahi) is a supernatural power (manifestation of things, but only of their qualities (chuhura va 'ashya, va htil anke khalq-and va hlahdud-and, be sefat-ast, hlah be the dawning places of prophecy possess. Human beings are illuminated by it only in small measure, as it is reflected by God's intermediaries, 61 and we cannot attain to it through effort; this power to do equate the acquisition of knowledge and the perceive spiritual realities is bestowed by the bounty of God. On the other hand, the power to make earthly discoveries is not bestowed. As human creatures fitted and qualified with this dual endowment, on the basis of faithfulness or belief or any other spiritual quality, must endeavor through the assistance and grace of God and by the but on the basis of the effort of mental investigation. 62 And it is the exercise of our ideal power of intellect to attain all lofty virtues, that rational soul/human spirit (nafs-e lateqelna-e ensani) which is the we may witness the effulgences of the Sun of Reality. 72 immortal part of the human being, which will live on after our death. 63

Implications for Baha'i methodology

'Abdu'l-Baha enumerates in *Some Answered Questions* the following "spiritual powers" (qova-ye haviye), 64 or faculties of the Baha'u'llah, in presenting his message to Zoroastrians like Ustad intellect and rational soul, which are over and above the five senses Javan Mard or Manikji Sahibji, did not emphasize the Shiite teach-

(sight, bearing, taste, touch, smell), which we have in common with
ings or the Islamic tradition \with \which the Babis were engaged, for
the anima.I spirit.⁶⁵ They are the power of the imagination (qovve-ye it
\Was in fact anathema to the Zoroastrians. In so doing, Baha'u' Uah
n1otakhayyele) which conceives things; the po\ver of thought did
not abandon his beHef in the truth of Muhammad or Shiism, he
(qovve-ye n1otafakkere),⁶⁶ which reflects on realities; the power of just
bracketed those beliefs to participate in a discourse that a

* f'FRANXLIN LEWIS

DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE

* 73

Zoroastrian could "hear" and respect. In similar fashion, the acl of Notes
bracketing one's spiritual or suprarational beliefs to participate in
academic discourse that is believable, that can be heard, by people
Frnnklin Lewis is Associate Professor of Persian U\nguagc and Litcrnrure at
who do not share the same premises is not an inherently materialist Emory
University in Atlanta.

exercise, nor does it presuppose abandoning one's faith convictions. I .
I have in mind nol lhe linguistic lenn (discoum:, discouise analysis), but
rather

Baha'is in academia should, of course, adopt the assumptions of
lhe sense of "discourseáá as ii appears in lhcoretical discussions oflhe
sociology

intellectual discourse, not only because this is the only way to
of knowledge or the construction of the episteme, especially !hose infonned by
lhc arguments of Foucault. Wingcnslein 's "language game," suggesting that a
engage in a constructive dialogue with non-Baha' i intellectuals and
discussion can be true within a certain frnamework without necessarily pointing
academics, but because it preserves, employs, and hones sophisti-
to external trtl lths, reOecls essentially the snme notion, as do various other
con-

cated techniques which help us to better understand, not only the
cepts such as Kuhn's "paradigm," etc. Not surprisingly, "discourse" has now
entered academic Persian tenninology (where it is variously rendered as
guye.rh,

physical world, but the mental universe of the present and past
gojtitl11). While I suggest below that 'Abdu'láBab!I discusses ideas lhat are
simá

If there is such a thing as a distinctively Baha'i methodology, it ilar
to lhe concept of discourse as "'school of lhought'" (i.e., Sufi discourse),
nev.

cannot be based on essential differences in the modes of perception
erthcless, 'Abdu'l-Baha does nor use lhe concept or tenn "discouise" in lhe
technical sense that ii is of\en used today.

and evaluation of infonnation. That is to say, sornewhat obviously, 2.
Different fonns of discouise perfonn better or worse at answering cerl ain kinds
there is no inherently Baha'i mode of seeing, hearing, touching,

of questions. Scientific method, for example, does not do a particularly good job

smelling, etc. There is likewise no inherent difference among people of addressing questions such as the existence or nature of divinity, the meaning

of life, or how scientific knowledge should be morally applied.

of different creeds in their ability for logic or rational evaluation. 3.

The Hidden Foundations, trans. Shoghi Effendi, "with the assistance of some English Socrates must be mortal if He is a man, and Baha'is are bound by this friends" (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, reprint 1975) pp. 19-20, Arabic logic as much as anyone else. Baha'is are committed to consultation #67.

4. 'Abdu'lá Baha, The Secret of Divine Civilization, trans. Marzieh Gail with Ali

as a means of arriving at the truth. This consultation should include

Kuli Khan (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1957; [3rd ed., 1975]) p. 36. My

the clash of differing opinions, including rationalist or even materialist-

thanks to William McCams, who read a draft of this paper and pointed out the

relá

alist opinions, if the spark of truth is to be produced.

advance of this passage here.

5. Mirza Mahmud-e Zaqani, Badayi' al-asth (Bombay, 1914; [facsimile reprint,

Where a distinctively Baha'i methodology might emerge, it

Hothelheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í Verlag, 1982]) Vol 1, pp. 175-6. Note that Ibis is

seems to me, is in the ethical application of knowledge and the cre-

Zarqani's recollection of what 'Abdu'lá Baha remembered Baha'u'llah have

ation of equitable access to knowledge and the benefits which ensue

said decades earlier, and as such is not authoritative. For speculation on

Ba. Máu 'llah ás use of Sufi discourse as a bridge or transition between the

panical

from it. This is properly a moral question about the means and ends

ularist Shiite discourse of Babism and wider Sunni-based pan-Islamic concerns,

of acquiring knowledge, and the values which drive a society's

see Franklin Lewis, "Introduction and Provisional Verse

acquisition of knowledge, rather than a question about the modes or

translation- (continued in Poetry in Revelation.. in the table of contents).

Bairoá;

Studies Review, Vol. 9 (1999/2000) pp. 106-16.

kinds of knowing. It is here, perhaps, where Baha'is have the most 6.

Futuh-i Mak/Oya (Meccan Revelations) is the magnum opus of the "Great

original contribution to make to the discourse of academic knowl-

Shaykh" of theoretical Sufism, Muhyi al-Din Ibn Arabi (d. 1240). Another of

edge-in the ethics of what we do with what we can know, and how

his works, Fusus al-Hikm (Bezels of Wisdom), is also alluded to a few lines

further down.

we adjudicate conflicting truth claims in consultation. 7.

Translation by the present writer. This is reported speech, which may or may not

have been correctly remembered by Zaq6ni, would have stalled in the Bahá'í community as "pilgrim's notes," not scripture.

8. The point has, however, been made, first in Istanbul and other places in the Middle

East, political discourse had been greatly influenced in the latter half of the

nineteenth century by European political theory. Juan Ricardo Cole in *Modernization*
74

75

nity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Bahá'í Faith in the Nineteenth

century Middle East (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) argues that

exclusive reference to the masculine gender. To avoid

misapprehension, one

might now render the passage- 'elm be-matizele-ye jenah ast

az baraye

Bahá'u'lláh sometimes uses political terminology in a modern way that reflects

vojud- alternatively and more in tune with the exigencies of

the current time as

awareness of European political theory. No general consensus has as yet

"knowledge is as wings for creation." Likewise, in the final

sentence, "knowledge

emerged on the extent to which this may be the case.

Knowledge is as a veritable treasure for man," the English

predicate might also be pre-

9. All the preceding statements on journalism come from Bahá'u'lláh's tablet,

positioned, as it is in the Persian (*kanz-e haqiqi az*

baraye erosan 'e/m-e uást), to

"Tarazit," in *Majmu'e 'i oz alvah-e Jamal-e Aqdas-e Abha ke ba 'd az Kitab-e*

render something like "The true treasure for human beings

is their knowledge."

Aqdas 111 *lizele shode* (Langenhain: *Lajne-ye Nashr-e asar-e Amri be-leslln-e Farsi*

18. Bahá'í Education: a compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í

Writings (London:

19. There are, of course, fundamental differences between the

traditional religious

Centre, 1978) pp. 39-40.

scholars ('ulama), the gnostics ('urafa) or Sufis, and the

philosophers

10. See Abid Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 4 (Oxford: George

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i Aqdas (Haifa: Bahá'í World

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19. There are, of course, fundamental differences between the

traditional religious

Centre, 1978) pp. 39-40.

the path of interior spirituality (tariqa) , aodfalsafa.

These various approaches

11. Baha ' u'llah, Kitab-i iqtisadi, trans . Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Baha ' i Publishing Trust, 1931; [2nd ed. 1950]) p. 192.

(wisdom), etc. Above and beyond this, however, different categories of knowl-

12. Baha'u' llah, The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys , trans. Marzieh Gail in consultation with Ali Kuli Khan (Wilmette: Baha ' i Publishing Trust, 1945, al-Ghazzali, and the terms they have used might very well contribute to a more [revised ed., 1975]) p. 5.

precise understanding of the terminology and concepts which 'Abdu'l -Baba

13. Baba ' u' llah. Gleanings from the writings of Baha ' i'llah. trans. Shoghi Effendi employs. One recent work of the many in English that treats this subject is

(Wilmette: Baha ' i Publishing Trust, 1939; (2nd revised edition, 1976)) p. 204; Osman Bakar, Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study of the Islamic

Persian/Arabic text in Mokhammad al-Akbari (Langen-Philosophy of Science (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998).

Winnipeg: Baha' i-Verlag, 1984) p. 133.

20. It is always dangerous to make statements such as this, since I have read only

14. While reason ('aql) is celebrated by most Islamic thinkers, its limitations in a small fraction of Baha ' u' llah ' s voluminous writings, a great part of which

apprehending the ultimate reality and attaining certitude (yaqin) are often dis-

Obviously, our under-

discussed among Sufis in particular. This theme is repeatedly engaged, for exam- standing of the teachings of Baha ' u' llah will become

fuller as the entire corpus

is made available, by Rumi in his Mathnawi (see Franklin Lewis, Rumi: Past and Present, East and West (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) p. 400ff. •Abdu'l-Baha suggests in his 1875

and West (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) p. 400ff. •Abdu'l-Baha suggests in his 1875

21. Zarqani, Badaye ' , Vol I, p. 124. Zarqani seems to imply that the phrase "were

Secrets of Divine Civilization (Wilmette: Baha' i Publishing Trust, 1975) p.

12, in accordance with the receptivity of souls and the requirements of the age" is

that the Iranian clergy cynically tried to convince the uneducated that modern
a direct quote from 'Abdu'l-Baha. I also infer that it was
'Abdu'l-Baha who
Western methods were contrary to religion. However, this was because they
cited this proverbial verse on the occasion mentioned, though
it may also be that
came from heathen Europeans. not because science and technology were inher-
Zarqani adduced the verse to strengthen the point for any
case. the theme seems
entirely irreligious.

to echo the Hidden Word we saw above, that God reveals truth
according to

15. Bahil'u'llah, *Kitab-i Aqdas: The Lost Holy Book* (Haifa: Baha'i World
Centre, human capacity to understand, not according to divine
omniscience.

1992; Arabic edition, same place and publisher. 1995) Verse 102. This passage

22. See Juan Ricardo Cole, "Problems of Chronology in
Baha'u'llah's Tablet of
was translated by Shoghi Effendi in *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*
"Wisdom," *World Order*, Vol. 13, p. 3 (1979), pp. 24-39,
which suggests that the
Tablet, p. 199 (XCVIII).

discourse of Islamic philosophy that Baha'u'llah adopts in
this tablet closely

16. "Tarizat," in *Baha'u'llah, Majmu'at al-Ashraf*, p. 21 and in
Tablets of Baha'u'llah follows medieval Islamic historians
presented as historical fact. However.
116/J, p. 39.

the medieval Islamic historians were mistaken on some points
of chronology

17. "Tajalliyat," in *Baha'u'llah, Iqbal wa' al-Hayat*, p. 28 and in
Tablets of Baha'u'llah and fact, at least insofar as we are able to
establish with current research. That

Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, pp. 51-52. Baha'u'llah also quotes the passage in *Epistle
to the Son of Man*. Baha'u'llah repeats these postulates ("facts" or
"factoids") is due to his desire

of the *Writings of Shoghi Effendi* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1941 ;

to explain things within the frame of reference of Islamic
philosophy for the

[revised sixth printing, 1979] pp. 26-27. The Persian text of the latter can
be to the benefit of the addressee, and does not necessarily imply an
absolute proposition

found in *Baha'u'llah, Iqbal wa' al-Hayat* by Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Mojtahid
conditional assent about the chronological facts of history.

Tablets of Baha'u'llah, translated by Najafi (Langenhain: Lajne-ye Nashr-e asar-e Amri

23. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, collected and
trans., Laura Clifford

bc-Lesan-e Farsi vu 'Arabi, 138 B .E.11982) p. 20. In view of recent concerns in Barney, revised edition (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 190, p. 19.

various religious communities about inclusive language in scriptural texts, one The Persian text is in Moftlvazlit, (Cairo, 1920 (facsimile reprint in New Delhi:

might comment that the word "man" in the phrase "man's life" in the first sentence is not literally necessary and might unfortunately be read these days as an asiriye, and "savages of America" is for barabare va motaviJhheshi11-e Amrika).

• fRANI<LIN LEWIS

DISCOURSES OF KNOWLEDGE!

* 77

24. Leiter dated 31 March 1958 from Laura Dreyfus Barney to Horace Holley, tics, liberalize and neutralize their prejudices, and make the general religion a cited among the Linard papers. accessed 11/30/00 at:

religion of peace, reason and morality" (Thomas Jefferson. Ifrilings [Library of <http://v.www.geocities.com/thlinard/publicat/faq.htm>. America, 1994] p. 1465).

25. According to a letter from the Archives Office at the Bahá'í World Centre dated 37. In the English translation of the talk, as transcribed by Bijou Sttaun, this reads

9 Decem~ 1987, a copy of which was sent to the Nacional Assembly of "The greatest attainment in the world of humanity has ever been scientific in

France, there were two copies of the Persian text in the Bahá'í Archives in Paris, nature" (Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 348). The Persian reads "a 'zam

one a copy of the secretary's notes of these talks taken at table, with corrections manqabat-e 'alam-e enstlni 'e/,,. asf' (from Majmu'e-ye Khetabtl, p. 570). a

added by 'Abdu 'l-Bahá, and the other a neat copy with 'Abdu 'l-Bahá's further phrase which 'Abdu 'l-Bahá is reported to have used verbatim elsewhere in his

corrections. A third and later copy with still further amendments by 'Abdu'l-talks, as well. See, for example, Payám-c J.falalait, ed. A.H. lshnlq-Khavari

Bahá' was in the Bahá'í World Centre Archives in Haifa. The text of this letter (New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1986) p. 82, p. 86, and the many exam-

was accessed at [www.geocities.com/thlinarW:publicat/soq.htm](http://www.geocities.com/thlinarW/publicat/soq.htm) on 11/30/00; a ples from Majmu 'e-ye KJret6b6t quoted above.

printout is in my possession.

38. Evidently four schools (madhhab) were accepted as canonically valid points

26. I am working from a facsimile offprint published by the Notional Spiritual of view among the Sunnis. Shiites had their own schools, which have been

Assembly of the Baha'is of India in 1983.

reduced in modern times to one (Ja'fari) and recognized as canonical among

27. See the translation of 'Abdu'l-Baha's letter provided in the introduction to most Sunnis.

'Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, compiled by Howard Mac-

39. Asl-i lad/ a/_ulrim huwa 'iifan Allah. Jolla jalti/ahu. Cited in Fazel-<: Milzan-

Nun, revised edition (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982).

darini, ed., Amr va Khalq (Tehran, 111 e.B./1954-5; reprint Langenhain: Lajne-

28. Zaraqani. Bad'ye '. Vol. I p. 54, also p. 58.

ye Nashr-e isar-e Amri be-Lesin-<: Farsi va 'Arabi, 141 o.E.11985) Vol. I. pp.

29. 'Abd al-Bahá., Majmu'e-ye Khatáb-e Ha:rar-e 'A/xi a/-Baha (Langenhain: 14-15. The original source is not further specified.

Lajne-ye Melli-ye Nashr-<: asar-e Amri be zabanáha-ye Flisi va 'Arabi, 1984).

40. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 348.

This is a one volume reprint of separate volumes previously published in Egypt

41. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Majmu'e-ye Khatáb-e Ha:rar-e 'A/xi a/-Baha, p. 570.

(1340 A.1111921, 3Dd 99 e.11942-1943) and in Tehran (127 B.E./1970-1971).

42. Ibid., p. 382.

30. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, rev. ed., p. 195. This is from Chap-

43. Literally, Academy of Arts & Technical Academy. This was the

name of the first

ter 50. "Spiritual Proofs of the Origin of Man." For the original Persian, see

college established in Tehran along European models in 1851.

Mofavazat. p. 138.

44. Al-hamda le 'Ilm dar In eq'im 'elm ruz be ruz be taraqqi ast va madares-e dar

31. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 197, Mofavazat, p. 140.

al-fommi-ha besyar ta 'sis .thode a.it va dar in madilres

taltimeze be neltiyar-e

32. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 175-6.

}a/rd mi-kt1.1ha11d va ka.ilif-e haqayeq-e '6/am-e ens6ni

mi-konand. Omid-11111

33. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Majmu'e-ye Khatáb-e Ha:rar-e 'A/xi a/-Baha, pp. 439-40 (English pagination at the

chapter 111 a.st ke mamalek-e sayere eqtedn be in mamlekat

namtiyand vo madares-

foot of page). The provisional English translation preceding the transliterated

e 'adide baraye tarbiyat-e ow/6dáh6-ye kit() bar pa darand vu

'a/am-e 'elm rti

Persian text is my own.

boland hJnand la áalam-e enstlni mwshan garrlad va haqtl 'eq vo asrtir-e

34. 'Abdu'l-Baha. Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 298-9 and Majmu'ae-ye

kti 'enar ztiher shO\•ad. In ra 'assol>6r-e j6/reliye namanad ... ('Abdu'l-Baha,

Kherab01, p. 530. Presumably, the denomination of the church can be checked Afajmu 'e-ye Klreulbi11, p. 383).

against historical records.

4S. 'Abdu'l-Bahi, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. SO.

35. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 181 and t.fajmu'e-ye

46. Baba'u'lillb, Tablets of8alttl'11 '//tlh, p. 150; Majmu'e-ye alwih, pp. 51-52.

KJreraoor, p. 450. Note that the Persian repeats almost verbatim in some pans

47. 'Abdu'l-Bah3, Promulgation of Universal Pe;,ce, p. 327.

what we saw in the previous quotation, although the English versions reflect

48. Cited in Mizandanini, ed. Amr"" khalq, Vol I. p. 67. Provisional translation

slightly greater variations.

by the present writer.

36. As the University of Vu-ginia was about to open, objections were raised over 49. A footnote appears here in the English text of Some

Answered Questions indi-

che fact that ic had no professorship of divinity. Critics said this was not merely cating, "Lit, lthe pivol" The Persian reads ~yek mas 'ale ke khay/i madtir a.rt,-

because lthe university was prohibited by the Constitution from upholding a par-

which oouJd also be ttanslated as "One matter which is pivotal ..."

ticular kind of religion, but felt lthat the university was in face against all

reliá SO. Dar bayan-e tlnke ma 'qula1faqa1 bevdsese-ye tthtlr dar qamis-e maltsus b6yad

gion. In respon.~c, the ullive111ity crustees offered each religious sect to

establish bayan shavad. 'Abdu'l-Baha, Some AitTWered Questions, p. 83, Moflvaz6t, pp.

a professorship of its own, each according to its own pnnnicular tenets, on the 61-62.

grounds of chc campus, so Uiat students could use the library of the University

SI. One is tempted to translate in more tochn.ical terms, but perhaps somewhnl

(i.e., the public space of discourse) while scill pursuing denominational.

anachro11istically, as "ontological."

parochial studies. Thomas Jeffe1110n explained, "By bringing the sects

together, 52. 'Abdu'l-Babi. Some Answered Questions, p. 157,

Afofavaz/u, p. 111 -12.

and mixing them with the mass of other srudenis, we shall soften their ascri-

53. 'Abdu'l-Bahi, Some Answered Questions, pp. 297-99, Mofavazilt, p.

207-208.

54 •Abdu' l-Bahli, Some Answered Questions, p. 299. Moftvazat, p. 208. SS. The original Persian of this talk is not included in Majmu'e-ye Kheuibtit, and

it cannot be considered as official scripture of the Baha'i Faith.

56. •Abdu' l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 21-22, notes by Howard

MacNull. The Persian original of this talk is apparently not given in Majmu'e-

ye Khetabtit.

57. Recorded in •Abdu' l-Baha, Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 255. The Per-

sian original of this talk is not given in Majmu'e-ye Khetabtit.

58 •Abdu' l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 198, Moftvazat, p. 141.

59 •Abdu' l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, pp. 208-209. Moftvazat, p. 148.

(i) 'Abdu'l-Baha Some Answered Questions, p. 209, Moftvazat, p. 148.

61 'Abdu' l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, cited in Fazel-e Muzandanini, ed. Amr •O l-thalq. Vol. I. p. 222.

62. 'Abdu' l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, pp. 217-19.

63. •Abdu' l-Baha. Some Answered Questions. p. 239. Moftvazat, p. 168.

64. •Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 210, Moftvazat, p. 149.

65. 'Abdu' l-Baha. Some Answered Questions. p. 217, Moftvazat, p. 153.

66. These two terms were used a thousand years earlier by al-Farabi and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and have been rendered in English as the faculty of "compositive imagination" or the "sensitive imagination" (mutakhayyala), and the "cogitative

faculty" or "rational imagination" (mutafakkira), where they apply respectively

to animals (mutakhayyala) and humans (mutafakkira). See Peter Heath, Allegory and Philosophy, Avicenna (Ibn Sina) (Philadelphia: University of Penn-

sylvania Press. 1992) pp. 62-63 and p. 82 and Bakar, Classification of Knowledge, pp. 51-53.

67. This term is also used by Avicenna and al-Farabi; see Heath, Allegory and Philosophy

and Bakar, Classification of Knowledge, p. 51.

68. Avicenna uses this term, too (al-hiss al-musliwak), which he sometimes seems

to equate with "fantasy" (bamtisiya), and locates in the front ventricle of the

brain. In Avicenna's view, this faculty organizes the perceptions of the five senses in the brain and makes them relational and intelligible. Heath, Allegory and Philosophy, p. 62, translates the phrase as "common sense."

69. 'Abdu' l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, pp. 210-11, Moftvazat, p. 149.

70. 'Abdu' l-Baha. Some Answered Questions, pp. 212ff, Moftvazat, p. 150ff.

71. •Abdu' l-Baha. Some Answered Questions, pp. 220, Moftvazat, p. 155.

72. 'Abdu '1-BahA, Promulgation of Universal Peace, from the notes taken by Ellen

T. Pursell. p. 328. Mahrnud-e Zarqani in Badaye' al-ilsar indicates that Ibis talk

took place in the evening of 19 September, after a return by motorcar from the talk delivered in St. Paul. Such discrepancies in the dates given in the

Persian

and English sources are quite common, and no cause for great concern. However, no Persian original for this talk appears in Majmu'ae-ye Khetilbat, so the

English notes of this talk are not verified by any transcription of the original

Persian words.

— Discourses of Knowledge (Used by permission of the curator)