



philosophy of mind, and considers how the	processus d'apprentissage
dans lequel est	
pursuit of science and the phenomenon of	engagée la communauté
mondiale bahá'íe	
religion both shed light on the capacities	peut servir de modèle pour
faire interve-	
and nature of the mind. After suggesting	nir la raison humaine dans
une entreprise	
that the process of learning in which the	collective visant
l'amélioration du monde.	
global Bahá'í community has embarked	Il fait ensuite un retour
à la philosophie	
may serve as a model for engaging the hu-	et affirme que si plusieurs
philosophes	
man mind in a collective enterprise for the	contemporains soutiennent de
manière	
betterment of the world, it turns back to	convaincante que la raison
humaine ne se	
philosophy to submit that, while many con-	réduit pas à la causalité
physique, la résis-	
temporary philosophers persuasively argue	tance des philosophes à
l'idée d'une di-	
that the human mind is not reducible to	mension spirituelle de la
raison humaine	
physical causality, the philosophical resis-	est extrêmement limitative.
La faculté de	
tance to a spiritual dimension of the human	raisonnement des êtres
humains démontre	
mind is excessively limiting. The minds of	des capacités qui
transcendent la nature, et	
human beings demonstrate capacities that	une conception de la raison
en tant que «	
lie beyond nature, and a conception of the	pouvoir de l'esprit humain
» ou « âme ra-	
mind as "the power of the human spirit"	tionnelle » peut non
seulement se révéler	
or "rational soul" can not only be a fruitful	fructueuse pour
comprendre la raison, mais	
way of understanding the mind, but lead	elle peut aussi permettre aux
êtres humains	
to an orientation by human beings in the	d'orienter le monde, comme
l'a démontré	
world, demonstrated through the learning	le processus
d'apprentissage discuté plus	

metteur pour l'avenir de l'humanité.

This paper is about the human mind,

Resumen

Este artículo relaciona los conceptos

'Abdu'l-Bahá as "the

Bahá'ís de la mente con pensamientos fi-  
spirit" (Some

losóficos. Presenta argumentos de ambas  
compare

fuentes para un entendimiento no reduc-  
insights

cionista de la mente humana y argumenta  
of mind

que, a pesar que la ciencia puede ayudarnos  
views. As with

avanzar nuestra comprensión de la mente,  
there is a

no es suficiente en esta búsqueda, ya que  
the mind

no puede captar completamente como la  
points

mente humana experimenta la realidad. El  
On the one

artículo revisa la manera conceptual de la  
hand, some of the more naturalistic or

mente para conocer, explora las implica-  
computational philosophical approach-

ciones del lenguaje para la filosofía de la  
es to the mind, which resonate less

mente, y considera como tanto la búsqe-  
da de la ciencia como el fenómeno de la

understanding, are well  
religión irradian luz sobre las capacidades

human

y la naturaleza de la mente. Después de  
animal con-

sugerir que el proceso de aprendizaje en  
intelligence as

el cual la comunidad mundial Bahá'í se ha  
explored in due

embarcado podría servir como un modelo  
and more

para involucrarse en un emprendimiento  
similarity

colectivo para el mejoramiento del mun-  
paper, which

identified by

power of the human

Answered Questions 55:6).1 I

Bahá'í concepts with some

from contemporary philosophy

that are similar to Bahá'í

any philosophical question,

broad range of positions on

in philosophy, but my focus on

of similarity is deliberate.

with a Bahá'í

represented by approaches to

consciousness that take

consciousness or artificial

their models; these are

course. On the other hand,

fundamentally, the focus on

supports the goal of the

do, vuelve a la filosofía para aceptar que, how insights mientras muchos filósofos contemporáneos en forma persuasiva argumentan que writings can complement each other, la mente humana no se puede reducir a la and contribute to discourse in this area. causalidad física, la resistencia filosófica a una dimensión espiritual de la mente humana es excesivamente limitada. Las argument. In mentes de los seres humanos demuestran of the nature capacidades que yacen más allá de la natural helpful insights naturaleza, y una concepción de la mente como “el poder del espíritu humano” o “el alma this paper grew out racional” puede no solo ser una manecolloquium on human fructífera para entender la mente, sino Institute for conduce a una orientación para los seres (ISGP) in humanos en el mundo, demostrado por el to the ISGP proceso de aprendizaje discutido anteriormente Shodjaee, Todd mente en el artículo, lo cual es prometedor their helpful para el futuro de la humanidad. which have been extended in this paper.

Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

from philosophy that help to illuminate the insufficiency of reductive explanations of the mind that rely solely on physical or natural explanations, thereby implying (or stating explicitly) “fill in the that the mind is a purely physical and

is to assist readers to see from philosophy and from the interweaving strands of the first, to gain some idea of the mind, I explore 1 The ideas in of a presentation to a man nature organized by the Studies in Global Prosperity December 2020. I am grateful and to Lydia LeMay, Ilya Smith, and Levin Zendeh for comments on the presentation

11

causality. More fundamentally, the reductionist accounts fail to an adequate qualitative consciousness itself; and while may aspire to progressively “fill in the gaps” to create a complete

picture of natural phenomenon. I canvass philosophy that provides logical support for persuasively the Bahá'í view of the mind as a unique description power that lies beyond physical explanations that aim to level the human mind to animal rationality, describe it as arising entirely out of the operations of the physical brain, or propose that artificial intelligence (AI) will reproduce the power of the human mind. These reductionist accounts stand at odds with our intuitive understanding of the mind, of course. After all, we don't say that neurons or physical dynamics in the brain read and write music, just as we don't say that feathers and wings fly. Birds fly, using these parts of their anatomy, and people compose music in their own minds by way of their capacities conscious appreciations.<sup>2</sup> But philosophy can help us move beyond an intuitive sense that there must be something more to the human mind than these reductionist models suggest, and provide reasoned arguments for why, for example, despite the success of neuro-

consciousness rooted in physical sality, philosophers have argued that an accurate of consciousness requires a kind knowledge that science simply cannot access. The second strand of argument elaborates on what, then, an philosophical approach to the mind entails, one that takes account of those features of mind that cannot be reduced to animal or computational models. Such an approach must provide a more complete account of human mind and consciousness than either neuroscience, animal or AI. I therefore explore accounts of the mind that, like a view, emphasize a range of of the mind: knowledge and certainly, but also feelings and emotions) and purposefulness intentionality of the mind). I a philosophy that appreciates features of the mind and grapples with their implications for human

scientific efforts in correlating brain activity with some features of consciousness, they fall short of demonstrating neuroscience that seeks to flatten these capacities into purely physical terms, and Colin McGinn's rebuttal of Patricia Churchland's reduction of mind to the physical across several issues of the New York Review of Books. See, for example, McGinn's "Storm Over the Brain." 12 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

understanding of the mind may help expand current philosophical positions. Even in philosophy that resonates in important ways with a Bahá'í understanding of the mind, there are, of course, differences. Most contemporary philosophers, for instance, even when they reject the reduction of mind to narrowly physical computational processes, still insist on placing the mind within the natural world rather than accepting the possibility that the mind is embedded in a reality that goes beyond the natural. This, however, requires highly abstract arguments, such as normativity, and free will provides a more sufficient account of the mind than can a materialist science that seeks to flatten these capacities into purely physical terms, thereby loses sight of the what they are. The third strand focuses on and how a Bahá'í contribution to our understanding of the mind may help philosophy I engage with typically stands the mind's essential be "human agency" and concepts relating to the spontaneity of the mind. Through mativity, we take responsibility judgments and perceptions: we (potentially) choose how to evaluate world around us, rather than receiving value judgments in the world, the way we receive impressions. Through human agency, we choose our actions.<sup>5</sup> Though "human agency" is not too distant meaning of "the power of the human

as McDowell’s position that our capacities of mind are “second nature,” or supra-physical references to “normativity” that remain essentially apart from a natural scientific explanation. These positions have shortcomings, in my view, that an acceptance of a wider, “extended reality”<sup>3</sup> above and beyond the physical or the natural would avoid. Such a reality can better account for the qualitative “feel” of consciousness and its immateriality. The idea of an extended world is, of course, built into a Bahá’í approach to the question of mind, which centers on thinking about the nature of this human the “power of the human spirit” or “the essence; perhaps in other cases the choice rational soul.”<sup>4</sup> Conversely, the particular facet of this essence which, by its nature, cannot be encompassed by language. There may of course be other considerations.

3 I take this term from Thomas Nagel.

4 “Spirit” and “soul” (sometimes and Korsgaard, “rational soul”) refer to the same general human agency concept in authoritative Bahá’í writings. (Rousse 417); “The human spirit, which distinguishes man from the animal, is the rational soul, and these two terms—the human spirit,” which on its face understood as describing a capacity emerging from an physical being, contemporary philosophy resists the idea of the soul” which, for Some Answered Questions 55:5).

5 “Both Heidegger following Kant, conceive of in terms of ... normativity” “If there is room for a tion of the will in contemporary theorizing about human agency, it is most likely to be

spirit and the rational soul – designate the phenomenon of one and the same thing” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, 195). Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

found in the vicinity of the normativity” (Wallace 13

equivalent to “the power of the human generating spirit,” and which is an essence that form of is ontologically supra-physical. Still, it may be that “normativity” and “human agency” are merely useful labels soul. It that cover insurmountable problems in philosophy’s efforts to gain a genuine understanding of the mind and of human action. I suggest an alternative approach that relies on the power of the human spirit in the final sections of this paper.

investigating reality and knowledge, but that, like any human knowledge, it is an of human agency, or in terms, the power of the rational is a capacity that operates at a consciousness that cannot be to causal interactions at the level in the brain. Having thus ined how science can both shed on the mind, and have its own illuminated by careful consideration of the nature of the mind’s capacity to conduct scientific Part Five I explore the same with respect to religion. science, cannot simply be as a creation of the human brain; instead a powerful way of knowing for human beings, precisely of the human mind’s unique to know. I comment on the language of Revelation, and the power of

that its capacities for feeling and purpose-cogni- fulness, and its essential holism, the also the human mind is categorically distin- guishable from AI. I add comments in religion, Part Three about language as a central ap- instrument of the mind. These sections human together demonstrate that explanations confined to natural science are unable and to account for the mind’s faculties of the knowing, feeling, and purposefulness, extended re- features of mind that not only shape world consciousness on an individual level, merely but have allowed humans collectively animal. to generate progressive civilization, whether a phenomenon with no parallel in the essen- natural world. In Part Four, I argue “the that scientific practice is an exemplary “rational expression of the mind’s capacity for coherence to a

14 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 32.3-4 2022

philosophy of mind that rejects a nar- on this row physicalist understanding of mind, dif- and if so, how such a paradigm can be human presented in philosophical terms. concep- This paper is inspired by a talk giv- language to reach not only the tive capacity of the mind, but feelings and purposefulness of reality. The phenomenon of therefore, helps give us a fuller appreciation of the nature of the mind: engagement with Revelation can engender feelings, thoughts purposefulness that strengthen mind’s relationship to an ality beyond space and time, to a that is expansive beyond the sensible environment of the Finally, in Part Six, I consider understanding the mind as an tially spiritual phenomenon—as power of the human spirit” or soul”—can help lend with Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements matter. For McDowell, a primary ference between the animal and is that the human mind has a tual way of knowing and engaging the

en by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on 20 September responds to an 1912, in which He says that philosophy should make efforts to seek undistinguished by standing of both physical and spiritual aspects of reality. In that talk, He specifically credits the enduring importance of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to the way they combined physical and spiritual dimensions in their philosophy (Promulgation ch. 105). The animal’s philosophers I cite in this paper have devoted years of study to those great figures of the western philosophical tradition, and in their own ways, they show the fruitfulness of a philosophy that, if not explicitly embracing the spiritual, is not hidebound by an insistence on materialist reductionism, including ones not triggered by immediate sensory input. In a similar way, ‘Abdu’l-

world, while the animal immediate environment. “World” “environment” are the fact that where an environment defined by its materiality and ity, a world is a conceptual that includes both features immediately sensed, but also (and usually more) features that reside as in the human mind. Thus, an environment, in this use of the consists of everything to which it direct sensory access in a given ment. This sensing may triggers that prompt action; but the mind situates itself in a wider within which it can invoke concepts, imaginations, etc.,

P O : Bahá explains that “the animal perceives sensible things but cannot perceive conceptual realities” (Some Answered Questions 48:6). “Of this power of discovery which belongeth to the human mind, this power which Since antiquity, philosophers have can grasp abstract and universal ideas, compared human beings with animals, the animal remaineth totally ignorant”

both in order to distinguish these two realities and to connect them. The work of John McDowell, one of the foremost “conceptual philosophers of mind working today, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to provides useful insight into the limitations of an animal model for understanding something by standing human consciousness. McDowell’s arguments resonate things. The concept of a dog distinguishes dogs from Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

6 I take the meaning of “al” for both McDowell and be in line with Markus Gabriel’s of a concept: “a concept is means of which we can distinguish thing or some things from other

15

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, understands the human chains of mind as reliant on an enormous number of concepts that shape a world order to the mind then has in view. Concepts do are the means by which the mind perceives and engages with that world. Some concepts represent the material features of the world: by concepts we know red from green, for example, and also know that red is in the concept in a class of color, which is distinct from the concept class of texture. These materially grounded concepts exist alongside others that supply us with the meanings we need in order to navigate the human world of institutions, norms, values, principles, and language. Thus, to

also imply other concepts in implication or assumptions: some cepts are assumed implicitly in understand other concepts. Humans not draw on concepts in capacity to know depends on the relationships between many As philosopher Markus Gabriel Whatever is real is integrated network of concepts. Every concept refers to another. If you a concept, you thereby know a bunch of others too. This is known as semantic holism and says that you’re able to a concept only if you’re able

such crucial parts of our daily experience as feelings and purposes are also log-conceptual, yet immaterial. Through concepts, we distinguish indignation from anger, generosity from kindness. We learn from infancy thousands and thousands of concepts that shape the perception and world we have in view. Many concept classes are nested within other concept classes; “dog” is a concept nested within the broader concept “animal,” have any yet itself encompasses the concepts of “German shepherd,” “poodle,” and other breeds of dog. This is only one of many ways in which concepts are profoundly interdependent. Concepts and sensations are empty (Mind and cats, but also from lions and earlobes” under- (Gabriel, Meaning 192). Importantly, a concept in this sense does not require direct sensory comparison in order to distinguish two things. Thus, while an animal can distinguish different things by sight or smell, the human can distinguish them in the abstract using concepts.

deploy a whole battery of concepts that stand in various ical relations to it. (Meaning This emphasis on the role of cepts in human thought is not to the importance of sense direct experience. We take in our rience by way of our senses, but manner that must always be by the conceptual for us to experience at all. To paraphrase whom McDowell draws on to his own idea of the conceptual, tions without concepts are blind, concepts without human experience World). Concepts allow us to stand what we perceive, and consciousness” is always shaped understanding: “objects come for us [by sensations] in of capacities that are fully (McDowell, World in View

In other words, to be receptive to the physical world we rely on a conceptual idea of a world that is already “there” in the experience mind, so that as we perceive and recognize features of the world (whether material objects or abstract realities), they are then available for placement within the world we have in view—or close enough to allow relative adjustments bring to a world that shapeshifts as we gain further knowledge of it. Successive experiences of life bring to us a manifold of sensations that we are able to grasp by the elimination and reduction of the available information—the millions of sensory bits available to our senses—cognition. In bringing to our experience an understandable world that we then have in mind.<sup>7</sup> “Our subjective beliefs on the physical world have a decisive role on how we perceive reality . . . All that we perceive might be deeply contaminated and to particulars, not to a world. The

by our subjective beliefs on the world” (Tabas, qtd. in “We Hear”). We interpret the sensations we in the world by way of the have learned, and through these concepts we then make judgments the world and take actions—for sons that are themselves as we advance matters at hand, or about a better world we have in There is thus an inseparable tion of sensibility and that cannot be disentangled. This interplay between sense concept does not seem to the same way in animal McDowell’s assessment, which nates with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s on the topic, animals may son in a manner that seems to human reasoning, but their is always a response to an animal “reasons” by way of response repertoires that rely on

7 Psychologist Timothy Wilson estimates that the brain is inundated with

acute

“11 million discrete bits of information senses, and their excellent memory of per second, of which no more than 40 can environments and the particulars with- be consciously processed” (qtd. in Heath, in such environments. In short, the Enlightenment 2.0 73). An animal, of animal distinguishes particulars not course, may receive as much sensory data conceptually, but by acute sensibility as a human being—or more, for animals with keener senses than ours—but to the and memory—which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá extent that they react to and engage with points out, are often better than human an environment without needing to under- sensibility and memory, which have stand it, the simplifying function of con- different functions than strict fidelity cepts is not necessary for them. For recent to the physical and the natural (Some discussions by neuroscientists on how our Answered Questions 48:2). consciousness maps patterns of synaptic The animal’s ability to distinguish firings in the brain onto conceptual pat- between particular objects, and even terns, see Antonio Damasio’s Feeling and human gestures, may appear similar Knowing: Making Minds Conscious and to our human discrimination, but has Anil Seth’s Being You: A New Science of to do with particulars in the physical Consciousness.

Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

17

environment rather than conceptual Hegel 104). This is the nature of judg- ment, the action by which thinking meanings. However aware and con- is conscious; for “to judge is to be aware conscious animals may be, theirs is not a aware world that is conceptual and thus be- not only of what one is judging, but yond the physicality of nature. The hu- that one is judging, asserting, claim- ing something,” to others or to man mind understands and navigates oneself

both the world of physical objects and think (105). The human being can thus about their own thoughts (and actions), brought to mind by our conceptual holding them in mind and cognitively way of thinking, feeling, and engaging examining them in the same way as with purposefulness (or intentionality). one can examine an external object. The animals' engagement, at whatever Human beings also rely on more ca- pacities of mind than sense level of consciousness it may be, is by perception and a memory of sensory information. perception way of biological needs, while human 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms that the beings engage with a world, not a mere human capacities of imagination, thought, environment, with purposes and proj- comprehension, and memory—along ects that reach beyond the biological. with "a common faculty . . . which An example can help illustrate the me- diates" between these capacities distinction. A horse, seeing an apple, and the outer senses of perception—are moves to eat it: sensory information prompts a reaction. A human seeing the spiritual powers, which seems to im- same apple may have a similar reac- ply that they are different in kind from tionary response, but can also engage animal rationality (Some Answered Questions ch. 56). An element of this difference appears to be their of the apple reminds her of a trip to an holism. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh likewise confirms that drought, or, by way of the story of Sir that Isaac Newton, of the law of gravity. It [s]pirit, mind, soul, and the pow- leads to a decision to act in the world, ers of sight and hearing are but by taking her children to an orchard, or one single reality which hath limiting water waste in her household, manifold expressions owing to or revisiting her university physics textbook. the diversity of its instruments. As thou dost observe, man's power to The centrality of concepts to human thought also permits a self-awareness comprehend, move, speak, hear, and see all derive from this sign of to be shared by the animal. As Hegel his Lord within him. (Summons, argued, human thought is about "cog- "Suriy-i-Ra'is" ¶35) nizing the distinction of things" while McDowell seems to be driving at a "knowing and holding in mind what is

being distinguished” (qtd. in Pippin, similar concept when he stresses the

18 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 32.3-4 2022

inseparable cooperation of perception and conceptual thought, as noted earlier. He further points out that the (or our conceptual nature of our thinking is good, or the only made possible by a “rationally organized network of capacities for active adjustment of one’s thinking to the deliverances of experience” (Mind and World 29). Andrea Kern follows McDowell’s thinking about the conceptual nature of our rational capacity. In her important book, *Sources of Knowledge: On the Concept of a Rational Capacity for Knowledge*, she provides one way of understanding the above statement of Bahá’u’lláh on the “single reality” concepts, including the “spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing.” She, too, understands the rational capacity for unique knowledge as a single reality of mind and perception. While not referring

In making a judgment, we rely on perceptions and on concepts: our beliefs, our standards for truth standards of the right, the beautiful), any necessary assumptions, and logic and This reliance is seamless; person can analytically between the sight of a work of aesthetic standard against which appraises it, and the process by which the perception is measured standard, in actual experience no such distinguishing, contention that it is a work. Indeed, in making often rely on standard of truth by which we without consciously bringing mind (Kern 182). This is a capacity for knowledge that once perception, judgment, and

action,  
 to spirit or soul, she thus agrees with  
 hu-  
 Bahá'u'lláh's idea that our rational  
 capacity seamlessly brings together  
 has con-  
 the conceptual mind and perceptions.  
 feature, or  
 This seamless integration of capacities  
 Human  
 enables us to further distinguish the hu-  
 through  
 man capacity for judgment. Kern elab-  
 music,  
 orates on what it means to make a judg-  
 engineering and  
 ment. Judgment—deeming something  
 make the  
 true or untrue, correct or incorrect,  
 capacity  
 according to some standard of truth or  
 creation, by  
 correctness—is always self-conscious,  
 proportion, scale,  
 in that our knowing something is also  
 appropriate  
 being conscious of knowing something  
 de-  
 (or sincerely believing that we do).<sup>8</sup>  
 aesthetic  
 ideals. Thus, it is important to com-  
 ment on the arts as a feature of culture  
 8 Or as Pippin puts it, “[j]udgment that likewise goes beyond the  
 animal’s  
 is the consciousness of judgment . . . There often more practical and  
 sensible  
 is not two acts, but one” (Hegel 105).  
 Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit” 19  
 reshaping of its own environment in demonstrated a capacity to  
 re-imagine  
 ways that fall relatively short of the situations on some level; similar  
 ca-  
 human being’s efforts. pacities can be seen elsewhere  
 in the  
 A final point on which McDowell animal kingdom, as in certain birds.  
 differentiates the animal and human While there is thus some evidence

for mind is that we characterize all human beings as moral or immoral, but hardly ever conceive of animals in these terms. This position finds support in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reminder that while the scorpion may seem evil in relation to the human being, it is, in its own self, good (Some Answered Questions 74:5). This is not, on its face, an attribution of good (or bad) moral behavior to the scorpion, but an assertion of its ontological goodness as a creation of God. This is the sense of good and evil within which nature and animals can be assessed, and all in this sense are good in themselves, even if from our perspective they can cause bad outcomes for us. Only in the human realm is it meaningful to attribute good and evil to intentions and actions.

In A Natural History of Human Thinking, linguist and developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello summarizes much of the research regarding differences between the human mind and animal rationality. This research largely bears out the conceptual differences between animal and human world”

the great apes’ representation of the object world in simple abstract causal, even intentional terms, they are unable to adopt alternative perspectives. Tomasello summarizes how, unlike animals, human beings have:

(1) the ability to cognitively represent experiences to oneself ‘off-line’; (2) the ability to or make inferences transforming those representations causally, intentionally, and/or logically; (3) the ability to self-monitor evaluate how these simulated experiences might lead to specific behavioral outcomes . . . [or to undertake] (4) thoughtful decisions. (4)

These capacities at an individual level have an exponential impact when deployed at the level of the group, and give rise to human ways of being together that the more basic capacities of the great apes do not permit. In addition to the “shared world”

man minds outlined in the philosophy above. Tomasello focuses in particular to on the thinking of the great apes, wide-perspective, to ly considered to represent the apex of ap-non-human mental ability. These an-others, and imals, of course, do have prodigious does not capacities. In recent experiments, often great apes. involving the use of tools, they have conceptual

constructed by human language, as discussed below, the human ability decenter our individual take neutral-agency perspectives, appreciate the perspective of coordinate action accordingly, find a strong correlate in the Any discussion of how

20 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

thinking distinguishes humans from later animals, particularly in its implications mind for coordination, necessarily requires consideration of language. However, before considering language in full, physicalist which will have implications for how these the pursuit of scientific and religious hand knowledge shed light on the nature of essential-mind, it will be helpful to explore some This further implications of the conceptual by mind. of science and religion in light of human language.

will support the argument, made in the paper, that a philosophy of mind that acknowledges the more-than-an-imal capacities of the human mind, and rejects a reductionist neuroscientific explanation of capacities, need not reject out of the concept of the mind as an ly “supernatural” phenomenon. argument will be further developed by considering the knowledge systems

P T : We can begin with Tomasello’s in-  
 H C M L sight that the capacity of human  
 groups  
 to progressively build on advances in  
 L I culture (broadly speaking,  
 including  
 S -C A technology) is due to a fundamental  
 S C feature of human conceptual

thinking.

Where animals can share a sensory

Having introduced key features of the environment, and use this sharing as

human mind through contrast with animals, I want to specifically explore how the basis of cooperation, humans

can achieve a different degree of

cooperation thanks to our capacity to the mind learns new ways of viewing share a

world. Such learning involves the world of concepts:

multiple realities of cognition, feeling and purpose that the mind engages. human beings construct an inter-

Though the platform for such learning is always our own self-conscious subjective world with others—

perspective awareness, it is important to emphasize shared but with differing tives . . . [this is] fundamental

to our inherently social nature as minded human cooperative communication. (46)

creatures. Both the self-referentiality and social embeddedness of learning highlight that the human mind, Tomasello's insight into the

cooperative structure of human teaching as discussed in the previous section, and

operates in a world, not merely in an learning by no means applies only to

environment. This world is in fact constructed of many worlds, including our

It is inherent in human learning from the inner world and shared social worlds. very beginning, as demonstrated by

All are built out of an architecture of human infants who master "joint

at- concepts. The features explored here tion" with mothers before

speech Mind, "the Power of the Human Spirit" 21

develops, allowing for the coordination infant mind, other minds, and the

reality of an object world. Thus, even

of complex actions, and, as we mature, child learns about the object

as the a "collective intentionality" with others. Joint attention, crucially, is more

world by relying on others' first-person reactions

than two minds paying attention to the towards, and expressiveness

regarding,

same thing; it is paying attention with that world, they simultaneously learn the importance of emotions, awareness that this attention is shared, meanings, something that human infants are capable of in some form from a young age. and intentionality. No creature is as helpless, for as long, as the human infant. Those While great apes demonstrate certain in- clined to see a design in the characteristics of joint attention, these features of do not continue to develop into the rich our existence might point out that it is forms of collective intentionality that arguably our complete dependency on unfold as the human child matures. other people and their reactions to us “The idea that the human mind in its that enables us—indeed, requires is— to learn so early the foundation of infant stages, as it were, looks at the hu- man sociability: that others have physical world and tries to make sense of it, is completely mythical . . . [O] and consciousness as we do. Obviously in the infant this is not yet ur first encounter with reality is an self-encounter with people” (Gabriel, Not conscious, but the first glimmerings of a world we wake up to over the a Brain 37). Other people and their years of our infancy as we learn a minds have far greater impact on a ba- complex of feelings, purposes and thoughts by’s growing awareness and conscious- that is extraordinarily vast. The human ness than the baby’s encounters with a capacity to entertain multiple capac- ity to entertain multiple world of objects. Babies meet mother, father, and significant others, and expe- for instance, which seems to elude the- rience their own consciousness by way great apes, begins to develop as early of immediate relationships, mediated as between the ages of two and three. by powerful gestures and enactments. The dependence of the human mind Babies begin learning through differ- on social learning is exemplified by

ent social practices that are mindful, how we learn language. From his first including with respect to the physical world. The physical world takes shape within a baby's consciousness mediated by concepts, standards and norms gleaned from other minds. The baby, in effect, learns of the world (in the expansive, more-than-environment sense) in its mental features as much as in its physical features, and does so by way of a triangulation between the word

22 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

is uttered, then another, in an additive process of learning; this is a process of objectivity gestures, actions, enactments between mother and father and baby, that builds a world of sense, a holistic picture, that is grasped by the baby (Taylor, *The Language Animal*). "Mama" may be among groups of the "first word" uttered, but it is already embedded in a baby's understanding of a whole world of previous interactive gesture and response that has been growing in the mind of the baby. This allows the baby to begin utterances "belief as in speech intimately tied to a world beliefs

word at twelve to eighteen months the child acquires well over 10,000 words by the age of six, while taneously learning rules of syntax semantic usage that build to an mous complexity (Pinker)—and all this, as philosopher of mind and guage Donald Davidson emphasizes, done on very thin evidence and experience. And it is not that one (Language 141) that allow human beings to develop ideas of by way of a detachment from son consciousness to perspectives. At a very early enables the coordination of a "we-intentionality" human beings.<sup>10</sup> In line with the highly nature of the human mind, Charles Sanders Peirce, the seminal philosopher, argues, as does that it is a mistake to think of individual belief. Of course the

that is blossoming in the mind of the individual-infant, a world where the sun comes and up gradually, as it were, as the infant (qtd. in develops and learns. As Wittgenstein views writes, “Light dawns gradually over know the whole” (qtd. in McDowell, World Davidson’s 168). Wittgenstein brings into the picture human the imaginative powers of the multiple language-games in which human beings become quickly adept across the many social practices of human own reality.<sup>9</sup> And, as philosophy now emphasizes, it is the sentence, not words we ourselves, that comprise meanings, world.<sup>11</sup> facts and truths (the good, the right, and the beautiful). explanation of Philosopher Charles Taylor, too, that our refers to the capacity of human infants to quickly acquire a capacity for “joint attention” with mothers and significant others, and notes the emergence of “the cultural conventions, norms largely inspired by and institutions, including language” Merlin Donald in *A Mind so Rare*, and Sebastian Rödl in *Self-Consciousness and Objectivity*. Merlin

9 See Hans J. Schneider’s discussion of imagination and calculation in of individuals are flawed; no al mind is capable of an accurate objective knowledge of reality” Menand 228). It is in the shared of many minds that we come to the world. This agrees with view that all members of the race share far, far more than the small proportion of which we disagree. It is always, of course, our sciousness or mind, in the that serves as the only platform have by which we engage the This first-person awareness comes first in any order of an reality. It is important to note

10 See “How Language Taylor’s *The Language Animal*.

11 This discussion of the of self-consciousness is the complementary views of writes from the perspective of and cognitive neuroscience; Rödl

from the  
Wittgenstein's Later Theory of Meaning. perspective of Hegelian  
philosophy.

Mind, "the Power of the Human Spirit" 23

self-conscious judgments are not simply subjective, although they can be. capture the experience of phenomena,  
per- which can only be known from the

Our judgments about reality can approach objective reality to the extent perspective of first-person  
consciousness.

proach objective reality to the extent A man who is entirely blind from  
birth

that we have developed them in sound, will not understand and appreciate  
col-

cooperative social practices with other or by finding out about brain  
processes

minds—discovering how others judge in the visual cortex, or by  
listening to

objective reality, learning how to think testimony from others. He has to  
expe-

from others' perspectives as well as our rience color first-hand, a  
phenomenon

own, bringing these multiple perspectives together according to standards or in the mind that is simply not made  
descrip- existent by any "objective"

principles of truth that we have learned tion of the electro-magnetic  
spectrum.

with respect to the object world, or by Someone who is deaf cannot  
appreciate

standards of the good, the right, or the mind, the impact in a hearing person's

beautiful, that we have learned by way whether by way of the mind's  
capacity

of our ability to share others' perception, for feeling, imagination, or

tives in multiple social practices since of hearing Puccini's "Nessun  
Dorma,"

infancy. We may have judgments we no matter how refined an understand-  
aren't sure of, or that are wrong, and ing the deaf person has of sound  
waves

those may be called subjective, but and the relationship of the ear to  
the

when we judge by standards or norms auditory regions of the brain. This  
is

of truth using our rational capacity for the nature of mind and  
consciousness,

knowledge, we judge objectively in a feeling and mindedness that

refutes

the best way we know how. Objective knowledge, we then conclude, is a neutral, third-person judgment that comes after our first-person judgments. It is derivative of our first-person consciousness and rational faculty as we come to understand each other in our nonethless, many first-person to first-person exchanges through life.

any and all physical explanations of the brain as a way to account for conscious minds. Yet there are able to the blind or the deaf, translations—not qualitatively rable in the sense of conscious ciations—that do allow, sufficient shared conceptions to coordinated actions.

When we think of objective knowledge, we tend to privilege more formal, physical descriptions of phenomena. Such descriptions are, of course, powerful: being able to capture the operation of air currents in mathematical terms explained allows the human mind to design and refine flying machines. And yet such descriptions are utterly inadequate to explained

Thus, if our self-consciousness is the platform or space by which we make judgments and take actions, this has implications for the extent which those judgments and actions be studied, quantified, and from the outside. Our understandings are always internal understandings, and while they can be

24 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

derivatively by an external explanation, that such an explanation is already less than the awareness of reality that we know and by knowing our own minds. Indeed, an individual can arguably gain a better way of understanding of another's mind by the passage of exercise of the simple, yet profound, human capacity to take multiple perspectives, than the researcher could obtain by even the most detailed description, a concept, Hegel asked: How is it that concepts grasp our minds so firmly that they then limit our thought reasoning. Hegel's question provides a understanding an important Bahá'u'lláh: To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may

tion of the workings of that person's brain. Just as we know ourselves from within, we can to some extent come to know another person's conscious sense of themselves, not through scientific their measurement, but through intentional perspective-taking, aided by our in- (Gleanings terpretation of the other's expressive language and actions. We can, however roughly, know what the other feels and thinks because we can to some extent we take their position, and feel and think it con- ourselves. And this, again, is a capacity of only made possible by our own foun- se- dational self-consciousness. aware Both of the facets of thinking and of learning just discussed—the social and can the self-conscious—have implications learning for how we make judgments about what is true or correct, how our think- ing can go wrong, and how we can be- come aware of this and respond. their A genuine capacity for knowledge the requires the ability to recognize that gradually we can at times be wrong. Humans, involve of course, have this ability; yet, as cooperation. Hegel pointed out, we often overlook Bahá'u'lláh points the grip on our minds of concepts that finite are wrong and prevent sound thinking some

however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts. 148:1)

As we saw from McDowell, we take in the world by placing what experience within the world of cepts we have construed over years of learning. Yet such learning may be riously misinformed. Becoming of inconsistencies in the vast array of concepts that make up our world prompt adjustments, as can new concepts or new relationships among existing concepts. However, while individuals can in this way correct some measure of error

thinking, our concepts and view of world can also be changed by sound social practices that shared perspectives and

At the same time, out limitations to which man's mind is strictly subjected. Where

and reasoning. While Descartes had questioned the ways the mind grasps another Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

kind of limitation which we can never overcome and which pertains to the inner workings of our own minds and sometimes the way in which the “rational faculty” (or soul) mediates the operation of the mind. Referring to the “rational faculty,” Bahá’u’lláh says,

”:

F ,C ,

Wert thou to ponder in thine heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained “reasons” is and subtle Reality... thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue. (Gleanings 83:4)

judgment only in the context of Markus Gabriel may be identifying one aspect of this limitation on ever understanding the rational soul when he points to a limit in thought’s ability to apprehend itself: space of reasons. (Mind and World 125) Because thinking is something real, the conditions of its emergence are not known to us in their

concepts can be changed over time appropriate learning, there is

25

unequivocally call upon us to advance in our learning and our investigation of reality, which does require modifying firmly erroneous, concepts.

T “S R

H M

By what means, then, can the mind fulfill this mandate, given that our thoughts are vulnerable to error and bound by the limitations just McDowell’s discussion of helpful on this question:

[W]e make sense of rational relations between experience and an equation between the space of concepts and the space of Thought can bear on empirical ality only because to be a at all is to be at home in the The idea of a “space of as McDowell puts it, refers to the

ca-

entirety . . . how exactly a concrete thought process unfolds, is some- capacities of mind by which we reason through the elements of that multiplic-

thing it takes a further thought to ity of human realities: feelings, beliefs,

grasp. No thought can catch itself attitudes, norms, memories, imagined in the act. (Meaning 217) counterfactuals or future possibilities,

motivations, purposes, projects, and

This limitation, of course, in no way values. And if guided rightly, and with

absolves us from the responsibility enough experience in sound social to seek to increase our understanding practices, we take on reasons that ad-

within the limits imposed on it, and to just the concepts we hold. We generate

identify and improve on errors in our reasons for the intentions and purposes

understanding. The Bahá'í writings of actions we take; and when reflection

26 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

is required, we rely on higher values Bahá'u'lláh's request to us: "ponder in

and meanings that override passing your hearts."<sup>13</sup> The cognitive, the affec-

desires and idle preferences. The rea- tive (or emotional), and the purposeful

sons supporting our intentions usually are all present in mind as a feature of

go well beyond our immediate experi- our human agency, consciousness, ence. We rely on a conceptual shaping freedom, and spontaneity within the of our experience in order to perceive constraints of the world we have in the world, and rely on our imagination view and which underlies and

prompts our perceptions, judgments, informed by new concepts to consider

affirma- tions and actions. possibilities that don't yet exist, but

may with the right sort of actions. Feelings are, in their own way, just as

And in our consideration of the mul- much evaluations of situations as cog- tiple realities that make up our view nitive thoughts are. Ronald de

Sousa ar-

of the world it is important to recall gues that we respond to the situations of

passages from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings life with emotions learned

during child-

where He refers to our “understanding arts.

heart,”<sup>12</sup> alerting us to an understanding about

ing of the mind and heart as one. Our Robert

conceptual nature includes feelings, capacity emotions, attitudes and other sensibility-based

ities. That we are self-conscious about affective

our feelings, often come to understand while

them, and give them expression in language ex-

pression and gesture, provides evidence evaluation-

that they can have just as much of a who

conceptual hold on us as more cognitive would

concepts do. For the mind is not social,

simply cognitive or intellectual. The mind thinks and judges with feelings as

is well as beliefs, and with attitudes that ar-

are themselves conceptual, for we know the ani-

the object world as much as we know intelligence

the world of principles, purposes, norms terms

and standards, and the human situations that enter into the judgments and actions

world by which we engage the world.

on There is little distance between and

the heart and the head, as attested by

12 See, amongst many, Gleanings 5:6,

hood or from literature and the

Such evaluations are judgments

the world that rely on the mind.

Pippin writes that “a rational

to take up the view of the other is

on a deeper and more original

capacity” (Interanimations 133),

Rainer Forst writes, “Feelings

pressions of our beliefs and

tions, not their opposite: someone

did not have any moral feelings

not really be a participant in

evaluating practices” (22).

Here we see that the human mind

is no more reducible to an analogue of

artificial intelligence than it is to

mal mind. Unlike artificial

that operates according to rules,

and algorithms on only one logical

level, our understanding of the

is by way of concepts that operate

different levels, including attitudes

feelings, purposes and projects.

13 See, for example, Gleanings

Gottlob Frege, who developed the first “concept script” that today serves as the basis of the digital revolution, is also credited with realizing that our uniqueness of human propositional judgements and utterances are always attached to attitude, normativity, and human agency. Markus Gabriel refers to Frege’s “coloring and shading” of thought, and the way in which feeling accompanies instrument-thought. “When we reflect on thinking itself, we also express attitudes” (Meaning 75). While analytical philosophy has tended to reduce thoughts to mere propositions or assertoric sentences, Taylor, McDowell, Gabriel and Pippin, among others, emphasize how language is also constitutive, as new meanings and concepts are developed that make sense of ourselves and human life. Language not only depicts an object world, but creates and constitutes higher values and meanings that define human reality. A complete understanding of thought recognizes human agency, and accounts for the attitude and feeling involved in the commitments and responsibility we attach to thoughts and capacity. To appreciate the uniqueness of thinking . . . even the capacity threatens to block one way to a full appreciation of the “thinking” (16). Bahá’u’lláh’s “rational faculty” is important considerations. He describes the rational faculty as the agency of mind, whose talities can be understood to a degree even though its actual nature cannot be:

Consider the rational faculty which God hath endowed the essence of man. Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and thy sight and hearing, thy sense smell and power of speech, and whatever else is related to, or scendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty. (Gleanings 83:1)

In sum, while we inevitably must

judgments. It recognizes that thoughts dissect the mind into distinct capacities in our efforts to involve different modalities—remembering, imagining, hoping, or asserting—while there is also value in investigating—and that we undertake thoughts ing correlations between features of the mind and particular brain areas or processes, this kind of analysis should

Irak Kimhi notes that “capacities not be allowed to obscure a fundamental truth about the mind, attested to by Bahá’u’lláh and recognized by deployment of logical words (such as “not” and “and”) and for self-consciousness (and hence for the use of the word “I”) . . . are all one and the same but a whole. While humanity will no

28 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 32.3-4 2022

doubt continue to develop ever more sophisticated artificial systems that thoughts, values, and purposes that person have current salience for the incorporate more features that we as- reasoning, and then also uses language to forms intentions for actions. associate with the mind—some of them

Donald Davidson writes that “language is operating at levels beyond what is seen not an ordinary learned skill; it is in humans—it seems unavoidable that or has become a mode of perception . . . these must always falls short of the ho- es- sential to the other senses if they are true human mind. to yield propositional knowledge.

Language is the organ of propositional perception” (Truth 135). An animal, or

P T : a human newborn, in other words, can L S W sense raindrops on its body and react to them; a more mature human who feels

Having laid some groundwork by exploring correlations between philosophical understandings of the mind and its workings, and the picture of how the human mind that emerges from the Bahá'í writings, I now return to the role of language in the human mind; this in turn will set the stage for a discussion of how science and religion shed light on, and can be better understood through, an adequate concept of mind. Much of our conceptual capacity depends, of course, on language, which is comprised not only of words, but also of the gestures and enactments that accompany speech.<sup>14</sup> The relationship between the mind's perception and thought, and human action and engagement with the world, is inextricable, and it is mediated by language. The mind draws on language to reason through the desires, feelings, beliefs, new relationships, and introduces a di-

the same raindrops can generate the knowledge, through language, that is raining.” Charles Taylor writes, too, of language widens our perceptual ities, and increases our range ing and feeling. Insofar as an emotion, a value or purpose, stands in our minds, it does so in the of a whole situation, a world that have in view and that we have tuted by way of a language we have learned. This world is built of put together using the structure of language. Some the world are constructed from nonfigurative language—“the blue”—and some from figurative guage. Language then influences the way we perceive and take in the (Language 93–94). Language gives us new feelings, new desires, new mension of strong values in our (33). Language multiplies a and more the combinations of

14 “Speech acts involve more than emitting the appropriate words. They also involve bodily action, stance, gesture, tone of voice, and the like” (Taylor, *The*

concepts

Language Animal 98).

Mind, "the Power of the Human Spirit"

29

available to the human mind. It allows us. We are able to translate each other's us to theorize, to generate analogies languages, and even when differences and metaphors that connect concepts, in culture and linguistic usage create and so influences how we perceive and gaps in understanding, we can articulate understand a world beyond what is late those differences and gaps.<sup>15</sup> possible for the environmentally con- The role of language in enabling, or constraining, our capacity to strained animal. Its subject and predi- under- cate structure gives us a powerful way and stand each other across linguistic of combining properties and objects, cultural barriers is contentious. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, for abstractions and particulars, adding to holds that our subjective views of example, world are predominantly influenced capacities for logic we have developed by the languages we speak. As not- the ed, Davidson argues that since infancy. Language enables us to between languages goes far to continually make judgments, relying gating the inherent irreducibility on logical operators that we are not these subjective views. At the same translation time, of course, different usually conscious of using—the logic languages of identity, non-contradiction, exclu- do create different ways of taking in miti- and seeing the world. Yet the point gating the inherent irreducibility of these subjective views. At the same time, of course, different languages do create different ways of taking in and seeing the world. Yet the point made by Davidson, as well as Taylor, is that there is far more overlap we deploy without pause or thought. tween human beings' worlds than be- there is difference; or, in other Even when we get words wrong, or words, that our shared world is greater than mangle syntax, our common sense way of thinking allows us to understand than

each others' utterances. Indeed, the capacity of language to enable communication between minds is remarkable for its flexibility. As Davidson has argued, we rely on an enormous set of interrelated concepts that are shared universally by all human beings, the majority of which were developed in infancy, childhood and adolescence. This has always, through history, allowed human beings to meet and converse across widely different languages and cultures, employing Davidson's "principle of charity" by which we assume that other humans are rational beings navigating the same world as above, makes a similar point in arguing

those worlds that are unique to culture, linguistic group, or (ly) individual. Translation relies this extensive shared world of beings, and conceptual differences between particular languages only a portion of the enormity of ceptual reality that all human share.<sup>16</sup> Of course, something is

15 See Davidson's Intersubjective, Objective and Truth, Language and History.

16 See Taylor's Whorf hypothesis in chapter 9 of Language Animal. Tomasello, as

30 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

lost in translation: the idea of a shared world should not lead us to conclude that there are no functional differences between languages, or to imagine that a language can be learned mechanically without reference to its cultural use and text and distinctive characteristics. But this language generation is not, for the AI, a sophisticated combination of words and phrases to rules generated inductively the analysis of thousands or texts. For the human, language generation is bound up with meaning.

the point remains that the phenomenon of language, as a whole, is enabling influence the of a collective life for the human race projects and that other species do not have access perception. Thus, where similar animals in the things. Our same place at a given time can share conversations a sensory environment, humans can, relationships, through language, share a world across understandings. time, space, culture, etc. And, largely shape through language, humans can collectively expand and refine the conceptual landscape of that world, leading to developments in culture. persuasive- As with the human mind's way of one learning, its reliance on language has and one implications not only for the world Taylor, we share with others, but for our inner world. Human use of language latter is differs in important respects from the more computer's use of language, not least Where designative in that a human's use of language is relationships intimately bound up with the human reagent's own self-understanding, and interpretation—"the cannot be properly considered without

Figurative language and new and el expressiveness in turn birth of new aspirations, purposes. They give us ways of tion beyond the surface of discursive activity, our with others, set up new redefining previous This capacity of language to and direct our inner world is larly powerful when we use to grapple with things beyond concrete. Davidson writes ly that we have two languages, relative to the physical realm, that is about the mental realm. in turn, refers to the former as "designative," while the only sometimes designative, and often "constitutive." tive language assigns between objects or concepts that quire little or no ball is round"—constitutive

language reference to this. Humans are language generators; we are constantly combining words, and the concepts they per- adult native tain to, in new and original ways.<sup>17</sup> And is new . . . in the sense that no one in the history of that advances in human civilizations de- that string pend upon humans' shared grasp of a con- an observation ceptual reality, including across linguistic verified over and divides. over again by examining large corpora,

17 Consider Noam Chomsky's ob- transcribing actual conversations, and so servation that once a threshold of twenty on" (Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust* 520).

Mind, "the Power of the Human Spirit" 31

requires interpretation and a less deter- them in terms of sensible things minate grasp on such matters as feel- . . . For example, [for] grief and ings and attitudes, values and norms. happiness . . . you say, "My heart heart became heavy", or "My heart was uplifted", although one's of which, Davidson argues, can be uplifted", although one's heart is not literally made heavy or translated into the other—without lifted up. (Some Answered Questions 16:1–4)

pause or deep reflection, in conversa- up. (Some Answered Questions 16:1–4)

tion and in how we go about our lives. 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to agree with both Taylor and Davidson when He The existence of this second lan- guage pertaining to the mental realm, explains that "human knowledge is of two kinds": and the inextricable influence of lan- guage on our inner condition, point One is the knowledge acquired to a hard limit on the extent to which through the senses. That which any human mind can be fully described

the eye, the ear, or the senses of stance  
smell, taste, or touch can perceive is called “sensible”. . . . These are synap-  
called sensible realities. realization  
The other kind of human knowl-  
descrip-  
edge is that of intelligible things; that is, it consists of intelligible  
Gabriel  
realities which have no outward form or place and which are not sensible. For example, the power of the mind is not sensible, nor are any of the human attributes: These are intelligible realities. Love, likewise, is an intelligible and not a sensible reality. For the val-  
ear does not hear these realities, religions,  
the eye does not see them . . . .  
But when you undertake to express these intelligible realities, you have no recourse but to cast them in the mold of the sensible, for outwardly there is nothing beyond the sensible. Thus, when you wish to express the reality of the spirit and its conditions and de-  
pa-  
grees, you are obliged to describe

from the external, objectivizing  
of neuroscience. However precisely neuroscience might map out the  
tic correlates to a person’s  
that “my heart is heavy,” this  
tion will never capture the essence of the feeling thus described.  
summarizes the issue well:  
Our self-conception . . . reflects our value system and our personal experience . . . It has developed in complex ways, in the tension between our understanding of nature, literature, legal systems,  
ues of justice, our arts,  
socio-historical and personal experience. There just is no way to describe these developments in the language of neuroscience that would be superior or even equal to the vocabulary [that we have] already at hand. (Not a Brain 15)  
In the closing sections of this  
per, I look first at how language and

the mind operate in natural science, a language Davidson characterizes as world  
of the physical realm, Taylor as the anal-  
designative. I will then look at the lan- and  
guage of Revelation, which addresses about  
both the physical realm and the mental realm—the designative and the consti-

measured. Scientists will often advance the ways we perceive the  
by relying first on metaphor and  
ogy with reference to the concrete  
sensible in order to hypothesize  
possible undiscovered causal mechanisms. Once the hypothesis is

tested, intuitive—and how both languages relate and phenomena are observed through to the material and the spiritual aspects elaborate instrumentation, analogy can of reality. remain useful in understanding what has been observed; only later are such analogies articulated into more formal P F : theory. Consider, for example, how S non-intuitive findings of physics in the twentieth century at both the relativistic and quantum scales almost We think of science as proceeding by demand way of designation, description, and to be understood through metaphor explanation of physical and natural and analogy before the student can causality, and there is validity to this: undertake to comprehend them more at a certain point in the process by formally. which human minds investigate natural The process by which science advances through metaphors and analogies has been labelled “abduction” by Charles S. Peirce.<sup>18</sup> Abduction language. In some scientific domains, in- as in physics, this designative language involves a way of thinking that relies on can even be crystallized into mathematics. However, if we focus only on on imagination and a general intelligence. This is a capacity of the human framed in this particular kind of language, we end up missing the full richness of the mental processes by which fanciful theories and mere superstition human minds engage in science. by deepening their experience with, It is noteworthy, for instance, that and intuitive understanding of, the phe- the human ability to “cast” intelligible nomena at hand.<sup>19</sup> This exploration in realities into the “mold of the sensible” highlighted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is 18 For an informative summary, see vital to the pursuit of science as well. Igor Douven’s “Peirce on Abduction.” 19 Peter Godfrey-Smith

explains

en process of natural causality is, in best expla-

a certain sense, insensible: it has not and as a

yet been made accessible to us to be explana-

tions. Imre Lakatos writes about scientific Mind, "the Power of the Human Spirit"

depth, beyond the surface observation per-

of the everyday world, is necessary, as Francis Bacon wrote at the dawn of discussion of the

modern science, since: scientific

discovery:

the greatest hindrance and aberration of the human understanding proceeds from the dullness, incompetency and deceptions of the senses; in that things which the

strike the senses outweigh things sci-

which do not immediately strike it, though they may be more important. Hence it is that speculation commonly ceases where sight ceases; insomuch that of things invisible there is little or no observation. (58)

So powerful and consequential is Insights that come from intense in-

vestigation provide clues that lead to immediately

theories that advance science. Such 'Abdu'l-Bahá stresses, insights emerge through the mind's essentially

capacity to associate disparate things and find connections and resonance, to make imaginative leaps. Thus, how-

many, ever much knowledge is ultimately

abduction as "inference to the

nation" in Theory and Reality,

way of eliminating other possible

33

below the surface of the ordinary

ceptual world. This is stressed by

'Abdu'l-Bahá in His

role and power of the soul in

Through the power of the rational soul, man can discover the realities of things, comprehend their properties, and penetrate

mysteries of existence. All the

ences, branches of learning, arts, inventions, institutions, undertakings, and discoveries have resulted from the comprehension of the rational soul. (Some Answered Questions 58:3)

this capacity of the soul to

realities beneath what is

sensible that, as

it must be understood as an

supernatural capacity:

The virtues of humanity are

but science is the most noble of

captured in science by designation and explanation, the mind has capacities for generating knowledge that do not operate by simple induction (in the way an artificial intelligence generates “knowledge” inductively from large data sets, for instance). Scientific investigation thus involves looking into phenomena in order to discover entities and forces the power of intellectual investigation research programs that showed promise or decline as a way of then formulating theory that was plausible, in For and against Method.

them all. The distinction which man enjoys above and beyond the station of the animal is due to paramount virtue. It is a of God; it is not material; it vine. All the powers and of man are human and hereditary in origin—outcomes of nature’s processes—except the which is supernatural . . . The and scientific acquisition is a higher virtue specialized to man alone. (Promulgation 20:2)

34 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 32.3-4 2022

The implications of this characterization of the mind and scientific inquiry for philosophy will be considered later. For the present, we can consider how the human mind’s capacity for Thomas scientific investigation sheds light on the distinctiveness of the phenomenon of mind itself (whether or not one sees in this distinctiveness evidence of a spiritual or “supernatural” essence to the mind). Indeed, it seems plausible that the way the mind undertakes science may not be reproducible in, for instance, artificial intelligence systems.

approach. Until recently, histories of scientific advance neglected the of haphazard inventions, and advances that were initially connected from theory.<sup>21</sup> As Kuhn notes, scientists develop seeing particular domains of way of a kind of sixth sense or an intuitive grasp arising from their tion in scientific practice. few better explanations of this book on scientist Barbara A Feeling for the Organism. Author Evelyn Fox Keller describes the

(often

As noted earlier, scientific advances rely on not only inductive and deductive reasoning, but also on abductive

“see” phe-

reasoning or “general intelligence.”

arising out of

The role of general intelligence in sound

particular demonstrates the futility of felt that,

efforts to model scientific practice on sympathetic

a series of technical steps, or to reduce discovery

it to an algorithm. As Hilary Putnam comes

writes, “there is no such thing as the pro-

scientific method” (72). This is not heart” (qtd.

only due to the diversity of methods within science, which range from clas-

under-

sification and taxonomies, to mathe-

to

matical methods and computer simula-

intelligence, as it

tions, and from laboratory experiments take

involving ever more elaborate instru-

of

mentation and measurement approach-

there

es to speculative cosmological theory.<sup>20</sup> activity

More fundamentally, the idea of “the” alone

scientific method is misleading because number

overlooked) contributions McClintock made to ecological and genetic

thanks to how she came to

nomena, a kind of vision

her absorption and dedication to

scientific practices. Einstein

“only intuition, resting on

understanding, can lead [to

of new laws], . . . daily effort

from no deliberate intention or

gram, but straight from the

in Keller 201).

The crucial role of intuitive

standing in science does not seem

be one that artificial

is currently being developed, can

on. While AI may serve as a tool

immense power for researchers,

seem to be core aspects of the

of science that the human mind

can undertake. An increasing

of articles and books now note how

efforts in artificial intelligence

20 See Ian Hacking’s work paper, “Finding Out: Prolegomena to a Theory

of Truthfulness and Reasoning in the  
Gaukroger,  
Sciences.”  
Science.

21 See Stephen

Civilization and the Culture of

Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

35

In The Myth of Artificial Intelligence:  
Why Computers Can’t Think Like We  
bina-

trillion neuronal synapses—so a  
computer recording a simple

Do, Erik J. Larson points out that the  
would

ry piece of information . . .

enormous funds given to AI research,  
which continues to rely on the induc-  
tive processing of large data sets, dis-  
every

require 100 terabytes. The amount  
of storage needed to store even  
this very simple information

place funding for more effective scien-  
day

second over the course of one

tific research that includes deductive as  
well as abductive reasoning. Artificial  
intelligence’s reliance on inductive  
days

for one person would be more than  
100,000 terabytes, or 100 peta-  
bytes. Supercomputers these

modelling alone allows it to discover  
correlations, but provides few insights  
account

hold about 10 petabytes. And this  
quick calculation doesn’t

into causality; AI’s lack of understand-  
ing of underlying causes makes it error  
prone with respect to specific cases  
(even before considering the often  
biased and subjective rules and algo-  
or a

for the changes in connectivity  
and positioning of these synaps-  
es occurring over time. Counting  
how these connections change  
just after a good night’s sleep

rithms that AI programmers write into  
their programs). Our efforts to devel-  
esti-

class in mathematics amounts to .  
. . . many more bytes than the

op this kind of “intelligence” have not  
The

mated atoms in the universe.

yet discovered the path to enabling AI  
to develop a genuine scientific under-  
standing of deeper forces, and causal  
connections at work.

wiring problem seems intractable  
in its magnitude. (qtd. in Larson  
250)

Comments by Rebecca Golden of  
the Genetic Literacy Project are enough  
un-

It would seem that just as animal cog-  
nition is an inadequate model for

to show the potentially insurmountable  
artificial

derstanding the human mind,

problems jointly faced by AI research-  
model

intelligence is not a convincing

ers hoping to reproduce the functioning

for our own capacity for thought;

and of the human brain, and neuroscientists perhaps our efforts to make AI in the who hope to model the human brain, or image of our own minds are destined for ever understand the mind completely: failure. Just as a thought, in Gabriel's words, cannot "catch itself in the act," The human brain is estimated to the mind cannot fathom itself. This is have approximately 86 billion neu- attested to in the Bahá'í writings, and is rons, each neuron with possibly coherent with an understanding where- tens of thousands of synaptic con- by the mind is an essentially spiritual nections; these little conversation phenomenon. We will explore this fur- sites are where neurons exchange ther later, but it helpfully leads us to the information. In total, there are broader point that science cannot fully likely to be more than a hundred describe the world.

36 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

It is a principle of science that evi- Bahá'í writings. dence always underdetermines theory. that the concept of "nature itself" is "not a sensible Evidence, in other words, can always support different theories, as Kuhn abstraction (Some Answered Question emphasizes. That is why science is so 16:3). Bahá'u'lláh likewise confirms that we will never have a intent on gaining ever more evidence tion of the natural world: total explana- tion of the natural world: in order to endlessly adjust theory. We Say: Nature in its never have complete evidence as there embodiment of My Name, is always more to learn and know, and theory is likewise always open to ad- the Maker, the Creator. Its essence is the tations are diversified theory is likewise always open to ad- justments, if not outright paradigm shifts. Our scientific theories, then, can diversity there

never be total descriptions of reality.<sup>22</sup>  
discernment.

Mathematician and philosopher John  
a power

Myhill summarizes this well: “There  
learning

is no nonpoetical description of the  
man of in-

whole of reality” (qtd. in W. Hatcher  
naught therein

11).<sup>23</sup> This view is consonant with the  
splendor of

Our Name, the Creator. (Tablets,

22 Quantum mechanics has also  
been used to demonstrate science inabili-  
ty to arrive at a total description of nature,  
a measure

since it understands the physical world at  
and confirms

the subatomic level as a matter of proba-  
poetry—and,

bilities only, not strict causality. For a re-  
especially

cent discussion, see Vahid Ranjbar’s “The  
Revelation—pro-

Quantum State Function, Platonic Forms,  
of reality.

and the Ethereal Substance.”

23 This conclusion is based on

P F :

Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, con-  
firmed by the Hilbert Space model of

T L R

quantum mechanics, and reinforced by the  
mathematician Gödel’s incompleteness

considered how the

theory which proves that no axiomatic sys-  
knowledge,

tem, even basic arithmetic, can ensure both  
the mind’s scien-

completeness and consistency. If a model  
understanding the totali-

of basic arithmetic can only be complete if  
to the question

it is inconsistent, or consistent if it is incom-  
plete, we can be sure there will never be a

demonstrating the

are signs for men of

. . . It is endowed with

whose reality men of

fail to grasp. Indeed a

sight can perceive

save the effulgent

Lawh-i-Hikmat ¶14)

This perspective returns

of enchantment to nature

Myhill’s suggestion that

we might add, perhaps most

the divine poetry of

vides the only total view

Having briefly

mind generates scientific

as well as the limits of

tific pursuit in

ty of reality, I now turn

use of Gödel’s theory in

total understanding of the physical realm. brain, and	difference between mind and
See physicist Roger Penrose's <i>Shadows of the Mind</i> (11) for ideas.	William Hatcher's references to these same
Mind, "the Power of the Human Spirit"	37
of what religion, and Revelation, can highlight the	view of the mind, as it
tell us about the mind. Where science astonishment and	mind's capacity for
aims at a determinate knowledge of in our	awe, perplexity and puzzlement
entities and forces across well-defined stirring	encounter with aesthetically
domains of phenomena in its multiple equally—	phenomena. This capacity is
sub-fields, the language of Revelation powerfully—en-	or perhaps even more
encompasses determinate and indeter-	gaged as the mind tries to
understand	the contingencies and mysteries
minate knowledge, and experience of of or-	dinary human life, and to
realities both physical and natural as contemplate	being and reality.
well as spiritual and beyond nature. <sup>24</sup>	Common to art and Revelation is
Before considering what the phe-	concern with meaning, and a
a	on metaphor as a means of
nomenon of Revelation might tell us reliance	ing the inexpressible. Like
about the mind, it may be helpful to express-	phy—and unlike science
say a few preliminary words about the philoso-	in isolation—religion and much
phenomenon of art, and its relation considered	intentionally explore meaning
to religion. The reason for this is that of art	purpose of life. The pursuit of
some of the capacities of the human and the	can, of course, be a legitimate
mind to know and experience reality meaning	of understanding and wisdom, and
transcend intellectual or cognitive ap-	therefore a particular kind of
source	
prehension. The mind, as noted above, has capacities for feeling, for moral	

knowl-  
 and purposeful action, and also for aes-  
 knowledge gen-  
 thetic perception and expression. Art,  
 The Life  
 as an element of human civilization,  
 explores  
 has long justified a more capacious  
 in  
 the Greek world largely as a matter of  
 wonder, in the pursuit of understand-  
 24 See Hatcher's Minimalism for a  
 this  
 discussion of the distinct purpose and na-  
 pursuit, Greek philosophers, including  
 ture of scientific language and the language  
 Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, encoun-  
 of Revelation. I had the good fortune to  
 know Hatcher, and learned a great deal  
 tered the problem of the ineffable—or  
 from our many conversations. Important-  
 language. that which cannot be put into  
 ly, he points out that the ways of knowing  
 often reluc- Arendt notes that Plato was  
 fostered by each are complementary—one  
 writing, and that tant to put his views in  
 does not supersede the other: "intuition and  
 that refused to Aristotle wrote of "truth  
 mysticism may give rise to transrational  
 be expressed in discourse"  
 (114). For  
 modes of knowing reality . . . [but neither] these philosophers, as well as  
 later  
 divine revelation or mysticism can contra- thinkers such as Nietzsche,  
 Heidegger,  
 dict the conclusions of reason in the face and Wittgenstein, who ran up  
 against  
 of the same information base . . . there is the limits of language, metaphor  
 as-  
 a fundamental difference between . . . the sumed a central role in their  
 attempts  
 transrational and the irrational" (114).

38 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

to convey knowledge about questions  
 of meaning. Art and Revelation have,  
 of course, similarly relied on metaphor  
 to express the ineffable. The examples  
 garden of these inner meanings,  
 thou shalt never taste of the im-  
 perishable wine of this valley. And  
 shouldst thou taste of it, thou

wilt

of this phenomenon in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are too numerous to

turn away from all else and drink of the cup of contentment. .

..

count; we might consider one example from The Seven Valleys in which He simultaneously explicitly speaks of the to

(Call ¶¶ 63–64)

In this short paper, I am forced

to ineffability of spiritual meanings that world

set aside an exploration of the

language is powerless to convey, employs metaphor to provide a glimpse of what lies beyond the veil of the ineffable, and uses art—specifically the poetry of ‘Attár and Ibn-i-Fárid—to help the reader understand what cannot be grasped cognitively:

of art and its different modalities

of

language and expression, modalities that engage the capacities of

the

mind to know and experience reality in an aesthetic and

sensible way that

is less determinate than the knowing produced by science. Art brings a

measure of indetermination and won-

The tongue faileth in describing these three valleys, and speech falleth short. The pen steppeth not into this arena, the ink leaveth only a blot. In these stations, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to leap and the soul to cry out, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, and confided only from breast to breast.

der to our perception and knowledge of the world. Through the arts we expand the powers by which we are able to bring alternative perspectives into view, and we develop our sense of a world that transcends the mere physical by way of evaluations and reactions that are emotional as well as cognitive. This growth in perspectives is not limited to our interaction with art itself; as de Sousa emphasizes, we often then shift those emo-

The bliss of mystic know-ers can be only told from heart to heart,

tional evaluations into the situations of human life. The arts thus help us to see the world in new ways.

A bliss no messenger can bear and no missive dare impart. divine

If this is true of the arts, how much more is it true of the language of

How many are the matters I have out of weakness left unsaid; For my words would fail to reckon them and mine every effort would fall short.

Revelation, a form of language that looks beyond the causal and habitual perceptions and realities of human conceptuality, and aims to advance the mind's grasp of realities that

include,

O friend, till thou enter the Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

but also transcend, the physical and

natural world.<sup>25</sup> I turn to Revelation human and its language now, drawing on ar- contingencies guments from within philosophy itself their ca- to support the view that religious lan- collective inten- guage— especially that of the most re- action—features cent Revelation—allows unique access mind as to certain ways of knowing.<sup>26</sup> If human agency, or the power of the human spirit, is beyond physical itself, determinations and descriptions of how it brain physicality, as many philosophers of claim, then it may be worth asking if matter of we might find a better resolution to the philosopher challenge of understanding the mind by written, relying on the concept of the rational soul and the power of the human spirit. As a path to bringing those ideas back into philosophical discourse, we might indispensable in first investigate the capacity of the mind inter- to know and engage with the language For of divine Revelation. Such investiga- postmetaphysical tion can lead us to value this language with religious practice . . . [and] throws

25 Indeed, the Báb explains that some of the power of art may come from its ability to tap into the same source that extraordinary. gives Revelation its force: “It is the im- postmeta-

of Revelation as a way by which beings can navigate the of human affairs, and develop pacity for cooperation, tions and coordinated that are unique to the human philosophy itself has argued. Before considering how Revelation might shed light on the mind let us consider in more depth contributes uniquely to our ways knowing in general. On the religion, no less a secular than Jürgen Habermas has [R]eligion, which has largely been deprived of its worldview functions, is still ordinary life for normalizing course with the extraordinary. this reason, even thinking continues to coexist light on a curious dependence of philosophy that has forfeited contact with the Philosophy, even in its

mediate influence of the Holy Spirit that neither physical form, will be able to replace nor repress religion as the significance of which they themselves long as religious language is the are oftentimes unable to apprehend” (qtd. in Nábíl-i-A‘zam 259)

bearer of a semantic content that  
26 Of course, as a believer in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, I consider His eludes . . .  
Writings, and those of the Báb, ‘Abdu’l-philosophical language and Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice as truths and guidance to resist translation into reasoning that transcend the arguments and positions discourses.  
(Postmetaphysical of philosophers. At the same time, I recognize the need to advance the discourse in philosophy around the existence of an fostered . . . philosophy has itself “extended reality” beyond the merely a kind of cognitivist reduction and material.

40 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 32.3-4 2022

has pinned reason down to only than that of science. It brings to mind astonishment and solace, peace and one of its dimensions, . . . the truth of assertoric sentences . . . pursuing truth is the only thing that still counts as rational. Questions larger sense of being and purposeful-ness than arises in the mere of justice and questions of taste, attending to the practical matters of physical as well as questions regarding the truthful presentation of self, are all survival. The language of Revelation excluded from the sphere of the conveys a sense of grace and content-rational. (49–50) ment, but also inspires determination and perseverance; it opens for those The questions Habermas refers to who take such language seriously a are reflected in the content of much re- form of knowledge that helps meet

religious language, just as religious language also addresses the capacities of everyday feeling and purposefulness which many philosophers emphasize as central to an understanding of the mind. Habermas explains, too, that ordinary life is by no means “immune to the shattering and subversive intrusion of extraordinary events” (Postmetaphysical Thinking 51). Revelation speaks directly to the tragedies and crises facing humanity, providing a context for the mind to grapple with death itself, and with the appalling levels of personal suffering that exist in the world; yet even in interpretations, confronting these areas of human experience that have so troubled human thought across history, religious language can inspire a sense of astonishment, awe and beauty, and bring about epiphanies, heightened excitement, love, and joy.

The language of divine Revelation provides a source of inspiration and

the practical imperatives of life even as it provides a beyond the particulars of ordinary This is a language that both the descriptive and the or constitutive. Thus, the divine Revelation expresses nate guidance, in specific laws, well-defined principles and it also involves a way of knowing experiencing life and the mystery of being itself. It conveys more and sometimes indeterminate sions of aspirations and noble that lead to different and does so in a language that young and old, the humble or cated, with an expression that can understood by all. These two of language together capture of truth, goodness and beauty, the mind to gain an awareness and, some extent, understanding of both its immediate reality and an extended,

guidance that widens the ways by which beyond the the mind can know and experience the lives. world. It is a language that is more language expansive, and often less determinate, mind's Mind, "the Power of the Human Spirit" composite of capacities and ways of emergence knowing and experiencing the world, Revelation through thoughts, beliefs, feelings, the and purposes. The mind relies on that these capacities seamlessly, adjusting doc- flexibly to different contexts, but it is stimulated always able to be inspired and guided of by noble values and principles that, Bellah over successive Revelations from God, the evo- human beings have gradually come to during understand. Exposed to such language, religion whether in the form of the Sermon on significant the Mount, the verses of the Qur'án, or independence the speeches attributed to the Buddha, his human beings gain insights that have formed allowed them to overcome and tran- humanity scend the contingencies of life and humanity providence—contingencies that, as in Nirenberg Bahá'u'lláh points out, are often "too finite reality that lies just horizon of our finite and humble Genuine religious thus takes advantage of the 41 the time of the Buddha, the of Greek thought, and the of the Old Testament, through to Revelations of Christ and up to of Muhammad—have begun to ument the ways religion the advance of human capacities thought, feeling, and purpose. details impacts of religion on lution of the mind before and the Axial Age, arguing that was the impulse behind shifts in the cognitive of the human mind.<sup>28</sup> Jaspers, for part, wrote that the Axial Age "the spiritual foundations of . . . foundations on which still subsists today" (qtd. and Nirenberg 98). This

scholarship  
mysterious for the mind of man to demonstrates a powerful  
relationship between religion, the human  
comprehend” on a cognitive level mind and  
(Kitáb-i-Íqán 167).<sup>27</sup> the advance of human  
civilization. It  
While this developmental effect of does so by understanding religion  
as a  
Revelation on the mind can be attested general institution throughout  
history,  
to by the individual, its effects can also rather than focusing on specific  
faith  
be seen from a historical perspective. communities or religious labels  
that  
Scholars such as Robert Bellah, build- are often weighed down by dogma  
and  
ing on Karl Jaspers’ concept of the clerical interpretations that  
cloud the  
Axial Age—a period of cultural fer- originality of genuine  
Revelation lan-  
ment measured variously from around guage. Viewed in this  
perspective, his-  
tory testifies to the impact of religion  
27 Bahá’u’lláh’s own language of on human civilization with  
respect to  
Revelation consists of an enormous body culture, rationality, morality  
and lan-  
of Writings of equally enormous range. guage itself.  
He provides a practical vision of human We can reflect, in light of  
this view  
purpose and relationship, inviting all the of religion, on the importance of  
members of the human race to live in “the  
utmost love and harmony, with friendliness 28 In addition to  
Bellah’s works  
and fellowship,” and assures us that unity, Religion in Human Evolution and  
The  
cooperation and love among the peoples of Axial Age and Its Consequences,  
see also  
the world that “can illuminate the whole Ben Schewel’s Seven Ways of  
Looking at  
earth” (Gleanings 132:3). Religion.  
42 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 32.3-4 2022

Revelation to the process of learning knowledge and learning, we could  
that Tomasello refers to as “the ratchet broaden and deepen a shared view  
of

effect” by which “cumulative cultural and spir- evolution” occurs in the “social learning” of humanity. Tomasello views the perception human mind’s cooperative nature (discussed earlier in this paper) as arguably meaning its essential quality. Habermas’ prodigious philosophical work reflects the how, same idea: human beings advance by the a process of social reasoning in which context, minds are engaged cooperatively and and communicatively in unending conver- language sations that touch contexts of affec- “reli- tivity, cognition, and purposefulness, considered as in an ongoing assessment of the con- resolve sequences of our actions with a view example to establishing better reasons for sub- prompt- sequent and better coordinated action. Revelation and Yet, even if the Axial Age provides abundant evidence of the historical peo- role of the language of Revelation in practice. But it fostering this fundamental human ca- both pacity for cumulative cultural develop- Revelation ment through cooperation, can it fulfill in the same function today? Humanity of faces enormous challenges: environ- the world in both its physical itual dimensions. This would panding and deepening our of social reality, refining our judgement, and elevating the and purpose of our lives. Here I would like to suggest given what we have reviewed about nature of learning in a social the role of language in the mind, the particular attributes of the of Revelation, a certain kind of gious” practice might be a powerful tool for humanity to the challenges it faces. The provided—the social practices ed by Bahá’u’lláh’s elucidated by the Universal House of Justice—may not look like most ple’s idea of a religious is, I would argue, a practice that relies on the capacity of language to engage the human mind a unique way, and takes advantage the nature of social learning. It

is a kind of practice, in short, that can give the observer a reason to have mental harm, gross inequities across and within countries, racism, prejudice and injustices that cause appalling suffering to many, to name a few. These challenges represent an evident failure of human solidarity. Despite an understanding of the human mind as uniquely designed for cooperation and for collective intentionality, we seem to be falling short of the minimal level of cooperation demanded by the exigencies of our times. With a renewed confidence in the power of the human mind and its capacity for cooperation, conceptual Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit” framework detailed in a series of letters of the Universal House of Justice. The process of learning has centered on a systematic educational program involving study circles for adults, junior youth empowerment programs, and children’s classes. This program of education involves study of the language of Revelation and authorized Revelation interpretations, embedded in extensive

of practice, in short, that can give the observer a reason to have in the human mind’s ability to the collective intentionality and needed to resolve the crises it faces. It provides evidence of the power enormous influence that Revelation can have on the processes of mind learning to build better, more and prosperous communities. Over the past twenty-five years, Bahá’í community has been a collective, worldwide learning process, relying on an evolving

43

with newer, better ways of viewing world. With continued study of the language of Revelation, and with to apply its guidance through our perceptions widen, deepen, and enriched. This systematic process in its participants a deeper appreciation of the language of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whether one

believes conversation and discussion, as well as or social practices undertaken by participants. This process encourages efforts of to generate a collective intentionality that then allows for coordinated action coherent, characterized by creativity and imagination. Participants learn to apply the guidance studied, and then reflect and elucidates converse together about such actions out- and their consequences. This serves relationship to stimulate advances in both individual and collective learning among the participants, whether Bahá'í adherents, explanatory, their friends, families or neighbors.<sup>29</sup> activates This process emphasizes both cognitive learning and the development of spiritual qualities, including attitudes, feelings, aspirations, and noble goals and purposes. It relies on appropriate kinds of social practices that involve In action accompanied by others. This enterprise is learning by doing, as described by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*: good. “For the things we have to learn before we can do, we learn by doing” learning

that He is a Manifestation of God thinks of Him merely as one more among many educators and teachers humanity whose language and ways of expression make sense, are and are also stimulating and aging. As all divine Revelations done, Bahá'u'lláh's both the spiritual aspects of life and lines a more appropriate to the material aspects of reality. language that is at once figurative informative, explicit and the Revelation addresses and those human realities of purposeful tion, thought and feeling. The impacts of the language of Revelation through the learning cess described above are thus not sured in external outcomes alone. this shared and cooperative of learning, there is an emphasis standards of the right and the There is an assumption of the of those who participate in the

(qtd. in Kern 259). We take actions and process, which stimulates aspirations we learn, replacing mistaken concepts to attain to higher levels of service, sacrifice, nobility, and positive action.

29 For a philosophical analysis of The mind's self-understanding and its this educational process, see Sona Farid- inextricable sociality mutually rein- Arbab's Moral Empowerment: In Quest of force each other, as the personal drive a Pedagogy.

44 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

to surpass one's previous self-under- as protagonists in the development of standing is simultaneously a drive to new ways of life. contribute to greater social cohesion Central to this kind of development and unity among all who participate. is growth in the mind's capacity to This may be understood as a process understand reality. Beyond a more in- of self-transcendence as described by formed reading of the reality of both philosopher William Desmond: the material and spiritual nature of vil- lages, towns, and city neighborhoods, Religious community binds to- participants learn to perceive and pen- etrate social reality at a deeper level. together the human and the divine, and out of this it transforms the This process involves a re-evaluation of the standards we rely on in our judgment. The sources of social power un- ments of others, of the truth, the good, the right, and the beautiful. There is dergo a transformation that car- as much to learn from false starts and ries human power to the edge of mistakes as there is from positive humanness. We understand pow- er as given all along, a gift from riences. For it is not only the concepts that come most quickly to mind that motiveless generosity, motiveless hold us in their grasp, and from which goodness beyond the goodness of we try to shake free, but deeper, more the gift, rousing in community the ingrained standards that we may not vision of humans living together

an ethics of generosity in the finite image of the ultimate generosity. (486) initially think to question when perceiving, judging and acting. These are uncovered and explored by way of the kinds of intense discussion and conversation that occur in the study circles.

mind that develops feelings, attitudes, cognition, perception, and purposefulness relies on personal and collective efforts to translate the Revelation language into advances in skills, qualities of mind, and action. The participation of a few million people around the world has contributed to an evolving framework for action that relies on cycles of study, action, reflection, and deliberation and conversation among groups of friends who begin to see themselves, their local communities and neighborhoods, as well as their obligation to re-local and regional Bahá'í institutions

In describing this process, Paul Lample draws attention to an image, developed by Otto Neurath, that McDowell also uses to explain human learning. We are, as it were, at sea on a ship that we have to rebuild, one at a time, while still staying afloat. We replace by bits and pieces one of the ship—one concept, or group of concepts—after another, making gradual adjustments as we come to learn new ways of thinking about the world (174). “[T]hinking,” as McDowell puts it, “is under a standing obligation to reflect about and criticize the standards

Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

45

by which at any time, it takes itself to be governed” (Mind and World 81). This work of rebuilding our “ship of we concepts” is facilitated by the religious and not language at the center of the learning process being described here. By sur-judgment, facing the spiritual nature of the world [God’s] we have in view, and of the relation-

as our inherited conceptual frameworks come under scrutiny in the light cast by the language of Revelation, learn to see with our “own eyes through the eyes of others,” ing our capacity to exercise in recognition that “justice is gift to thee and the sign of [His] lov-

ships between the realities within it, this language helps the mind advance Hidden in its understanding of the meaning of things, and thereby build sound concepts, new ways of perceiving the world (including other human beings). It develops our capacity to reason all through the feelings, attitudes, beliefs, perception, norms, values, and purposes that justify our actions. Our interactions with others can take on a sense and a feeling every- that is spiritual, not because we turn us away from the material dimension, Ruhi but because we come to see greater coherence between the material and the spiritual dimensions of reality. We develop finer discriminations in how involvement we see and hear the world in both its to material and spiritual aspects, relying elaborat- on our rational faculties and capacities learn to for knowledge as well as our capacities observa- for feeling and purposefulness. to de- Genuine religious language is about enti- unity, love and understanding, moral participants in qualities, and the living of a life that the moves a person closer to God. It is a reality, language that deals with features of the per- world that can guide our perceptual realm

ing-kindness. Set it then before eyes” (Bahá’u’lláh, Arabic Words no. 4).30 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes, let them open wide their eyes and uncover the inner realities of things,... Our spiritual our inward sight must be opened, so that we can see the signs and traces of God’s spirit in thing. Everything can reflect to the light of the Spirit. (qtd. in Institute 9) From what has been described, it should be clear that in our in this learning process, we need adopt the scientific approach ed on earlier. Where scientists look beyond the mere surface tions of the object world in order termine the underlying forces and ties operating in nature, this process learn to look beyond surface of culture and external and the limitations of that way of ception, opening their minds to a

attention, allowing us to see the world in the light of those spiritual qualities of love, mutual understanding, care, Hatcher's anti-kindness, and justice. Throughout our Affect in involvement in this learning process, of Human Consciousness."

46 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 32.3-4 2022

of spirituality beyond nature. "It is paper, then, common nowadays to think of science the and religion as opposed. To the con-Bahá'í trary, faith and reason are twins born of true in sameness and difference," write David grounding and Ricardo Nirenberg (97). Science, pre- in its determinate ways of knowing, represents an unquestionable advance for humanity, but religion in the form of the divine language of Revelation provides another avenue of knowledge and experience that complements, over- not time laps and extends the ways that science together engages the world. Our understanding, mind- whether in science, the arts, religion, or feeling, ex- in the practical course of ordinary life, with is always a capacity of human agency limita- (or, we might say, the human soul)— infinite reality an expression of a mind that finds itself and in both an object world of spatially extended entities, energies and forc-

30 For a discussion of the this judgment, see John S. cle in this issue, "The Mizán of Material versus Metaphysical Models

true. I will conclude this by considering whether a view of mind that emerges from the writings is, if not demonstrably a scientific sense, capable of the philosophical view of the mind sented thus far.

P S :  
T M S

A further question, then: Is it to recover a view that brings an understanding of our range of ful capacities for thought, pressiveness and purposefulness a ready acceptance, too, of the tions of mind before the beyond the horizon of our finite determinate knowledge? The mind and, therefore, human

ac-  
 es, but also in a space of non-physical  
 lies  
 abstraction and ideals. The advance-  
 the  
 ment of human civilization depends  
 generally  
 on a deepening of our understanding,  
 contempo-  
 based on all capacities of mind: the  
 argue  
 instrumental and designative, but also  
 to  
 the expressive, the cooperative, and the  
 the  
 communicative, along with the mind's  
 step further  
 sense of value and purpose.  
 relation-  
 I have suggested here that interac-  
 tion with the language of Revelation,  
 particularly in a process of social  
 but  
 learning with others, draws on and  
 for it  
 strengthens the capacities of the human  
 reality,  
 mind in a way that can help us address  
 our collective problems, and advance  
 we  
 civilization. We may agree with this  
 correct-  
 proposition, of course, without also  
 and the  
 believing that Revelation, or the spe-  
 we can  
 cific claims it makes about reality, are  
 both  
 Mind, "the Power of the Human Spirit"  
 recognizes the constraints imposed by  
 generated  
 nature, and the resulting importance of  
 practices—habits of  
 science and material means, and yet  
 Arendt similar-  
 transcends those constraints in certain

tion have a degree of freedom that  
 outside the laws of causality that  
 natural and physical sciences  
 take as given. While many  
 rary philosophers persuasively  
 that natural science is not enough  
 fully understand the human mind,  
 Bahá'í idea of mind goes a  
 in holding that the mind has a  
 ship to the soul.  
 The mind may be dependent on  
 the health of the brain and body,  
 it is not entirely of that world,  
 reaches into a higher level of  
 however uncanny or other-worldly  
 this may sound to philosophers. If  
 understand the supernatural  
 ly as a quality of spirituality  
 true nature of the human spirit,  
 attain to an understanding that  
 47  
 changes in the brain are often  
 through deliberate  
 will that lead to actions.  
 ly argues effectively that will

is real, and ways that rely on our learning from the Human language of divine Revelation. character Neuroscience and studies of animal cognition are, thus, certainly necessary and essential to human advancement. in the A scientific understanding of the brain serves to inform a better understanding of the mind.<sup>31</sup> Physical happenings affect the brain, causing changes in our the limita- minds. Lack of sleep, poor nutrition, of and physical injuries provide all the ev- with idence we need in this respect. It is also notes that true that our conscious and unconscious power of choices—about what to think, how to to compre- judge, and what simple or complex ac- signs, and tions we undertake (from drinking cof- things” (Some fee to learning to ski downhill)—also cause changes in the physical state of an ear- the brain.<sup>32</sup> There are influences going neuron theory both ways—brain to mind and mind to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that brain—but not all correlations amount itself, the hu- to causal explanations. Davidson ar- sound gues—effectively, in my view—that sound body.” there are no psycho-physical laws: the mind, though some brain occurrences that then

is different from mere thinking. beings do manage to develop and right conduct, and we all are ness to how these can often themselves against terrible odds exigencies of human life. We also recognize limitations we cannot overcome in principle. Bahá’u’lláh comments on tions of any total understanding the mind given its relationship the soul, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “the uttermost limit of [the comprehension’s] flight is hend [only] the realities, properties of contingent Answered Questions 58:3). Writing to Dr. Auguste Forel, ly co-founder of the first of the brain, “for the mind to manifest man body must be whole; and a mind cannot be but in a But He also made it clear that while “circumscribed”, is

also beyond

lead to mindful actions, and some mind- of the

ful actions (the decision to drink coffee, for instance) impact the brain, there always remains a measure of free will. soul:

The brain is plastic and adaptable, and imagineth and exerteth its influ-

31 Indeed, Shoghi Effendi writes that one of the important future pursuits of is cir-

humanity will be “the sharpening and re- limitless.

finement of the human brain” (204). whether of

32 See Sanjay Gupta’s excellent the

summary of keeping the brain healthy in from

the aptly titled *Keep Sharp*.

48 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 32.3-4 2022

the laws of nature, nay, all are the slaves thereof. Man, howev- and

er, though in body the captive of nature is yet free in his mind and soul, and hath the mastery over nature.

develops a view of the world by way

‘Abdu’l-Bahá thus asserts that there minds

is physical causality, or determinism, Pippin

in the material realm, yet freedom, spontaneity and autonomy for the that,

mind, however circumscribed or lim- human

ited. This opposition between freedom expli-

and determinism has long been a co- even-

nundrum in philosophy—how can they loops’ and

exist in the same world?

the brain and body by the power

soul:

It is through the power of the

that the mind comprehendeth,

ence, whilst the soul is a power

that is free. . . . The mind

cumscribed, the soul

. . . all other beings,

the mineral, the vegetable or

animal world, cannot deviate

Our human agency operates in a self-conscious way at a level above

beyond what natural or physical sci- ence can account for by mere descrip- tion and explanation of causal mech-

anism. In considering how the mind

of its relationships with other

through language and concepts,

summarizes well the views of many other philosophers when he states

“there is something about some

capacities that . . . will never be

cable scientifically, no matter our

tual knowledge of ‘feedback

brain reorganization”

(Interanimations

Yet nowhere do we find ‘Abdu’l- 65).

Bahá bothered by this problem. He similar point,

views our minds as straddling the physical and spiritual dimensions of a more extended reality encompassing both. In contemporary philosophy, too, there is greater acceptance of the compatibility of necessity and determinism in nature and the freedom of human mind and in-

human action. This acceptance may scientific

stem in part from the realization of the impossibility, in principle, of ever arriving at an explanation of the totality of the physical and natural universe.<sup>33</sup> Nagel’s idea of an “extended reality,” the gift

some of which may be open to scientific discovery, but some remaining forever beyond science, or McGinn’s “mysterium” in physical reality, forever beyond science, are useful ways of considering the impossibility of ever knowing everything about physical or “ideal faculties

natural reality. . . . beyond nature’s ken” puts the mind,

including its “capacity for scientific acquisition,” beyond an explanation by 33 See footnote no. 23.

Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

natural science. Many contemporary The

philosophers would agree with this understood as assessment; but ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reality. This

reference to the “supernatural” is a term “other-world-

philosophers resist. McDowell recognizes the

tions the “supernatural” as an option

‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes a

yet draws a bolder conclusion:

Man possesses conscious intelligence and reflection; nature does not. This is an established fundamental among philosophers . . . The ideal faculties of man,

cluding the capacity for

acquisition, are beyond nature’s ken. These are powers whereby man is differentiated and distinguished from all other forms of life . . . Notwithstanding

of this supernatural power, it is most amazing that materialists still consider themselves within the bonds and captivity of

(Promulgation 20:5)

An “intelligence” and

. . . beyond nature’s ken” puts

49

that also involves the spiritual.

material and spiritual are

dimensions of one single

model is not any more

ly” than any other that

immateriality of our

consciousness, for understanding the mind, but quick-purposefulness. It ly dismisses it. He writes that we need realities of not be bothered by “the fear of super- and ide- naturalism,” and argues for an explana- natural tion of the human mind’s uniqueness, hand in however inexplicable by natural sci- ence, as a “second nature” (Mind and World 84).<sup>34</sup> Nagel considers “divine minded intervention” as one way to explain the contact evolution of the human mind but also real- sets it aside, opting instead for an un- realities of derstanding of mind that will have to “spiritual” if “su- wait for a currently unavailable, but he though hopes eventual, scientific understand- objections in ing of teleology that might explain the strong evolution of consciousness and mind and (Mind and Cosmos 66–67). McDowell eclipse and Nagel both dismiss the “supernat- realities of mind ural” and “divine intervention” based nature,” beyond the on a conventional understanding of the though “supernatural.” Yet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá un- in mind, once derstands the “supernatural” as simply they have that which is beyond nature. Thus, a carry mind can be embedded in nature and “spiritu-

thought, feeling and is a way of understanding human life that are abstract al, simultaneously beyond the world and yet immediately at the commonplace experience of our mindedness or consciousness. As Gabriel writes, “[a]s beings . . . we humans are in with infinitely many immaterial ities” (Meaning 9). These mind can be called “supernatural” is too far a reach, “spiritual” may also raise a culture that arguably lacks a sense of the sacred or the holy, where material aspects of life the spiritual. Yet such are “outside of biological and natural, and they may be immaterial translated into human action effects on the world that always both material and human, or

the physical but also in a larger reality al,” consequences.  
 To support the contention that the  
 34 McDowell relies on Wittgen- mind is in essence a spiritual or  
 super- natural phenomenon, we can  
 stein’s statement that, “Commanding, consider  
 questioning, recounting, chatting, are as the insufficiency of considering  
 the the  
 much part of our natural history as walk- mind, or the human being, as a  
 purely ing, eating, drinking” in order to justify natural entity. As Pippin  
 argues, human beings have “no naturally  
 his use of the term “second nature” but his determined  
 point, like Pippin’s, is that “commanding, niche in the world”  
 (Interanimations  
 questioning, recounting” are beyond the 24). We find our place in the  
 harmo- nization of our interaction with  
 natural world by the uniqueness of our hu- the  
 man mind.

50 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 32.3-4 2022

physical world in which we are embod- 55:6). “The mind itself,  
 reason itself, is an ideal reality and not  
 ied, and of our purposes and intentions, tangible”  
 meanings, norms and language that are (Promulgation 111:13). It is the  
 human mind that generates “the  
 thoroughly conceptual, abstract, and  
 sciences, arts, inventions, crafts and  
 immaterial in both our individual and  
 discoveries”  
 collective consciousness. The human (Some Answered Questions 48:4),  
 “for it is only physically that  
 creature is never a “natural man,” as  
 man resem- bles the lower creation, with  
 Hobbes and Rousseau both imagined  
 regard to his intellect he is totally  
 for their differing arguments about hu-  
 unlike it”  
 man nature. The human cannot be nat- (Paris Talks 23:3).  
 ural, because, as argued at the outset of  
 The soul is spiritual and  
 outside of nature, and so too is the human  
 the paper, she does not live primarily  
 mind in its inseparable relationship  
 in an environment, but in a world. The

to the human being is able to conceive and are as inhabit alternative worlds and orders of kind and reality, from the political to the moral nature and from the aesthetic to the spiritual, struggling the here and now of a natural life, living in worlds either shaped by us, as inspiration or demeaned by a degraded imagination. What might be, what can preserving its be, and what is valuable and desirable advancing in human life, always lies beyond our material-biological and bodily needs—yet such collectively. a human life must also serve those needs and be in harmony with the natural environment if we are to survive as a human race.

“Before all else, God created the mind.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cites this Holy Tradition on the first page of *The Secret Lawh-i- of Divine Civilization*, and explains that “[t]his supreme emblem of God stands first in the order of creation and first in rank.” He refers to “the intellect and wisdom” as “luminous lights”, unexplored. Of and states that “grace and splendour” outpouring of derive “from wisdom and the power of thought.” The mind is “the power of

soul. Unless we realize who we human creatures, different in quality from animals, and from and the physical world, we will gle to understand and embrace sponsibility that devolves upon spiritual creatures, to look ural world as we should, integrity and health, while our own health, spiritually and ally, personally and

Walk thou high above the world of being . . . Those who have

jected God and firmly cling to Nature as it is in itself are, bereft of knowledge and (Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets, Hikmat* ¶¶17–21)

In this rapid overview of the and the “power of the much has been left late, there has been an thoughtful publications about sciousness, mindedness,

sentience

the human spirit . . . the light that shines and sapience, wisdom and meaning,

from it” (Some Answered Questions knowledge and sound reasoning.

This

Mind, “the Power of the Human Spirit”

51

paper represents a modest effort at engaging in the philosophical discourse in this

field. Philosophy itself remains a discipline within which many thinkers, though

by no means all, maintain a level of respect for religion in spite of the advance of

secularism. With that in mind, I hope that this paper may inspire Bahá’ís and like-

minded individuals to read philosophy, including the works of philosophers who do not share their own views, trusting that continued earnest efforts from seekers of

truth will advance our collective understanding of the relationship between human

agency and the mind, casting light on the mind’s relationship to the “human spirit”

and “the rational soul.”

W C

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