



to anything related to God or religion.

Following Shoghi Effendi's guidance, we hope to make readers more aware of the nature and consequences of committing to one of these three viewpoints. Doing so allows readers greater freedom in choosing their options.

This paper specifically references the Bahá'í Writings for two reasons. They share the fundamental premise of the other theistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—on the existence of one transcendent personal God Who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent and is the creator of the phenomenal world. Moreover, as a more recent revelation, the Bahá'í Writings explicitly deal with issues that the other scriptures do not cover directly but which have come to the forefront of mankind's development especially since the European Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup> In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

The superiority of the present in relation to the past consists in this, that the present can take over and adopt as a model many things which have been tried and tested and the great benefits of which have been demonstrated in the past, and that it can make its own new discoveries and by these augment its valuable inheritance.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of our exploration of both intellectual and affective aspects of theism, atheism and agnosticism we may gain three benefits. First, it is hoped that readers may gain additional ways of understanding and appreciating the foundational texts of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. This contributes to Shoghi Effendi's goal of helping people to "consciously guard themselves against being caught in what one might call the undertow of materialism and atheism."

Which World Are You In?

Second, more complete understanding of different beliefs increases the opportunities for positive dialogue. By 'positive dialogue' we mean dialogue that encourages understanding and respect for differences. Achieving this goal requires at least some awareness of both the intellectual and affective consequences of theism, atheism and agnosticism since very few people are motivated to accept and maintain their beliefs on purely intellectual grounds. Obviously, positive dialogue makes Bahá'í teaching more effective.

Third, more complete understanding of other beliefs enable more effective apologetics, i.e. defending the Bahá'í revelation against criticisms of its teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that

The beloved of the Lord must stand fixed as the mountains, firm as impregnable walls ... Let them be a mighty fortress to defend His Faith, an impregnable citadel for the hosts of the Ancient Beauty. Let them faithfully guard the edifice of the Cause of God from every side.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. Worldviews

If we found ourselves suddenly transported to another planet, we would immediately be faced with a horde of questions about the nature of this new reality in which we find ourselves. “What kind of a world are we in?” “What are the potential physical threats we must overcome?” “What kind of beings live here—if any?” “If so, how must we relate to them?” “What is the nature of this new reality? Is it ordered and ruled by certain laws or is it chaotic and unpredictable? “Are there non-physical aspects of this new reality? “Are the things we see here real or illusory? How much of this reality is knowable to us? Given this utterly unprecedented situation, asking such questions is, of course, plain common sense since both physical and psychological survival and well-being depend answering them with at least some degree of accuracy.

### Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

In answering these questions, we are consciously or unconsciously engaged in the process of developing a world-view, i.e. an individual and collective response to the reality in which we find ourselves. A world-view is a synthesis—to various degrees of logical consistency—of our intellectual, affective (emotional) and conative (intentional, purposive) responses to our external environment. It is a complex of observed facts, intellectual understandings, expectations, emotions and intentions expressed in our values, attitudes, expectations, goals and, perhaps above all, a sense of meaning. Such responses are not merely abstract and intellectual, but also affective i.e. they shape our feelings, attitudes and intended actions. World-views need not necessarily be expressed in abstract philosophical discourse but can also be expressed in art, music, poetry, myth, religious beliefs, narratives and rituals as well as in secular and sacred imagery.

According to Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the founders of methodical world-view studies,<sup>6</sup>

[t]here is in mankind a persistent tendency to achieve a comprehensive interpretation, *Weltanschauung*, or philosophy, in which a picture of reality is combined with a sense of its meaning and value and with principles of action ...<sup>7</sup>

In other words, all human beings—not just cultural elites—need a world-view in order to make sense of and give coherent order to their lives at both the individual and societal levels. Without a world-view—whether invented or, or as in most cases, adopted from society—effective action is impossible because we would lack a hierarchy of ideas, values and feelings to motivate and guide action. Such a lack makes survival let alone the optimization of well-being highly unlikely. Indeed, we would not even understand our own identity because having a personal identity assumes certain things to be true about oneself and the world.

## Which World Are You In?

James Sire, author of *The Universe Next Door* reiterates and expands Dilthey's claims about the universality of world-views and explains why they are necessary.

Everyone has a world-view. Whenever any of us thinks about anything—from a casual thought (Where did I leave my watch?) to a profound question (Who am I?) we are operating within such a framework. In fact, it is only the assumption of a world-view—however basic or simple—that allows us to think at all.<sup>8</sup>

Thinking—as well as feeling and willing—always occurs in the context of a world-view, a paradigm or framework either consciously known or unconsciously assumed. If we have no intellectual criteria to tell us what is worth thinking about and to distinguish error from truth, right from wrong, and reasonable from unreasonable, we become unconcerned and blasé about things and spend no more time and energy thinking about them.<sup>9</sup> Such pre-reflective, uncritical responses subject to little if any questioning and/or rational discourse are simply accepted at face value because they are assumed to be true. <sup>10</sup> They remain “prephilosophic.”<sup>11</sup>

The existence of other—sometimes competitive—world-views presents an important challenge: what is the most effective way of understanding them? Dilthey concluded that abstract intellectual knowledge of their beliefs is insufficient; the feelings correlated with the abstract ideas are must also be taken into consideration for an accurate understanding of our own and others' world-views. To achieve this, he developed his method of “*verstehen*,” or ‘understanding’ as the evidence-informed “imaginative re-experiencing of the subjective point of view of the actor”<sup>12</sup> in regards to other world-views. This requires empathy or “*empfinden*” (literally ‘feeling into’) not just for abstract ideas but also

for feelings and emotional states.<sup>13</sup> “*Empfinden*” uses evidence-based imaginary exercises us to understand human existence empathetically, i.e. subjectively from within the standpoint of an ‘other.’<sup>14</sup> Subjectively

## Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

oriented fact-based imaginative understanding is necessary for deeper intellectual and affective understanding of all world-views.

The underlying premise of Dilthey's method is the oneness of human nature regardless of race, gender, culture or any other accidental factors. A. H. Hodges points out that Dilthey's method of fact-based imaginative and “sympathetic insight”<sup>15</sup> provides genuine knowledge of other world-views because it is “based on the identity of nature between ourselves and what we study [i.e. human expression].”<sup>16</sup> In short, human nature is one. (The “oneness of mankind” <sup>17</sup> is a common

teaching by all the Manifestations of God.) Dilthey's method of "einfühlen" or 'feeling into' shows that humans essentially share a similar inner life, and, thereby, encourages "discovering myself in the Thou."<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Dilthey's method of verstehen and einfühlen provides a disciplined scholarly practice built on a universal religious teaching. The modern historian and political philosopher Isaiah Berlin agrees with Dilthey on this issue.

Members of one culture can, by force of imaginative insight understand (what Vico calls *entrare*) the values, the ideals, the forms of life of another culture or society, even those remote in time and space ...<sup>19</sup>

Contrary to Spengler and contemporary theorists and practitioners of 'identity politics,' world-views are not isolated and impermeable monads with insuperable barriers between them. On the basis of our common human nature, we can gain genuine knowledge and understanding about different cultural and ethnic groupings. The key to gaining such knowledge is an open-minded and open-hearted willingness to do so. The Roman poet and playwright Terence (2nd century BCE) sums up this approach to understanding humanity in a single line: "I am a man and nothing human is alien to me."<sup>20</sup>

The contemporary philosopher of religion, Linda Trinkaus Zogzebski builds on Dilthey's practice of "einfühlen," pointing out there is a close connection between the abstract beliefs expressed in a world-view and

#### Which World Are You In?

their concomitant feelings and emotions. She is particularly emphatic about the need for affective or emotional understanding, stating that "many emotion-dispositions ... have an important role in evaluating any kind of belief."<sup>21</sup> Her statement reminds us that very few people adopt a world-view on strictly logical and intellectual grounds. Almost invariably, personal and affective components are involved, e.g. feelings of loyalty to a parental tradition, an emotionally overpowering experience of some kind, or an unshakeable intuition that some idea is 'right.'

Perhaps the best known work of connecting emotions with the concept of the divine is Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*. This famous text asserts that beliefs in the "holy," the divine, the "numinous"<sup>22</sup> "cannot

strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked"<sup>23</sup> and such evocations elicit intellectual, affective and conative responses. Otto's goal is not only to provide intellectual understanding but also to enable the reader to "feel" the experiences associated with "the holy," i.e. to under-

stand through "einfuehling" ('feeling into') why the experience of the holy is so compelling. He identifies the important emotional states the holy evokes, for example, "the consciousness of creaturehood"<sup>24</sup>—as

seen for example in the Bahá'í Noonday Prayer—a sense of the “wholly other”<sup>25</sup> and a feeling of “wonderfulness and rapture which lies in the beatific experience of deity.”<sup>26</sup>

Following the example provided by these scholars, this paper examines the connection between theistic, atheistic, agnostic and apathetic world-views and the correlated intellectual, conative and especially the affective responses they are most likely to arouse. Knowledge of this connection is essential to answering the question, “What is the nature of the world in which I find myself?” We shall pay special attention to the way in which certain affective states encourage a sense of confidence in and worthiness of human nature and the decisively important concepts that grow out of these feelings.

Guidance from the Manifestations of God is necessary to inspire such confidence in the spiritual aspects of human nature because, all too

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

easily, especially in the autumn and winter season of civilizations,<sup>27</sup> human beings fall into the “Slough of Despond.”<sup>28</sup> Judaism, Christianity and Islam provide this guidance in a general way. The Bahá'í Writings do as well but add explanations about the declining condition of the post-Enlightenment world. Shoghi Effendi calls for greater heroics from Bahá'ís “as humanity plunges into greater depths of despair, degradation, dissension and distress.”<sup>29</sup> He continues,

People are so markedly lacking in spirituality these days that the Bahá'ís should consciously guard themselves against being caught in what one might call the undertow of materialism and atheism, sweeping the world these days. Skepticism, cynicism, disbelief, immorality and hard-heartedness are rife”<sup>30</sup>

In “an age of scepticism and unbelief” <sup>31</sup> a loss of confidence in the spiritual nature and destiny of mankind takes hold, leading to a deep scepticism, discouragement, pessimism, cynicism and that hinders mankind from living up to its God-given spiritual nature and its potentials. Especially the history of the 20th century CE has normalized this inward condition with its degraded view of humans as no more than an animal-like material being without any spiritual aspects. When such viewpoints become wide-spread, human self-understanding becomes fore-shortened, seeing only the material world and its temptations and rewards as ‘real.’ It is denigrated by a pervasive philosophical and consumerist materialism that reduces humankind to an electro-chemical process without any spiritual features whatever. Such attitudes are not only reflected in serious literature and philosophy—vide Sartre’s *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*, George Orwell’s 1984 or Camus’ *The Stranger* and William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* but also in popular literature such as Agatha Christie’s *The Murder at the Vicarage*. Christie’s aging spinster heroine, Miss Marple reflects that “At my time of

life, one knows that the worst is usually true.” 32

The development and strengthening of human self-confidence and feeling of worthiness is one of the “eternal verities”<sup>33</sup> of God’s

Which World Are You In?

Manifestations. Here, too, there is agreement among the four global theist religions. In the Qur’an, God says, man is His “vicegerent on earth”<sup>34</sup> whereas Judaism, Christianity and the Bahá’í Faith teach that mankind is made in the spiritual image of God,<sup>35</sup> i.e. the *imago dei*. In addition, the Manifestations provide guidance to help humanity gain courage, confidence in its own nature and a sense of worthiness to overcome the seemingly overwhelming power of matter and our animal aspects.

We shall find, among other things, that ideas and feelings are in a reciprocal relationship, each feeling often leads to certain ideas, and certain ideas lead to particular feelings, emotions and attitudes. For example, the deeply felt intuition that non-physical, i.e. transcendental forces, processes and/or entities exist encourages theistic belief. In turn, theistic belief encourages feelings about the value of mankind’s spiritual nature and destiny. These results shape our attitudes to and about the world. Four general answers to this question are available in contemporary Western societies:

1. Theism i.e. reality cannot be adequately explained in strictly material terms; that there is one God only who possess the attributes of personhood;
2. Atheism i.e. non-material entities, processes and forces do not exist; belief in them is delusional and harms mankind in innumerable ways;
3. Agnosticism, i.e. the limitations of human understanding prevent us from deciding between the previous two viewpoints.

We may, of course, ask why not simply survey ‘practicing’ theists, atheists and agnostics about how they experience/feel their beliefs. Such a study of actual adherents would, provide valuable information for the sociology of belief. However, our focus is philosophical: on exploring the logically necessary intellectual and affective consequences of these beliefs and how they shape our theories of reality. These

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

two approaches are not mutually exclusive since they study different aspects of these beliefs. Indeed, sociology can gain new data by using the logical philosophical template to measure the logical coherence of actual beliefs among practitioners of these world-views.

2: Theism Part I

Explicitly or implicitly, all belief systems whether religious or secular, embed certain metaphysical principles about the basic, “most general structure of reality.”<sup>36</sup> Theism is no exception. For theism, although matter and spirit both originate from and depend on God as their necessary and sufficient condition for existence, they are ontologically different insofar as they have mutually exclusive attributes.<sup>37</sup> While matter is perceptible by the physical senses, spirit is an “intelligible reality[ ] which [has] no outward existence.”<sup>38</sup> In Christianity, this distinction is made in the statement “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”<sup>39</sup> Judaism’s view of the difference between matter and spirit evolved in the direction of clearly distinguishing the two.<sup>40</sup>

The matter/spirit distinction has far-reaching intellectual and affective consequences. Recognizing the existence of non-material aspects of reality—identified in the Bahá’í Writings as “intelligible realities”<sup>41</sup>—determines how we orient ourselves in the world. Because reality is not metaphysically one-dimensional<sup>42</sup> but dual, we cannot limit our attention to sensible things but must also take account of aspects of reality that cannot be physically perceived or measured and quantified. The matter/spirit distinction may be described as being ‘open’ insofar as it does not confine our intellectual and affective knowledge to the material world. It opens new possibilities for human growth and evolution.

The presence of the unseen may arouse fear (more on this below) but it also encourages us to be more curious about and more conscious about our surroundings and to pay more attention to the natural world as a carrier of ‘signs’ of its divine origin. This heightened attention to the

### Which World Are You In?

nature of reality may plausibly be regarded as one of the factors in the beginnings of science and theology, since both start with the need to understand the real world more adequately. As we try to explain what we observe and/or intuit, “the rational soul” develops new capacities of thinking, such as the use of analogical reasoning, i.e. explaining the unseen by references to the seen.<sup>43</sup>

From the human perspective, the difference between matter and non-material spirit is exacerbated because spirit has powers denied to material things. It can, for example, exist invisibly and, thereby, can observe us without being observed itself. Unlike material bodies, the intuited non-physical reality can be everywhere at the same time, i.e. omnipresent. Whereas non-physical, spiritual entities are immune from physical harm, material bodies of all kinds are subject to accidents to diseases and all manner of natural disasters, to starvation and attacks by human and animal foes, and eventually death. This, too, suggests

supernatural powers not available to humans (though there will be some who seek to acquire such powers). Such differences encourage humans to distinguish among (1) the most powerful and the less powerful or powerless<sup>44</sup>; (2) the contingent and non-contingent; and (3) the unlimited and the limited.

These conclusions regarding our ontological situation vis-à-vis non-physical aspects of reality awaken deep and unshakeable feelings of human dependence and weakness vis-à-vis the invisible entities, forces or processes. However, as will be shown below, they also lead to certain insights about human strengths that we can build on. Indeed, doing exactly that is the purpose of God's Manifestations on earth.

The combined effect of the powers of the non-physical entities and forces easily lead to an overpowering feeling of mankind's vulnerability and even powerlessness, and, with it, to a sense of ontological dependence and inferiority. For good or ill, non-material entities can act on us in enigmatic ways, i.e. unseen, by unknown means and for unknown purposes. These abilities can arouse not only wonder,

#### Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

respect, awe, curiosity and a desire to investigate but also suspicion vis-à-vis nature and other people, fear and even inhibit the ability to act. The labyrinthian tangle of contradictory feelings may also generate a strong overwhelming sense of the inherent mysteriousness of and fascination with the non-material aspects of existence.

Fascination, be it the fascination of the wonderful or the fascination of the horrible or a convoluted snarl of both that we find difficult if not impossible to untangle, leads to what Rudolf Otto in *The Idea of the Holy* identifies as the "mysterium tremendum."<sup>45</sup> His emphasis is, rightly, on the feelings, not on the merely abstract intellectual knowledge about the reality and truth of the unknowability, omnipresence and omnipotence of the "numinous" or "the holy." According to Otto, the complexity of our experience and feeling of the "mysterium tremendum"<sup>46</sup> unleashes a wide range of emotions ranging from the sudden transformative feeling-knowledge of "transport and ecstasy,"<sup>47</sup> to "intoxicated frenzy"<sup>48</sup> and even to "wild and demonic"<sup>49</sup> emotional episodes. The intrinsic mysteriousness of reality, encourages a welter of seemingly contradictory feelings. Among them we find the feelings of uncanniness and dread; bafflement, perplexity and confusion as well as curiosity, wonder and amazement.

Rudolf Otto associates the recognition of inferiority and dependence as "the element of absolutely mysterious power over which humans have no control. The various beings hypothesized—gods, ghosts, animal spirits—"retain numina,"<sup>50</sup> i.e. an aura of power, "awefulness" and the "uncanny."<sup>51</sup> We feel surrounded by mysterious forces, processes

and beings, and, therefore, easily fall prey to feelings of cosmic paranoia exile and existential homelessness, (reflected in the story of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden), isolation, estrangement from the world, hopelessness and meaninglessness in the face of human transience. According to Rudolph Otto, at best we can propitiate these super-human powers by attaining “consciousness of createdness and the consciousness of creaturehood”<sup>52</sup> by means of humble acceptance,

### Which World Are You In?

individual and communal prayer and ritual, and by practices to foster a feeling of harmony with the unseen powers. Indeed, recognizing that “Thou art all,”<sup>53</sup> and becoming “weary of self”<sup>54</sup> we may even seek “the annihilation of self”<sup>55</sup> by following a mystical or monastic path.

However, as noted above, there are positive intellectual and affective gains to be derived even from these seemingly invincible negative feelings. In fact, these positive gains are unachievable without first directly facing the negatives because they are the necessary conditions for awakening humanity’s consciousness of its own powers of mind, of its own “rational soul”<sup>56</sup> which distinguishes it from the rest of creation. Without the challenges presented by the material world mankind would have little if any opportunity to discover its own mental and spiritual powers because there would be no pressing reason to actualize these potentials. This actualization entails realizing that “Man possesses conscious intelligence and reflection; nature does not.”<sup>57</sup> Consequently, mankind’s self-confidence is promoted and sustained. Consciousness and reflection give humans power over physical nature.<sup>58</sup> Even more, consciousness—an “intelligible reality”—is experienced or felt (through intuition<sup>59</sup>) as a non-physical process diminishes the ontological distance between humankind and the non-physical or spiritual aspects of reality. Recognition of similarity to the spiritual beings and forces, encourages feelings of self-confidence and worthiness in human nature. Among other things, such consciousness of our pre-eminence in the created world and the resulting confidence is the basis for diminishing the propensity to “To act like the beasts of the field.”<sup>60</sup> Consciousness is what gives humankind a sense of its superiority over material reality and, thereby, strengthens humanity’s self-confidence in the struggle to survive—and thrive—in an often hostile and dangerous world. Even more, it encourages confidence in our ability to control—not suppress—our lower animal nature and, thereby, continue our evolution as moral beings. Without the feeling of confidence in our mental and spiritual powers and a sense of worthiness as human beings, it is easy to ignore our potentials as moral and

### Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

spiritual beings. The Manifestations of God inspire us to outgrow this

diminished, self-inhibiting and depressed understanding of ourselves, often as no more than one animal among all the others.

Uncanniness need not necessarily provoke only negative reactions. It can also stimulate a feeling of astonishment and with it, curiosity not only about “the Holy” but about ourselves as well. Awareness of our limitations combined with a “fascination”<sup>61</sup> with the ultimate source of this experience prompts—at least in some—an epistemological quest for ‘other ways of knowing’ appropriate to this mysterious aspect of reality. Obviously, sense perception is not well-suited to this quest. Therefore, we seek “other forms of experience which deserve to be called cognitive.”<sup>62</sup> Among these ways are an openness to intuition,<sup>63</sup> an “awaken[ing] [of] spiritual susceptibilities,”<sup>64</sup> inspiration, i.e. the “promptings of the Holy Spirit”<sup>65</sup> and meditation practices.<sup>66</sup> Even such relatively common experiences as dreams, visions, physical disciplines such as fasting or self-isolation, and NDE’s can provide knowledge, especially about ourselves. Again, the feeling of confidence in our potentials for acquiring all kinds of knowledge plays an important role in pursuing knowledge.

Moreover, overpowering awe in the presence of “the holy” inspires worship and praise along with a feeling of gratitude for the unearned and unasked for gift of existence. Reminding us of existence as a good is an essential task of theistic religions amid the sufferings of the world. We sense that life has intrinsic value and that human existence is ‘ontologically right,’ despite what our own personal fate may be and, thereby, transcend these events.<sup>67</sup> Once this good is forgotten or worse, never recognized, despair and nihilism with their attendant cynicism and self and socially destructive attitudes and actions, individuals and societies have come to the ‘end of the road.’ Like Oedipus in Oedipus at Colonus, they will feel and act out the belief that it is best not to be born and if this catastrophe happens, it is best to return to non-existence.

Which World Are You In?

Not to be born at all  
Is best, far best that can befall,  
Next best, when born, with least delay  
To trace the backward way. 68

This existential optimism is a necessary motivator for good will to all as well as affective and intellectual progress. As will be shown below, this feeling is enhanced by the theist doctrine of a personal God.

The mysterious nature of transcendent beings and/or forces may also cause us to experience what Otto calls “creature-consciousness or creature feeling ... [which] is the note of submergence into nothingness before an overpowering absolute might of some kind.”<sup>69</sup> Such feelings are easily understood given the unknown and, thereby unpredictable reality seems to surround us at all times and all places; its omnipres-

ence—and knowledge of our secret deeds—can easily unnerve us. The Bahá'í Writings—in agreement with Judaism, Christianity and Islam—teach that compared to God's absolute, i.e. unconditionally independent existence, mankind does not exist, is 'as nothing' because humans are totally dependent on God.<sup>70</sup>

However, an acute feeling of mankind's intrinsic deficiencies need not necessarily lead to a "peculiar dread" but can also lead to positive intellectual and affective results. Dread can activate as well as paralyze us. A sense of deficiency can prompt a desire to improve which, in turn, requires the slow and careful cultivation of humankind's latent intellectual and affective capacities needed for ethical, material, cultural and psycho-spiritual progress. Among these necessary skills are self-observation, reflection, self-critique, a sense of humility, a sense of responsibility and a deeply felt commitment to do better in the future. These practices also require an unflagging dedication to truth, which itself requires a willingness to distinguish between preferences and fact and a willingness to override personal preferences for truth. We

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

may call this complex of feelings and their ensuing beliefs 'conscience' which depends on the independent investigation of truth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá praises those who have

investigated the truth and have been freed from imitations and superstitions, that ye observe with your own eyes and not with those of others, hearken with your own ears and not with the ears of others.<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out that God "has endowed [mankind] with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to investigate and discover the truth, and that which he finds<sup>72</sup> real and true he must accept." <sup>73</sup> It is noteworthy that both religion and science have their roots in the skills and commitments acquired from "dread" and a consciousness of human deficiencies. In other words, both science and religion have the same existential origins and the same purpose.

The tendency to reflect on our own thoughts and actions encourages greater social and moral self-consciousness which are required for human psycho-spiritual progress both in individuals and societies. For this reason Bahá'u'lláh admonishes us to

[b]ring thyself to account ere thou art summoned to a reckoning, on the Day when no man shall have strength to stand for fear of God, the Day when the hearts of the heedless ones shall be made to tremble.<sup>74</sup>

Affectively, such growing powers of self-consciousness can stimulate feelings of self-confidence and with it, hope for oneself and even humanity in general as seen, for example, in the Bahá'í doctrine of

progressive revelation. We shall discuss below how hope is enhanced and becomes one of the great gifts of belief in a personal God.

Which World Are You In?

### 3. Theism Part II

The consequences of recognizing the existence of non-material realities become intensified and expanded with the theist principle that the world is the creation of a single, transcendent and personal Being Who is actively involved in the life of mankind. This development is not merely an arbitrary anthropomorphic imposition prompted by ‘pre-philosophic’ i.e. unreflective and uncritical thought or by “vain imaginings.”<sup>75</sup> There is also an underlying logic that is not difficult to discern. It is based on the previously examined distinction between matter and spirit and its consequences as well as on empirical observation of human actions.

The unusual and seemingly ‘supernatural’ powers of the non-material aspects of reality—especially in contrast to the contingency of material things and life—suggest that spirit is permanent and, therefore, more real than matter. Since material things are never observed to come into existence from nothing by their own power, i.e. they are contingent, analogical reasoning on the basis of this evidence suggests that the physical world itself originated from or was created by external permanent i.e. non-contingent spiritual agency. In other words, there is a distinction between (4) the Creator and the created, or, the Origin and the originated; (5) the independent and the dependent; and the (6) the essence and the accident. The existence of the contingent material world depends on non-contingent external action by non-material, i.e. spiritual agent. In addition, because the physical world is accidental, i.e. contingent and the spiritual power is essential, i.e. it is the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of the physical world.

Logic supports this view. Because the universe is existentially constituted entirely of material, i.e. contingent entities, it follows that the universe itself is contingent.<sup>76</sup> If every part of a machine is destructible, the machine itself is destructible, i.e. its existence is not necessary. Claiming otherwise implies that machines, mountains, plants—or the universe—can exist separately from their parts. Such a claim—that a

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

mountain or tricycle can exist separately from their parts—is, in effect, an admission of non-material realities, akin to Plato’s theory of Ideas. The readily apparent consequence is that the contingency of the universe requires a Creator Who is not subject to the limitations of physical existence. In the same way, a pot requires a potter, i.e. an external entity possessing consciousness, the ability to make choices and intentionally work towards a purpose and desiring the existence of the pot. Such an entity also possesses individuality because it is a particular kind of

being, i.e. it has an identity—whatever that identity may be.

Direct experience also teaches that effects must in some way or degree resemble their cause. A piece of ice will not light a fire in kindling because ice and fire do not share any relevant attributes, namely, heat; a lit match, however, will do so because it also possesses heat and, therefore, can impart heat to kindling. From this, it is only a small logical step to realize that even if other lesser spirits exist, there must be a single supremely powerful being to create the vast complexity of the world. The vastness of the world requires a commensurate cause,<sup>77</sup> namely, a single all-powerful Being beyond any conceivable limitations.<sup>78</sup>

These necessary attributes of the potter are also the qualities necessary for personhood, thereby making it rational to conclude that the superior non-material power must be a person or, at least, have the attributes of personhood.<sup>79</sup> For Bahá'ís as well as other theist thinkers, Shoghi Effendi confirms these conclusions about a personal God by stating,

What is meant by personal God is a God Who is conscious of His creation, Who has a Mind, a Will, a Purpose, and not, as many scientists and materialists believe, an unconscious and determined force operating in the universe. Such conception of the Divine Being, as the Supreme and ever present Reality in the world, is not anthropomorphic, for it transcends all human limitations and forms, and does by no means attempt to define the essence of Divinity which is obviously beyond any human comprehension. To say that God is a

Which World Are You In?

personal Reality does not mean that He has a physical form, or does in any way resemble a human being.<sup>80</sup>

Of course, God has these powers in a super-eminent way that I, they are only analogically reflected in human nature. Shoghi Effendi's list of attributes—consciousness, a mind, a will and a purpose—are the necessary and sufficient conditions for possessing personhood. Without these foundational attributes there can be no meaningful moral agency; no love, care or concern; no sense of justice; no freedom of action; no scale of values, obligations or rights; no sense of meaning and no intentional relationships. Impersonal, unconscious forces, processes or machines—not even computers—cannot feel love, concern and self-motivation, demonstrate moral agency, establish a sense of values or initiate and sustain desired relationships. Unconscious, non-personal entities, processes and forces, like computers, can, of course, imitate the actions and procedures we associate with these attributes <sup>81</sup> but it is a superficial imitation insofar as it lacks the attributes listed by Shoghi Effendi.<sup>82</sup>

The Bahá'í Writings themselves also teach the personhood of God on

the basis of a metaphysical argument: God must have the attributes of personhood because these attributes are evident in mankind. As previously noted “Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God.”<sup>83</sup> Mankind—wholly dependent and created—cannot possess spiritual capacities not super-eminently present in the Creator. Otherwise, not only would the created be superior to the Creator but also such capacities in mankind would have arisen from nothingness, i.e. without a sign in God’s essence.<sup>84</sup> Humans can only possess personhood because the foundational attributes of personhood as well as their consequences such as moral agency and the ability to love are present—albeit in super-eminent form—in God. This line of reasoning is confirmed by the Manifestations of God.

#### Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

Perhaps the most far-reaching consequence of God’s possession of the attributes of personhood is that it strengthens humanity with what we may call ‘cosmic confidence,’ i.e. the conviction that mankind’s ‘being’

or existence is good in and of itself and this good exceeds whatever natural and moral disasters may occur to individuals and/or entire societies.<sup>85</sup> Given the persistent physical, moral, social, political economic and psychological obstacles that beset our lives, humans would—and do—lose any hope for the future, fall into discouragement and despair about the value, purpose and meaning of life. Too easily they would fall into “the station of the ignorant ones who are as animals, following every croaker and shaken by every wind. ‘Forsake them to play in their shallow waters.’ ”<sup>86</sup> If human existence is not considered a good in itself, affectively, conatively and intellectually, then the value of love and care, whether physical, social, moral or spiritual care or whether for ourselves or others is, in effect, denied. Such negative emotions are exacerbated when a society succumbs to a materialist view of humans as electro-chemical machines and/or animals ‘just like the others’ with everyone fighting a feverish ‘war of all against all’ to acquire satisfaction in the material world.

In sharp contrast, in the four global theist religions, cosmic confidence is based on the personhood of God Whose love for humanity is the ultimate reason for our existence. ‘Love’ expressed by an impersonal force or process—like ‘love’ expressed by a machine—would be utterly meaningless and contribute nothing to our confidence in the face of the powerful challenges of the physical world. We exist because we our existence is loved by a personal God. Through Bahá’u’lláh, God reminds us of this basic principle of theism: “I loved thy creation, hence I created thee.”<sup>87</sup> Since God is “conscious of His creation” and has, among other attributes “a Mind, a Will [and] a Purpose,” it follows logically that creation as a whole and especially humans are inten-

tionally “call[ed] into being”<sup>88</sup> by a transcendental Being Who wishes mankind’s existence. We are not simply “accidental composition[s] and arrangement[s]”<sup>89</sup> resulting from a long series of random physical processes and coincidences i.e. a long serendipitous sequence of

Which World Are You In?

coincidences no less miraculous than a virgin birth. This heightens humanity’s feelings of self-esteem as divine creations.

The Quran shows God’s love for mankind when He says, “and behold, We said to the angels: “Bow down to Adam” and they bowed down.”<sup>90</sup> Similarly, Judaism, Christianity and the Bahá’í Writings portray humanity as the spiritual image of God, the *imago dei*. Because our individual and collective existence is an intentional creation of divine personal love, mankind can not only trust God—even when things go wrong as in the story of Job—but can also have full confidence in our own objective intrinsic value.

The Bahá’í Writings enlarge the scope of mankind’s intrinsic value and purpose by teaching that humankind has a specific place and purpose in cosmic evolution: “If man did not exist, the universe would be without result, for the object of existence is the appearance of the perfections of God.”<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, God created humanity with a unique nature

Human nature is created with a special essence—the capacity to reflect all the names of God—which distinguishes us from all other things and gives humankind a special position in the scale of being. Mankind, i.e. human nature, stands out because ... for each name, each attribute, each perfection which we affirm of God there exists a sign in man.<sup>92</sup>

Cosmic confidence is supported not only by mankind’s special and necessary place in the hierarchy of existence but also by the knowledge that our unique essential nature is created by God and, therefore, “his species and essence undergo no change.”<sup>93</sup> Even “education cannot alter the inner essence of a man.”<sup>94</sup> We are, so to speak, safe from ourselves! This is important in modern, post-Enlightenment times in which the denial of human nature and the concept of its complete malleability have led to catastrophic experiments to design and create a ‘new man’ according to the desires of fallible—though fashionable—philosophers and ideologues.<sup>95</sup> The theist religions agree here as well. This not only

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

provides confidence in humanity’s essential nature but also gives us relief by freeing us from the pressures exerted by the ideological delusions of our time.

Knowing that we are conscious and intentional creations of God, Who

gifted us with a purpose in cosmic evolution also gives mankind the courage not to succumb to the intimidation of a vast and overwhelmingly powerful physical universe. We remember that because “Man is, in reality, a spiritual being,”<sup>96</sup> and that “the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident—that is to say, the body—be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.”<sup>97</sup> Leaving aside the technical Aristotelian terminology, the gist of this statement is that matter cannot harm the “rational soul.”<sup>98</sup> This assures not only the ontological superiority of the “rational soul” against overwhelming physical force, but also its immortality. In other words, our feelings of being intimidated and even fatally discouraged by the physical universe and its catastrophes—bodily diseases, droughts, floods, crop failures, earthquakes, genetic disabilities, sheer accidents—are irrational and unjustified. Spiritually, we are not entombed in the world of matter though, of course, our bodies are.

In addition, confidence in ourselves as God’s creations strengthens the courage and willingness to actualize our potentialities not only as individual self-improvement but also as societies in establishing education systems for public well-being. The quest for individual self-improvement often begins with an intuition that there is ‘something more’ we feel compelled to do to feel fully ‘at home’ with ourselves, i.e. we are spurred on by what choreographer Martha Graham called a “divine dissatisfaction” with what we are compared to the inner potentialities we feel or intuit within ourselves. Bahá’u’lláh affirms the reality of this feeling, saying, “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”<sup>99</sup>

Not being completely entombed in matter and time generates hope, in other words, a positive attitude or feeling about the future, and,

Which World Are You In?

consequently, a certain enthusiasm and willingness to attain this future by appropriate conduct in the present. Such confidence encourages virtues necessary for survival and growth, as, for example, perseverance, open-mindedness, intellectual and affective flexibility, and a willingness to experiment. Equally important, hope for a better future generates a willingness to engage in self-criticism for self-improvement as well as a willingness to sacrifice for others even if only to receive a just reward beyond the material world. Kantian deontologists may object that acting for a reward is not a virtue but in the case of attaining heaven (however defined), why wouldn’t it be? How can we rationally assert it is not a virtue to choose to act in favor of one’s own spiritual well-being and progress in the eternal afterlife? Indeed, it would seem to be the only rational thing to do. Nor would doing so lead to outrightly selfish acts because these would hinder our spiritual and moral progress throughout eternity.

However, hope for immortality also engenders a healthy and rational fear—if for no other reason than that no one wants to encounter the consequences of their misdeeds for eternity!<sup>100</sup> In other words, the hope for immortality also helps humans take their moral responsibilities more seriously; they become ‘morally engaged’ and develop greater willingness to assess their own actions more seriously. As `Abdu’l-Bahá’ points out, disbelief in personal immortality easily leads humans to neglect the acquisition of virtues:

The conception of annihilation is a factor in human degradation, a cause of human debasement and lowliness, a source of human fear and abjection. It has been conducive to the dispersion and weakening of human thought, whereas the realization of existence and continuity has upraised man to sublimity of ideals, established the foundations of human progress and stimulated the development of heavenly virtues; therefore, it behooves man to abandon thoughts of nonexistence and death, which are absolutely imaginary, and see himself ever-living, everlasting in the divine purpose of his creation. He must turn away from ideas which degrade the human soul<sup>101</sup>

Lights of `Irfán Book Twenty-One

Moreover, the deep convictions allows feelings of hope for ultimate justice, the confidence that even though economic, political and moral criminals may escape justice on earth, their deeds will be judged in the next life. This certainty has tremendous societal implications. In the first place, cosmic confidence and hope make the effort to improve ourselves and society worthwhile despite the trouble that we may have to endure. More specifically, hope for God’s justice helps curb the desire for personal revenge that can tear entire families, societies and even countries apart. Such hope helps sustain good order and peace in society.

Without the vital feelings of confidence, hope and courage in the face of overwhelming physical power, it is difficult to see how science could have evolved. `Abdu’l-Bahá’ makes it clear, that humanity

wresteth the sword from the hands of nature, and giveth it a grievous blow ... Man hath the powers of will and understanding, but nature hath them not. Nature is constrained, man is free. Nature is bereft of understanding, man understandeth. Nature is unaware of past events, but man is aware of them.<sup>102</sup>

In other words, mankind’s intellectual and scientific progress depends on the feelings of confidence inspired by the theist doctrine that humankind is made in the spiritual image of God. Humanity occupies a special place in the scale of being. Indeed, human nature is the vanguard of the spiritual aspects of the evolutionary process. There is, for example, no common denominator between animal behavior and such human behaviors as writing operas, establishing public schools, engaging in religious services, creating legal systems with codified

laws and a charter of individual rights or the systematic pursuit of scientific knowledge.<sup>103</sup>

The cosmic confidence that forms a foundational part of theism is also strengthened by its ability to provide logical and coherent solutions to four fundamental problems in ethics. By ‘logical and coherent’ we mean solutions that follow from a basic premise—the distinction

Which World Are You In?

between matter and spirit—and suggest certain conclusions by inferential and/or analogical reasoning. In short, the theist solutions form a part of a unified whole.

The first question is, ‘Who—if anyone—has the legitimate authority or the right to lay down moral principles and precepts for the human race?’ Given God’s His knowledge of His creation, it is difficult to imagine who else could have genuine ethical legitimacy since His knowledge is the only reliable guide to ‘the good.’ In addition, it is virtually self-

evident that no human and no collection of human beings inherently possess such legitimacy by virtue of their human nature. The reasons are obvious: humans are fallible and fickle, have personal interests, lack absolute independence from all things, i.e. are susceptible to outside influence, interference and coercion. Thus, humans cannot guarantee objectivity and justice. They also lack the unlimited knowledge needed to establish viable ethical and judicial standards. God is unaffected by the aforementioned deficiencies.

The second aspect of authority is the question of power. Without legitimacy, power is tyranny and forceful enslavement but without power, legitimacy remains purely theoretical, i.e. impotent. Thus, to see how legitimacy is actually put into practice we must ask ‘Who—if anyone—has the power necessary to enable people to follow these rules despite their short-comings and weaknesses?’ ‘Who—if anyone—has the power to impose His will and His ethical judgments on humankind? Who—if anyone—can impose both obligations or laws and consequences for committed or omitted acts? The belief in one personal God allows a logically consistent answer to these questions—God alone has that power. He exercises it through the “eternal verities” taught by the Manifestations as well as in the attributes and potentials of human nature. Humans may stray from these for a time, but in the long run, they return to the guidance implicit in their God-given essence. Human powers, at best, are able to violate mankind’s essential nature, but all too

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

often mainly by violence, legalized oppression and vast amounts of collective self-deception. God-substitutes such as governments, priest-

hoods or ideologies lack this power because they are subject to the vicissitudes of ubiquitous change and they lack the legitimacy and the power to make their ethical requirements effective. Inherent human limitations prevent this.

The third aspect of authority is ‘universality.’ Here, the most fundamental question is, ‘Is there such a thing as a universal human nature that underlies personal and societal ethics?’ The four theist religions answer this question positively, i.e. that a common human nature allows us to identify and build on our inherent nature that will—in the Bahá’í teachings—lead to a unified federal world state. Such a future is at least possible—if humans choose to follow the guidance of the Manifestations and above all, the ‘law of love.’ Mankind originated with God’s love and so this divine motive is the fundamental feature of our existence. `Abdu’l-Bahá warns us that “No worldly power can accomplish the universal love.”<sup>104</sup>

The fourth problem is the traditional problem of moral ‘evil,’ i.e. consciously chosen and harmful acts against others. How can a beneficent God allow such horrible events to happen? Either He cannot stop them, in which case He is not omnipotent, or He will not stop them, in which case He is immoral by allowing needless suffering to continue. Though this subject has been voluminously debated, in our view, only two points need to be understood.

First, no ‘solution’ to these concerns can and should ever satisfy us.

Satis-

faction with any answer encourages a careless attitude, especially towards human suffering. As a result, we would be less determined to mitigate or end suffering and that, in turn, leads to the emotional, intellectual and conative coarsening, demoralizing and animalizing of human existence. However, because there is no satisfying explanation of suffering does not mean that there is no framework to provide at least some degree of understanding. Theism provides such a framework.

Which World Are You In?

The first and most obvious is that unlike God, we do not and cannot know all of the relevant facts about human existence. Therefore, should not rush to judgment that suffering is ultimately meaningless because within the context of the physical world, we can see no meaning in it.

#### 4. Atheism Part I

This paper concerns itself with one form of ‘positive atheism’ which directly asserts that non-material beings, forces and processes do not exist and even more, cannot exist. Positive atheism advocates metaphysical naturalism, claiming that only material nature is real and that any contrary beliefs are false. Consequently, it rejects as false the concept of God found in Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá’í Faith. More specifically, it denies the existence of any being that is sup-

posedly supernatural, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, personal and morally good. The concept of such a being is logically self-contradictory and cannot even be properly explained.

At this point it is necessary to distinguish 'atheism' from 'anti-theism.' The so-called 'New Atheism,' best represented by Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, and Stenger, is militantly anti-theist. These authors proclaim that God does not exist, that "faith is inherently an enemy of reason and science and no reconciliation between them is possible,"<sup>105</sup> and that religion harms individuals and societies. Hitchens claims religious instruction for children is "child abuse"<sup>106</sup> and Harris questions the validity of religious tolerance, stating that "the very ideal of religious tolerance—born of the notion that every person can believe whatever he wants about God—is one of the principle forces driving us toward the abyss."<sup>107</sup> The New Atheists agree that religion "must be actively resisted and attacked whenever possible."<sup>108</sup> Openly ridiculing theists and theism is an important part of their strategy.<sup>109</sup> Of course, the New Atheism is far from 'new.' Indeed, it has not added a single new argument against God and religion. Furthermore, it was already in vogue in the late 18th C with the popular writings of Diderot, d'Holbach and D'Alembert who regarded religion itself as a set of vile deceptions and

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

an obstacle to human progress and maturity. Although Kant himself was not an absolute anti-theist,<sup>110</sup> his essay "What is Enlightenment?" established the motto of anti-theism, "Sapere Aude" i.e. dare to think for yourself. Anti-theists strongly believe that theists are inherently, thoughtless, brain-washed, irrational, intellectually ignorant and easily led. (They have obviously never debated with a Jesuit!) In contradiction to anti-theist biases, Bahá'u'lláh makes this concept one of the foundational teachings of His revelation.<sup>111</sup>

Marxism and its variants are the most wide-spread forms of anti-theism. Marx writes,

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people ... The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness.<sup>112</sup>

In the Soviet Union and other Communist nations, religious life was actively, often harshly suppressed and "scientific atheism" courses were mandatory from school to university. The failure of this atheist education program became apparent as soon as Communism failed as a system of government in 1990 and the Russian Orthodox re-emerged as a potent force in Russian society.

The one issue on which atheists and anti-theists agree is the metaphysical denial of God's existence. Metaphysically, they assert that reality is one-

dimensional, i.e. strictly material, and that there are no transcendental aspects, levels or planes of reality from which the material world is originated or ruled. All apparently non-physical phenomena such as thought, 'magical' powers or paranormal events can be adequately explained in strictly physical terms. The metaphysical denial of God, is, of course, a form of faith in itself since there is no empirical, scientific proof for this view—which invalidates it on the basis of its own principles.

### Which World Are You In?

Let us look at atheism in general and then examine particular kinds of atheism. Having stated the essential intellectual principles of atheism, our discussion will examine the affective or emotional aspects of denying God.

One of the most frequently cited affective consequence of disbelief in God is a feeling of relief and freedom from the dictatorial demands of God Who arbitrarily prescribes human nature, mankind's moral obligations and the meaning of our lives. Moreover, He does so without consulting us, the recipients of His 'largesse' and thereby de-values us as unworthy of consideration in matters that concern us more than Him. Fortunately, no such Being exists. We are free, i.e. there are no a priori commands requiring universal obedience or worship both of which demean human nature by enslaving us to an ontologically different Being Who does not have our interests in mind. Without this tyrant overshadowing us, we can at last, exercise our freedom to make individual and collective choices as we see fit and can concentrate on being human beings instead of puppets trying to dance on someone else's string. Not only that, but we are no longer subject to the humiliating bribery of heaven or threats of eternal torment in hell. As a result, we are free to develop a genuinely human morality based on human standards and choices and not subject to a pseudo-morality based on obedience imposed from the outside.

The freedom of atheism is also used to support the concept of human dignity. We are free to be themselves, albeit within the limits of their society. Humans can finally attain the dignity of taking responsibility for their own actions for good and/or ill. Without that, we remain perpetual children who expect someone else to 'die for our sins,' or to offer us mandatory 'guidance.' Both 'gifts' discourage individual and collective thought and action and, in effect, hold back whatever moral or psychological progress we might make. Why think, when we can 'shift the blame'? Such seemingly well-meaning 'offers' not only demean us by assuming we cannot take responsibility for ourselves but

### Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

also infantilizes us by teaching permanent dependence on others for ethical integrity. No society can function with such intellectual laziness since viable societies require individual decisions and responsibil-

ity commensurate with the age we live in.

The problem with the idea of human dignity based on the non-existence of God is that it provides no intrinsic reason to draw that conclusion. There is no necessary logical inference leading from the non-existence of God to the concept of human dignity. The atheist view that humans,—like animals and plants—are no more than packages of bio-chemical processes, are “accidental composition[s] and arrangement[s]”<sup>113</sup> resulting from a long series of random physical processes and coincidences.<sup>114</sup> Feelings of discouragement and despair about human nature and its value are a far more likely outcome than any feelings of gratitude for existing. Recognizing the intrinsic ‘goodness of being’ has no rational basis in the belief that humanity is the outcome of a long chain of cosmic accidents and mutations.

Consequently, atheist views of human dignity can only be based on personal subjective feelings and beliefs—and these are notoriously unreliable and malleable according to the needs and preferences of the hour. In contrast, theism provides a necessary logical inference from mankind as God’s willful creation to human dignity.<sup>115</sup> Because humans are intentionally “call[ed] into being”<sup>116</sup> by God, theism provides an objective i.e. not a purely subjective basis for the intrinsic dignity of mankind.

Pride and courage are two other liberating emotions encouraged by atheism. When we are free to stand up for ourselves, especially against an overwhelming but unworthy power, we tend to feel a need to be true to ourselves and live ‘at our best’ for the obvious reason that doing so is the only available—and rational—choice. Few people wish difficult lives on themselves, and those who for medical or anti-social reasons ‘go too far’ are restrained by society. Positive atheism frees us from needlessly demeaning human dignity by replacing divinely mandated ‘sin’ with socially legislated ‘crime.’

Which World Are You In?

Pride and courage also inspire a passion for cosmic justice. Why should humankind be burdened with demands not imposed on the rest of nature? We are, in fact, animals like the others, i.e. simply a part of nature; our seemingly special brain powers have traceable roots in the animal world and make us different in degree but not in kind. Imposing ‘spiritual’ rules on us and requiring us to ‘live up to’ our spiritual

destinies is simply rank injustice. Humans neither asked for nor were asked about these impositions and there is no reason we should accept them. Like Lao Tzu or Henry David Thoreau, we can draw our moral guidance from nature without the help of divine Manifestations, and make adjustments due to human peculiarities as necessary. Finally, we must accept that, like all species, we will eventually be superseded by other kinds of being that—see the dinosaur-bird connection—may be

totally different from us.

However, there are also problematic intellectual affective and conative consequences of positive atheism. While Judaism, Christianity and Islam implicitly teach that morals ultimately originate with God and are not from nature, the Bahá'í Writings explicitly explain why this is so. The natural world is essentially different from humankind:

Man hath the powers of will and understanding, but nature hath them not. Nature is constrained, man is free. Nature is bereft of understanding, man understandeth. Nature is unaware of past events, but man is aware of them. Nature forecasteth not the future; man by his discerning power seeth that which is to come. Nature hath no consciousness of itself, man knoweth about all things.<sup>117</sup>

In other words, nature's lack of a "rational soul" and its lack of spiritual capacities make it an unreliable guide for human morals. Lao Tzu, Thoreau and other ethical naturalists select the aspects of nature carefully to exclude the life and death struggles for survival and nature's carelessness about human well-being. Interestingly enough, these 'negative' attributes of nature is precisely what other ethical naturalists—National Socialists in Germany—take as their models.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

The most basic of these is that, despite protestations to the contrary, atheism is out of step with or contrary to human nature as encountered by historians, archeologists, sociologists and anthropologists. None of these academic disciplines have ever found a society at any level of development without beliefs about a spirit world distinct from the material world, or without belief in God or gods or spiritual beings of some kind. It is clear that societies and cultures operate on certain religious premises. The persistent and globally pervasive presence of religion would not be the case if cultures and societies did not find such beliefs congruent to human needs and, thereby, successful in ordering individual and collective life.

This conclusion is supported by the resurgence of religious belief—not necessarily church attendance—in Russia despite seventy years of programmatic education in "scientific atheism" throughout the Soviet school and university system.<sup>118</sup> Developments in Eastern Europe are similar but not so in parts of Western Europe where explicit atheism reaches levels as high as 15% in the Czech Republic.<sup>119</sup> Research seems to show that in the United States at least, the number of people who explicitly identify as atheists, i.e. deny the metaphysical existence of God, has moved from 2% to 4% by 2019.<sup>120</sup> In Canada, 8% identify as atheists.<sup>121</sup> However, it should be noted that there is some fluidity in the concepts of atheism, agnosticism, and 'spirituality.' Beliefs are not always consist, as shown by the fact that some who claim to be atheists also believe in 'spirituality' or a 'higher power' that is not

personal.

The pervasiveness of religion in societies and cultures does not require every individual to be a bona fide believer. However, it does mean that societies find the prevalence of and adherence to religious belief to be necessary for stability and well-being. For this to be viable—and societies find it so—religion must meet genuine needs of the vast majority of its members and of society itself. ‘Obedience’ is a case in point. Societies of all sizes from families to multicultural nation states require a certain amount of ‘obedience’—otherwise known as ‘co-operation,’ ‘team spirit,’ ‘unity,’ ‘self-discipline’ and ‘family loyalty.’

This need is

Which World Are You In?

undermined by the atheist emphasis on personal freedom, i.e. its essentially atomistic and antinomian nature with its stress on the priority of personal choice in matters of morals (both private and public), and societal, cultural and legal norms. In other words, positive atheism encourages a feeling of rightful self-confidence and independence to the point where it can become anti-social and feels fully justified in being so. Such behaviors can range from eccentric to revolutionary or even criminal in nature.<sup>122</sup> As a result of encouraging such feelings, societies face the challenge of overcoming fragmentation by viable ways of creating unity. In both individuals and societies, too much diversity is as destructive as too little.

The intrinsic antinomianism of positive atheism encourages hubris, an overwhelming and unchecked self-confidence, a seemingly limitless feeling of empowerment, a feeling that ‘anything goes’ without any inherent limits. ‘Limits are made to be broken’ expresses this feeling. The theist religions, and especially the Bahá’í Writings, recognize that limits on human behavior are necessary for the well-being of individuals and societies. For example, Bahá’u’lláh teaches that

To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.<sup>123</sup>

These virtues require a willingness to practice self-discipline, i.e. self-limitation because of the human nature and the guidance given by God through His Manifestations. Overweening pride leads us to “disregard [ ] the complexity of human nature”<sup>124</sup> and think that we can ‘tamper with’ or engineer human nature physically, mentally and spiritually. This unlimited feeling of self-confidence is reinforced by atheism’s denial of a life after death. This leads to human “degradation”<sup>125</sup> because there is no need to take responsibility for our actions. In that way, the atheist pride in taking responsibility is severely undermined.

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

The intrinsic antinomianism of atheism helps us to understand one of Bahá'u'lláh's most enigmatic statements:

Know thou for a certainty that whoso disbelieveth in God is neither trustworthy nor truthful. This, indeed, is the truth, the undoubted truth. He that acteth treacherously towards God will, also, act treacherously towards his king. Nothing whatever can deter such a man from evil, nothing can hinder him from betraying his neighbor, nothing can induce him to walk uprightly.<sup>126</sup>

This statement is a general principle that applies to more than Sultan Abdu'l-'Aziz's potential government appointees. Offensive as it may sound to some, Bahá'u'lláh raises a crucial point about ethics, namely that unless they have a divine foundation, morality, human ethical principles are merely subjective preferences. These may vary greatly among individuals. The antinomian nature of atheism, its rejection of socially or religiously based ethics, gives priority to individual choices, i.e., to subjective preferences which can easily change with time, social and political situations. In short, we cannot rely on them, or as Bahá'u'lláh states, they are "neither trustworthy nor truthful" because

they have no fear of God's justice. Bahá'u'lláh's teaching is hard, but

it is grounded in reason and common sense, and, therefore, is not a matter of irrational prejudice.

## 5. Atheism Part II

Atheism comes in various forms. One of the most common is evidentiary atheism<sup>127</sup> whose proponents argue that there is no evidence for God's existence. Usually, their arguments are based on science, i.e. the claim that there is no genuinely scientific evidence that a non-material, supernatural Being exists. For evidence to be considered genuinely scientific, it must be sensible, observable, measurable and quantifiable, verifiable by others, consistently replicable and allow testable predictions. Events and claims that cannot meet these standards are not recognized as sources of evidence. Because science can only use physical

### Which World Are You In?

tests for physical phenomena, the existence of a spiritual Being is not a 'testable hypothesis. Therefore, science can—at most—conclude that there is no evidence for a material God-like Being—something which all theistic religions concede as a matter of principle.

While the other theistic religions also reject evidentiary atheism—obviously, since they believe in non-material God—the Bahá'í Writings are unique in confronting this issue directly and explicitly. 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds a cautionary note to this debate by pointing out that sense knowledge is not always reliable; "One cannot ... rely implicitly upon it."<sup>128</sup> The senses cannot be automatically taken at face value. He uses simple

examples—double suns, desert mirages, the apparent immobility of the earth—to make a telling point: all physical instruments whether natural or man-made have inherent limitations and, therefore, only provide one view of reality—which may not always be sufficient to our purpose. This mistake is actually subject of a witty but profound joke about a confused man looking for his lost car keys at night but limiting his search to the area around the streetlamp because he cannot see anywhere else. In short, the intrinsic limitations of the scientific method are not sufficient to find answers about God’s existence. Dogmatically insisting that they are sufficient assumes that our knowledge of reality is enough to absolutely exclude the possibility of non-physical aspects of reality and other ways of knowing needed to recognize them. Instead of dogmatizing we must “investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found.”<sup>129</sup>

In our understanding, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes this point not to encourage us to ignore scientific findings, but rather, to open our minds to the possibility of ‘other ways of knowing.’ Since all forms of theism believe that there is more to reality than matter and material phenomena, such encouragement is logically appropriate; otherwise, we would be cutting ourselves off from a vital source of knowledge and wisdom. Among these are such practices as yoga which sensitizes one to non-material realities,<sup>130</sup> intuition, dreams, mystical experiences and visions. These ‘other ways’ may or may not always be suitable for discovering scientific

#### Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

knowledge—as we currently understand it—but that does not mean that ‘other ways of knowing’ cannot also deliver valuable empirical knowledge. He says, for example, “In the world of sleep, too, one may have a dream which exactly comes true, while on another occasion one will have a dream which has absolutely no result.”<sup>131</sup> Clearly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recognizes that ‘other ways of knowing’ can lead to empirical, i.e. experiential proof. Of course, he recognizes that these ways are not always reliable but he does not leap to the false logical conclusion that because other ways of knowing are not easy to evaluate, they are never evidence at all.

Logical atheism is based on the claim that there can be no logically valid ‘proofs’ of God’s existence. <sup>132</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, summarises the contrary theist belief, stating that “The utmost one can say is that [God’s] existence can be proved, but the conditions of [God’s] existence are unknown.”<sup>133</sup> Indeed, he re-affirms Aristotle’s First Mover argument on the grounds that without God, the First Mover, the “ process of causation goes on, and to maintain that this process goes on indefinitely is manifestly absurd.”<sup>134</sup> He also re-affirms the cosmological arguments for God’s existence by stating that “throughout the world of existence the smallest created thing attests to the existence of a creator. For

instance, this piece of bread attests that it has a maker.”<sup>135</sup> Obviously the accounts of creation in Jewish, Christian and Islamic scriptures agree.

Kant’s fourth antinomy is probably the strongest logical argument atheism has in denying a God as the Creator of reality. God, a “necessary being,”<sup>136</sup> cannot be invoked by theists because doing so requires a ‘leap’ from evidence from physical creation to the existence of a transcendental Creator, i.e. from physical, sensible evidence to a transcendent plane of reality.<sup>137</sup> The physical evidence—according to Kant and his atheist acolytes—cannot logically justify such a leap. In other words, a posteriori cosmological proofs based on inferring the Creator’s existence from physical creation are invalid. Many have regarded this argument as the logically decisive refutation of the existence of God and any non-physical reality.

#### Which World Are You In?

Theism, by implication of God as Creator and the Bahá’í Writings explicitly reject this argument: “throughout the world of existence the smallest created thing attests to the existence of a creator. For instance, this piece of bread attests that it has a maker.”<sup>138</sup> In this simple but potent analogy, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá shows why Kant’s argument fails on the basis of universal empirical experience. It assumes that things can bring themselves into existence—something which has never been observed or experienced. He gives no reason why we should suddenly, without supporting evidence and contrary to all human experience assume the opposite in regards to the creation of the universe. “Similarly the wise and reflecting soul will know of a certainty that this infinite universe with all its grandeur and perfect order could not have come to exist by itself.”<sup>139</sup> The reason is obvious: for a thing to bring itself into existence would logically require that it exists before it came into existence.

Other logical atheists assert that the theist concept of a non-material, omnipresent, omniscient, i.e. infallible, and omnipotent God is logically incoherent and, therefore, cannot even be explained without falling into disqualifying self-contradiction. For example, can an omnipotent God make a rock so heavy He cannot lift it? Can He will himself out of existence? Can He make square circles or make  $1 + 1 = 3$ ? Positive atheists reject any attempts to define ‘omnipotence’ as anything but its (apparently) obvious meaning. Again, the Bahá’í Writings state explicitly what is left implicit in other theist scriptures. Precisely because God is omnipotent in the obvious sense, He can do anything, but just because God could do these things, does not mean He would choose to do them. Indeed, He “ ‘doeth as He pleaseth and ordaineth as He willeth’ ”<sup>140</sup> but the nature of His creation shows that He choice is for order and rationality:

This composition and arrangement arose, through the wisdom of God and His ancient might, from one natural order. Thus, as this

composition and combination has been produced according to a natural order, with perfect soundness, following a consummate

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

wisdom, and subject to a universal law, it is clear that it is a divine creation and not an accidental composition and arrangement.<sup>141</sup>

God's emphasis on reason also supports this suggestion.<sup>142</sup> That is also why "Religion must stand the analysis of reason."<sup>143</sup>

Another type of atheism is ethical atheism which asserts that the notion of a God Who chooses to create this world would never allow His creations to suffer and/or perpetrate the horrors of natural disasters and the sickening variations of man-made evils. <sup>144</sup> Since there is no sign of such intervention—even with the extreme provocation of childhood suffering—the morally good God we thought created us does not exist and there is nothing to be achieved by pretending He does.

Most obviously, this argument is logically invalid. God's nature and God's existence are two completely different issues, one is metaphysical, the other is ethical. It is a category mistake to infer something does or does not exist metaphysically on the basis of ethical judgments. For example, just because a bully is nasty to me doesn't mean s/he does not exist.

In our understanding, ethical atheism seems to be rooted in feelings of discouragement and despair about human nature. Ethical atheists expect a high standard of behavior from humans and are disappointed that the infliction of cruelty is too easy for a significant portion of humanity. Such expectations may encourage hope that people can do better, but at best, it is likely to be a muted, desperate hope because pessimism about human nature is confirmed all too often.

Consciously or unconsciously, atheism inevitably encourages a deep disappointment about justice insofar as the metaphysical materialism cannot provide any provision for justice either in this world or the next. If there is to be any justice or, indeed, any morality, it must man-made and/or based on nature. Both are disappointing. There many conflicting opinions about what constitutes justice and how to enforce it. Nor

Which World Are You In?

is there agreed upon way of overcoming these concepts. Consequently, some degree of disappointment and in human nature are likely.

Indeed, atheism also sets the condition for intellectual scepticism and feelings of bewilderment and turmoil vis-s-vis ethical issues in general. Without God as a basis for moral principles, only nature and human desires remain as a foundation for ethics. What makes nature unsuitable as a ground of ethics is illustrated in Sam Harris's "The Moral Landscape: How Science can determine Human Values."<sup>145</sup> As Hume's

'Guillotine' decisively shows, a descriptive statement about what actually happens in nature and/or what people actually do is not and, logically, cannot be a prescription of what we should do. Just because Jenny has always cooked supper—a factual description—cannot be used as a prescription that she should always cook dinner, i.e. that she is morally obligated to do so. No scientific experiment can establish that giving to the poor is morally good. Doing so (or not) is a physically describable fact with physically describable results that science is equipped to study. However, only human choice can decide this act is good. As Hume pointed out, facts and prescriptions are not logically related.

Only human choice can relate them, give positive value to helping them and negative value to hurting them. At this point four new problems arise: (1) what facts shall we select? (2) who selects them? (3) for what purpose? (4) why should we accept the authority of the one (or more) who chooses? Without God, there is no final arbitrator. These problems are precisely why Kant, who 'disproved' all proofs of God's existence,<sup>146</sup> re-introduces Him as a necessary "regulative principle"<sup>147</sup> for the foundation of any coherent ethical system. For example, if we choose to base our ethics on nature, which aspect will we choose? Social Darwinism, focussed on the harshly competitive aspects of nature and built a biologically based morality on the struggle for existence. Lao Tzu and his modern ecologically-minded successors focus on the co-operative, 'communitarian' aspects of nature. Even if we choose to recognize both aspects of nature, on whose authority shall this choice be imposed? In the Bahá'í Writings our choice is based on

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

God's authority, but atheism has no such recourse and thereby ultimately fosters confusion and inner turmoil that can easily lead to an indifferent relativism about competing moral systems.

Often correlated with this disappointment in human nature is a resentment against a 'God Who failed.' Because God does not meet our ethical expectations we feel He, does not or should not exist, or is not worth worshipping, or should be ignored. This resentment easily spills over onto those who—supposedly—belittle the pain of others by offering a theodicy, i.e. "a defense of the justice or goodness of God in the face of doubts or objections arising from the phenomenon of evil in the world."<sup>148</sup> The most famous of these accusations comes from Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, who "respectfully return[s] Him his ticket"<sup>149</sup> because he does not want to live in peace with unjust suffering. God's ability to compensate fully for the suffering of a child does not justify the occurrence of suffering in the first place. He chooses to be disturbed, outraged and completely defiant on this matter.

In response to Ivan's argument, the Bahá'í Writings explicitly state the

usual theistic teaching that the

knowledge of a thing is not the cause of its occurrence; for the essential knowledge of God encompasses the realities of all things both before and after they come to exist, but it is not the cause of their existence.<sup>150</sup>

In other words, because God does not exist in time, the concepts of past, present and future do not apply to Him, and therefore, the term 'foreknowledge' is accurate only from a human point of view. Consequently, claims that God's 'foreknowledge' causes an event are logically false since there no 'before' and 'after' with God. It is obvious that since

God is timeless, He is in a totally different frame of reference so the 'foreknowledge is causation' argument is logically invalid. The 'problem'

Which World Are You In?

itself is a chimera. A human analogy for this situation is a woman on a mountaintop observing a man walking down a forest road in the valley below. Because she is in a different frame of reference, i.e. her altitude, she can foresee all the possible routes the man may take and more explicitly, she can foresee with absolute certainty that if he continues as he has been going so far, he will be blocked by a raging river. Nevertheless, her ability to foresee does not cause the hiker's choices.

Unlike the Bahá'í Faith and the other theisms, Ivan Karamazov fails to realize that there is no necessary connection between belief in God's healing powers and human callousness to suffering. Intellectual understanding that God's mercy will compensate unjust suffering does not authorize a lack of compassion towards the unfortunate victims of man-made and/or natural afflictions. Indeed, in my understanding, extreme discomfort and compassionate sympathy with the suffering of others is necessary to prevent us from becoming blunt and coarsened to their pain. If we are not disturbed by human misery and distress, individual and societal spiritual progress will be held back. The Bahá'í Writings summarise in specific detail, the theist teachings on this issue:

Be ye a refuge to the fearful; bring ye rest and peace to the disturbed; make ye a provision for the destitute; be a treasury of riches for the poor; be a healing medicine for those who suffer pain; be ye doctor and nurse to the ailing; promote ye friendship, and honour, and conciliation, and devotion to God, in this world of non-existence.<sup>151</sup>

These words remind us of our obligation to act for the good of others just as God acted for our good by bestowing the gift of 'being' on us. Since God expects us to ease the suffering of others, He is unlikely to have subverted the good of being by devising a system of creation that imposes needless and pointless suffering. God tells us "I loved thy creation, hence

I created thee.”<sup>152</sup> From a theist perspective, a God Who bestows the good of ‘being’ upon us, will enable us to transcend unjust suffering as we progress through the spiritual planes of being after we die.

#### Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

It should also be noted that irremediable anxiety and mistrust about human nature and humanity’s future play a significant role in ethical atheism. The cause is clear: there is no intrinsic reliable basis for hope in human nature and the alleviation of suffering. Our subjective feelings about right and wrong are the only foundation we have—and the history of the 20th C alone shows how extremely fluid these can be especially when ideologies and politics are involved.

The globally influential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argues that even if God exists, His existence is unworthy of recognition and/or worship. He advocates a “postulatory atheism.”<sup>153</sup> Whether or not God actually exists is not relevant to this view which is more epistemological than metaphysical in nature. For Sartre Even the idea of God’s existence is an offense to human freedom, value and dignity because it surrenders human free will, dignity, and self-confidence to a Being—or an idea—that has no legitimate authority over us. Why should we accept the human nature God has supposedly given us? Did He consult with us about what we wanted? What gives Him the right to decide what is good or evil? “Postulatory atheism” insists on the primacy of individual human choice especially in ethical matters as long as people are prepared to “live in good faith,” i.e. accept responsibility for their own actions.

Postulatory atheism often imagines God a tyrant, as an omniscient, a universal ‘stalker’ of our thoughts, feelings and actions. Not only does He arbitrarily impose the human essence on us, but His very existence makes privacy—a necessary aspect of personal integrity—impossible. Under His watchful eye—like the ubiquitous telescreens in Orwell’s 1984—even our most intimate relationships are exposed to the view of this cosmic ‘peeping Tom.’ The situation is no different with omnipresence and omnipotence. Here too, in atheist thinking, we do not even own ourselves. We are imprisoned in our own lives, and, in the teaching of immortality, even death is not an escape. We have to answer for our actions in what amounts to a kangaroo court—since God already knows all our answers and knows His judgment. This too degrades us, turning us into play things of an arbitrary super-power.

#### Which World Are You In?

In our understanding, the defining emotion of postulatory atheism is defiance, a rebelliousness and emphatic rejection of any authority but the individual will. It encourages a fierce sense of personal independence and is, thereby, an ethical version of the contract theory of government: rules must be based on the agreement of free individuals and cannot legitimately imposed without personal consent. This principle

applies to God above all. Therefore, in postulatory atheism, we withdraw our consent and live on the basis of our personal will. Almost inevitably correlated with this defiant attitude is a profound sense of isolation and loneliness. Each of us is alone and totally responsible for our own actions—if we live in “good faith” with ourselves, i.e. if we don’t lie to ourselves about having no other choices and the nature of what we have done. For example, a thief should be honest, recognizing that he could have become a policeman and is now someone who is ‘happy’ while choosing to steal.

From a Bahá’í perspective, attractive in literary and philosophical works as it might be, the intrinsically atomistic and antinomian nature of “postulatory atheism” cannot meet the needs of individuals and societies for unity and a unifying power. Without unity, no society of any kind can exist.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, the primary mission of God’s Manifestations is to bring unity to mankind. A society in which individuals develop their personal ethical standards and are only subject to restrictions to which they agree would not survive long. Imagine such a principle applied to vehicle traffic or airlines! Such notions may be fine sounding ideals but they lead to disaster if applied. More directly, such notions are immature. As `Abdu’l-Bahá points out, “There is indeed an abundance of lofty ideals and sentiments that cannot be put into effect. Therefore we must confine ourselves to that which is practicable.”<sup>155</sup>

It is clear... that opinions and perceptions vary, and that this divergence of thoughts, opinions, understandings, and sentiments among individuals is an essential requirement... . . . We stand therefore in need of a universal power which can prevail over the thoughts, opinions, and sentiments of all, which can annul these

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

divisions and bring all souls under the sway of the principle of the oneness of humanity. And it is clear and evident that the greatest power in the human world is the love of God.<sup>156</sup>

Finally, there is psychological atheism which regards religion as a symptom of childish fears of being alone in the universe or an irrational fear of the inevitability of death. Theism portrays God as a strong Father figure Who can protect us from what we fear most—death. Human maturity requires that we overcome both of these futile fears because we cannot change our cosmic isolation or biological death. These views are most famously promulgated by Sigmund Freud in *The Future of an Illusion*.

Whether belief in God is an illusion or not, anthropology along with the resurgence of theism in former Communist states relegate Freud’s theory to the sidelines for one reason: intellectual arguments have little or no effect on genuine needs. Indeed, that fact that religion is a ubiquitous feature of human existence strongly suggests that it is a genuine need for human well-being. Outgrowing it may be an ideal

but as mentioned above, given the human need for religion, there is no prospect of that happening.

## 6. Agnosticism

Agnosticism is “the view that human reason is incapable of providing sufficient rational grounds to justify the belief that God exists or the belief that God does not exist.”<sup>157</sup> ‘Soft’ or ‘weak’ agnosticism is a

suspension

of judgment on the issue of God’s existence and is open, in theory at least, to new evidence if that should become available. In contrast, ‘hard’ or ‘strong’ agnosticism asserts that the inherent limitations of the human mind make it absolutely impossible to prove or disprove God’s existence. It regards the issue as permanently settled. There can be no new evidence because humanity’s epistemological capacities cannot change and its limits have been firmly established by the scientific method.

### Which World Are You In?

We shall examine the different types of agnosticism and their intellectual and affective consequences in turn.

First appearances to the contrary, soft agnosticism is aptly named because it potentially overlaps with some kinds of theism. The rejection of logical or empirical arguments for the existence of God does not necessarily preclude belief gained by other ways of knowing such as intuition or experiences of the transcendent aspect of reality through various spiritual practices. Theism and most explicitly, the Bahá’í Writings recognize the partial truth of soft agnosticism, namely, the possibility of gaining decisive knowledge in various ways. The fact that such knowledge is not regarded as ‘scientific’ does not mean that it is not true knowledge. `Abdu’l-Bahá provides rational proofs of immortality and then adds,

But if the human spirit be rejoiced and attracted to the Kingdom, if the inner eye be opened and the spiritual ear attuned, and if spiritual feelings come to predominate, the immortality of the spirit will be seen as clearly as the sun<sup>158</sup>

In short, soft agnosticism may be described as ‘open.’ Unlike hard agnosticism, soft agnosticism is not necessarily dependent on a materialist metaphysics which rejects all ‘other ways’ of knowing. We shall explore this in greater detail below when dealing with fideistic agnosticism.

However, until such non-scientific evidence is recognized and admitted, it seems clear that soft agnosticism, like hard agnosticism, leaves its advocates in the position of Buridan’s Donkey.<sup>159</sup> The poor beast was suffering severe starvation and thirst and died because it could not decide which it should do first—eat some fresh hay or drink some fresh water. In other words, both soft and hard agnostics live in a perpetual state of uncertainty about the basic ‘life issues’ that virtu-

ally all humans ask in one way or another. Are there non-material

### Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

realities? Am I immortal? Are there afterlife consequences? What can we know for sure? How did this universe come into being? What do mean by right and wrong? 160 The answers to all such 'life questions' are derived from our conscious or unconscious metaphysical assumptions about God's existence or non-existence. This is because the first question in metaphysics concerns the existence or non-existence of a transcendental reality. Until this question is answered decisively—by whatever means—the answers to most other important 'life questions' tend to be confused and haphazard, i.e. self-contradictory, unclear and vague, and not consistently held. We confuse and disappoint ourselves because answering the 'life questions' that inevitably come our way become more difficult.

Both hard and soft agnosticism bring with it still more uncertainty and anxiety about social and cultural issues. If an individual or a society is not sure about God's existence, it becomes extremely difficult to obtain public agreement on issues of morality; criminal punishment; the nature and role of government; sexual conduct; the limits of art; and fair business practices. This is because the existence or non-existence of God decides the horizon of our choices. Are we thinking in terms of the physical world only or do we have to consider God's guidance and the after-life? Caught between these two possibilities leaves us in a state of perpetual inner conflict which fragment both agnostic individuals and societies.

One example of this is the debate about how best to treat alcohol and drug addiction. Should religion and faith have a role in publicly funded programs even though they can be very effective.161 Ultimately, such conflicts encourage needless divisions in society and can even generate a climate of scepticism and cynicism that undermines the basic cohesion societies need to function effectively. Individuals conflicted in this way may, of course, choose answers as an act of will, i.e. force themselves to believe certain ideas or simply side with the majority. However, doing so makes it difficult to assert our answers with any conviction because of the constant presence of caveats, doubts and anxieties. Only

### Which World Are You In?

two choices remain—apathetic agnosticism, an emotional "I don't care" response or the defiant atheism of Sartre.

The first sub-type of agnosticism is apatheic agnosticism' which finds the issue of God's existence or non-existence as irrelevant to human life and pays it no further heed. Since we don't or can't know the answer, why bother about it? We might describe this position as theoretical in concept but atheistic in practice. It is not necessarily a consequence of

a failure to understand the depth and importance of the issue. Rather, its most likely cause is intellectual and emotional frustration with the inability to decisively resolve the issue of God's existence. Its basic flaw is that ignoring the issues does not make them go away nor does it prevent society's debates about them leave individuals unaffected.

From a Bahá'í (and theistic) perspective, atheism is a dangerous strategy. As Kant realized in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, without God—even if only as a regulative principle—our ethical views will be purely subjective and, therefore easily changeable according to our situation and/or convenience. As a result, it becomes increasingly easy to slacken our moral standards and behavior in favor of our lower animal nature.

To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.<sup>162</sup>

This is not to say this will necessarily happen to everyone—remnants of religious influence still influence society—but the inner drift towards lower, more convenient or socially acceptable standards is clearly evident in increasingly secular and anti-religious societies. The growing use of drugs that weaken human consciousness and willpower; the ever more obvious sexualization of children, especially girls; and the exponential increase of glorified violence in popular films are all signs of this downward trend towards animal standards.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

Another subtype of agnosticism may be called 'theistic' or even 'fideistic' agnosticism which argues that science and reason cannot prove God's existence but believe in Him anyway. The epistemological basis for doing so is the conviction that the extent of mankind's thought is not necessarily the extent of reality itself. Such agnostics agree with Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."<sup>163</sup> They are sceptics vis-s-vis the claims of strict empiricism because the idea of using physical evidence to prove or disprove a spiritual God is ipso facto logically ridiculous. They may also rely on other ways of knowing that are not irrational but trans-rational such as intuitions, dreams, 'mystical' experiences or practices like yoga which are designed to sensitize us to transcendent realities. In some cases, fideistic agnosticism is an example of faith as an act of will.

In our understanding, the Bahá'í Writings do not support fideism. `Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings demonstrate that for the optimum progress in individual and societal spiritual evolution both reason and our spiritual faculties are necessary. God's existence can be logically proven and he provides various examples of such proofs. He states that "the existence of the Divine Being hath been established by logical proofs."<sup>164</sup> In addition

to logical arguments, he also uses two cosmological proofs. He uses the 'first mover' argument to show that a non-contingent being is necessary to explain motion since an infinite regress of movers is "absurd."<sup>165</sup> He also employs cosmological argument that a contingent creation requires a non-contingent Creator. "[T]hroughout the world of existence the smallest created thing attests to the existence of a creator. For instance, this piece of bread attests that it has a maker."<sup>166</sup> From this we may conclude that from `Abdu'l-Bahá's perspective, the existence of God is not legitimately a merely subjective matter. In Bahá'u'lláh's new revelation,

all humans are expected to use their free will and spiritual capacities to recognize God's existence. This is illustrated by Bahá'u'lláh's statement

that we cannot blame our disbelief in God on others because "the faith of no man can be conditioned by anyone except himself."<sup>167</sup> Finally, as

Which World Are You In?

noted above, he recognizes that direct insight can show that God exists. Speaking of immortality, he states,

But if the human spirit be rejoiced and attracted to the Kingdom, if the inner eye be opened and the spiritual ear attuned, and if spiritual feelings come to predominate, the immortality of the spirit will be seen as clearly as the sun<sup>168</sup>

A third subtype of agnosticism is Pascalian agnosticism which admits that neither reason nor evidence can prove God's existence but asks us to gamble that God exists. A bet is not knowledge. We bet that God exists and act accordingly. If we are right, we will 'go to heaven' because we have lived a morally good life. If we are wrong, nothing is lost because in the grave will not be aware of the fact—and we still leave the legacy of a good life behind us. This view is sometimes derided as hypocritical but that criticism is weak. Pascal's argument honestly recognizes our predicament vis-s-vis God's existence. It then advises a prudential response which does not contradict its underlying premise—namely that we do not know whether or not God exists. Nor is it hypocritical to want to attain a good afterlife. No one except, perhaps, Sartre and his followers in 'defiant atheism' would want to do the opposite.

From our perspective, the Bahá'í Writings present no objection to Pascalian agnosticism at least as a first step to recognizing the existence of God. Betting on God's existence shows recognition of the existential importance of God and our personal destiny in the transcendental planes of being. On this basis we can see the possibilities of further spiritual growth.

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper we have surveyed some of the intellectual and affective consequences of theism, atheism and agnosticism and how these con-

sequences influence one another in the commitment to one of these

### Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

beliefs. Together they constitute our world-view, i.e. the paradigm by which we interpret reality and on which we consciously or unconsciously base our attitudes and actions. Of course, we do not expect that every individual represents these viewpoints in a perfectly consistent way and so may deviate somewhat from the logically based descriptions we have attempted to outline. The absolute denial of God's existence, for example, logically requires us to abandon the idea of divine justice or compensation in the Abhá Kingdom. This, in turn has inescapable consequences for our feelings about the world and our actions. However, inconsistency is still possible; a person may claim to be an atheist yet still believe (or hope) that 'somehow' justice will be done. Bahá'í teachers should follow up this opportunity for further exploration.

Our exploration has also outlined what the Bahá'í Writings teach about the intellectual and affective issues arising from a commitment to theism, atheism and agnosticism. In regards to the question of God's existence or not existence the Bahá'í Writings agree with Judaism, Christianity and Islam about a single personal Creator but have an advantage over preceding revelations insofar as it is a later dispensation. It is specifically intended for our time and deals with most of these issues explicitly. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

The superiority of the present in relation to the past consists in this, that the present can take over and adopt as a model many things which have been tried and tested and the great benefits of which have been demonstrated in the past, and that it can make its own new discoveries and by these augment its valuable inheritance.<sup>169</sup>

The ultimate aim of this paper is to show, and help Bahá'í teachers to show that ideas have consequences. Vis-à-vis these three main answers to the question of God's existence, our choice is not a matter of indifference because any one of these will shape our lives.

Which World Are You In?

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Paris Talks. London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971.

Promulgation of Universal Peace. Second Edition. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982

The Secret of Divine Civilization. Trans. Marzeih Gail. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957.

Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá . Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978

Some Answered Questions. New Translation. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2014.

Tablet to August Forel, Ocean

Audi, Robert editor The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Bahá'u'lláh.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh . Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976.

Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh . n.p., Immerse. Bernal Schooley, 1997

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh . Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978

The Hidden Words, translated by Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois, 2002.

Shoghi Effendi. Lights of Guidance

Eliade, Mircea, editor The Encyclopedia of Religion, 16 volumes, London: Collier Macmillan, 1987.

Hodges, H.A. Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Treubner & Co., 1944.

Kant, Immanuel.

Critique of Pure Reason, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Critique of Practical Reason, translated by Thomas Kingswill Abbot, Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5683/pg5683.txt>.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

Kluge, Ian.

Reason and the Bahá'í Writings, in Lights of Irfan, 14 (2013).

“Review of Udo Schaefer, Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture,” in Journal of Bahá'í Studies vol. 25, no. 1-2 (2015).

Otto, Rudolf,. The Idea of the Holy, translated by John W. Harvey, New York: Galaxy Books, 1958.

Zogzebski, Linda, Trinkaus. Philosophy of Religion, John Wiley & Sons, 2007.

Which World Are You In?

## NOTES

- 1 Shoghi Effendi, From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, March 19, 1945 in Lights of Guidance, p. 542, # 1842; emphasis added.
- 2 The Cambridge English Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cynicism>
- 3 This is the case because the times and conditions of the earlier revelations did not require guidance on these issues.
- 4 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 113.
- 5 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p.

- 9.
- 6 H.A. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 13.
- 7 H.P. Rickman, "Wilhelm Dilthey" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, p. 404.
- 8 James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, p 16.
- 9 Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error*.
- 10 The Bahá'í Writings explicitly discourage this: "The first is the independent investigation of truth; for blind imitation of the past will stunt the mind." Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 248.
- 11 Katherine Rose Hanley and Donald J. Monan SJ, *A Prelude to Metaphysics*, p. 23.
- 12 J. Bohman, "Verstehen" in Robert Audi, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 954.
- 13 Wilhelm Dilthey, "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik" (1900) <http://www.schmidt.hist.unibe.ch/semester/ws0102/GeschichtstheorieSozialgeschichte/Dilthey.htm>
- 14 The universality of human nature taught by the theist religions is a direct challenge to one of the most dangerous trends in modern politics—identity politics which tends to place insurmountable barriers between different groups and subsumes every individual in the characteristics of his/her group. Nazism (German vs Jew), Communism (bourgeois vs proletariat or peasant), Feminism (women vs men) and Liberalism vs illiberalism exemplify the danger of identity politics.
- 15 A. H. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 12.
- 16 A. H. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 12.

#### Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

- 17 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 248.
- 18 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, VI, p. 191 in Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 15.
- 19 Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 10
- 20 Terence, in the play "Punishing Himself."
- 21 Linda, Trinkaus Zogzebski, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 22.
- 22 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 8.
- 23 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 7.
- 24 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.
- 25 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.
- Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.
- Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 28.
- 26 Rudolf Otto *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 32.
- 27 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 94.
- 28 John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Chp. 1: In the Similitude of a Dream

- 29 The Universal House of Justice in Wellsprings of Guidance, p. 79—80.
- 30 Shoghi Effendi, Letter written on His behalf, March 19, 1945 in Lights of Guidance, # 1842, p. 542.
- 31 Shoghi Effendi, Letter # 55, September 5, 1931 in Extracts from the USBN, p. 6.
- 32 Agatha Christie, Murder at the Vicarage, p.
- 33 Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day Is Come, p. 108.
- 34 Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah, 2:30. Yusuf Ali translation.
- 35 Genesis, 1:27. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 279.
- 36 Edward Feser, Aristotle's Revenge, p. 3.
- 37 In Bahá'í metaphysics of emanation, creation 'flows out from' God's "Primal Will" (SAQ, 53: 5; p. 235). Closest to God are the spiritual levels of reality and the lower, less spiritual i.e. material levels are further away. There is sameness i.e. both parts originate with the Primal Will but there is also difference. See Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 140.
- 38 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 74: 2 p. 303.
- 39 KJV, John 3: 6

#### Which World Are You In?

- 40 Rachel Elior, "Jewish Spirituality and The Soul," in Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought, edited by Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-spirituality-and-the-soul/>
- 41 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 16: 3, p. 93—94. They can be known but not by the physical senses.
- 42 One dimensional, i.e. explaining reality in terms of strict materialism or strict idealism.
- 43 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace,
- 44 The Baha'i "Noonday Prayer."
- 45 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 12.
- 46 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 12.
- 47 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 12—13.
- 48 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 13.
- 49 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 13.
- 50 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 17.
- 51 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 17.
- 52 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 20—21.
- 53 Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 21.
- 54 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p.

76.

55 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 21.

56 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 55: 4; p. 241.

57 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 50.

58 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 11. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes intuition

as the “second sort of knowledge, which is the knowledge of being, is intuitive

it is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself.” It is not

knowledge gained by inferential, discursive reasoning—although intuitions may lead to ideas developed by reason and inference. In other words, intuition allows

immediate perception of “intelligible realities which have no outward existence”

and do not rely on physical sensation or inferential reasoning for support.

59 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 74: 2 p. 303.

60 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, CIX, p. 214.

61 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 31.

62 A. A. H. Hodges, *Wilhelm Dilthey: An Introduction*, p. 12.

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Twenty-One

63 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 316.

64 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 7.

65 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 22.

66 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 175.

67 Blaise Pascal pointed out that although the universe can easily kill us, our con-

sciousness of this fact, our being a thinking reed” makes us greater than material

creation. *Pensées* # 347.

68 Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, translated by F.A. Storr.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/31/31-h/31-h.htm#linkcolonus>

69 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 10.

70 Shoghi Effendi, *From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an indi-*

*vidual believer*, October 26, 1932 in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 479.

71 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 29

72 The correspondence theory of truth is embedded in this statement which also

includes the obligation to accept the truths we find. We must “discover the truth” and “accept” it and not try to interpret it according to our individual and/

or collective wishes.

73 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 291; emphasis added.

74 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, CXIV, p. 236.

75 Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, III, p. 5.

76 This is not an example of the fallacy of composition which does not apply to existentially constitutive parts. We cannot say that the whole plant continues to exist even though we have destroyed all of its cells and that my house continues to exist after the wreckers have hauled all its parts away.

77 The principle of sufficient reason (PSR) which with the law of non-contradiction is the basis of rational thought—including science—states that causes and effects must be directly or indirectly commensurate. Both principles are essential to the philosophical arguments presented in the Bahá’í Writings. See Ian Kluge,

“Reason and the Bahá’í Writings,” in *Lights of Irfan*, 14 (2013).

78 It should be noted that the most obvious attribute that God and His creation share is the fact of being, i.e. existence, which God bestows on the phenomenal world. Given the dependence of our being with God’s, it is clear that the similarity is strictly analogical and not literal. ‘Being’ is not univocal. Phenomenal being is relative whereas God’s being is absolute.

Which World Are You In?

79 ‘Personhood’ is used here in the simple sense of possessing unique individual traits based on consciousness, “the rational soul,” will and intention, and purpose.

80 Shoghi Effendi “from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 21, 193” in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 477.

81 Machines may be programmed to imitate the actions we associate with these attributes but an imitation of an action is not a consciously self-motivated action.

The difference between an actor and a machine is that the actor consciously knows s/he is imitating action and the machine does not. Recognition of this difference is the key to understanding novels and movies (*2001: A Space Odyssey*) in which robots, computers or toys become self-motivated—usually vicious—‘persons.’

82 It is understood, of course, that God has the attributes of personhood in a super-eminent sense and that mankind only has these attributes analogically. Similarly machine imitations of human behavior are, at best, analogs and not the original, just as human consciousness is an analog of the divine super-eminent attribute of consciousness.

83 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.

84 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 60: 5; p. 259. "For absolute nothingness cannot find existence, as it has not the capacity of existence." Hence the need for God to provide a sufficient reason for the existence of the phenomenal world. Russell's view that the universe has 'just always existed' assumes that which needs to be explained.

85 The Third Reich, the Soviet Union and institutions like slavery are societal moral disasters that violate(d) the most fundamental teachings of all Manifestations in a programmatic, i.e. conscious and deliberate way.

86 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, volume 1, p. 176.

87 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, # 4.

88 Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 48.

89 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 47: 5; p. 209.

90 *The Quran*, Yusuf Ali translation, Surah 2: 34.

91 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196; emphasis added.

92 'Abdu'l-Bahá', *Some Answered Questions*, p. 196. The "scale of being" refers to the increasing inclusive hierarchy: minerals, plants, animals, humans. Each level contains and surpasses the powers of the previous level.

93 'Abdu'l-Bahá', *Some Answered Questions*, p. 184; emphasis added.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

94 'Abdu'l-Bahá', *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá'*, p. 132; emphasis added.

95 Communism, Facism, and Nazism had goal of creating 'new' men and women.

Postmodernism denies the reality of human nature and, thereby, opens the way for 'engineering' souls to suit man-made philosophical and/or ideological criteria. See Ian Kluge, "Postmodernism and the Baha'i Writings" in

Lights of

Irfan, Volume 9, 2008.

96 `Abdu'l-Bahá,' Paris Talks, p. 73.

97 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 66: 2; 276.

98 Shoghi Effendi points out that "physical ailments, no matter how severe, cannot

bring any change in the inherent condition of the soul." # 1061 The Compilation of Compilations, Volume 1, p. 477.

99 Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214.

100 Need there be any other notion of 'hell' than that? External, physical pain may

be relatively endurable compared to the pain the soul can inflict on itself.

Maybe

that's what those devils symbolize in the paintings of hell—the soul tormenting

itself in the fires of insight into and regret for its deeds. Moreover, the

Writings

reflect basic human psychology very realistically: the need for carrots and sticks

in an effective re-enforcement program to change behavior and thinking.

101 `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 88.

102 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to August Forel, p. 10.

103 Such a fundamental difference between human and animal is a difference in kind, i.e. a difference that cannot be reduced to a common factor in the way ice,

steam and water can all be reduced to water.

104 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 37.

105 Dawkins, The God Delusion, p. 232.

106 Christopher Hitchens , god Is Not Great, p. 217.

107 Sam Harris, The End of Faith, p. 15.

108 Austin Cline, "Theism and Anti-Theism: What's the Difference?" in Other

Religions, Atheism and Agnosticism, <https://www.learnreligions.com/atheism-and-anti-theism-248322>

109 See Hitchen's god Is Not Great, Dawkins' The God Delusion and Harris's The

End of Faith for examples of their contempt for believers.

Which World Are You In?

110 Kant rejects all logical proofs of God in The Critique of Pure Reason but admits

the idea of God is a 'practical necessity' for the foundation of a coherent ethical

systems in The Critique of Practical Reason.

111 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 248.

112 Karl Marx, "Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's

'Philosophy

of Right,' ” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>

113 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 47: 5; p. 209.

114 In the author's view, the materialist concept of evolution requires a long

serendipitous sequence of coincidences no less miraculous than a virgin birth, a

Red Sea crossing or the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mohammed.

115 The fact that people do not always live up to their theist beliefs does not disprove

the logical inference from being a creation of God to intrinsic human dignity.

116 Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 48.

117 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 12.

118 "Russians Return to Religion But not To Church," Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/02/10/russians-return-to-religion-but-not-to-church/> New research in 2018 supports the PEW numbers: Gene Zubovich,

in *Religion and Politics*, "Russia's Journey from Orthodoxy to Atheism and Back Again," October 16, 2018, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/10/16/russias-journey-from-orthodoxy-to-atheism-and-back-again/> See also Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta, *Religion and Modernity: An International Comparison*, Chapter 7; <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780198801665.001.0001/oso-9780198801665-chapter-11>

119 Michael Lipka, "10 Facts About Atheists," PEW Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/06/10-facts-about-atheists/>

120 Michael Lipka, "10 Facts About Atheists," PEW Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/06/10-facts-about-atheists/>

121 Michael Lipka, "5 Facts about religion in Canada," PEW Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/01/5-facts-about-religion-in-canada/>

122 See Sartre's *Saint Genet* for an example of admiring the

'independence' of a

career criminal. The entire culture of presenting criminals in a heroic light is a

consequence of antinomian attitudes.

123 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CIX, p. 214.

124 Baha'i World, Volume 4, p. 352.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

125 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 180.

126 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CXIV, p. 232.

127 Richard Dawkins, Richard Stenger, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris are among the best known.

- 128 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 83: 2; p. 343.
- 129 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 30.
- 130 The source is my daughter Emily who is a certified yoga instructor and has heard this from many students.
- 131 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 71: 8; p. 293.
- 132 Among the traditional proofs of God's existence are Aristotle's "First Mover" argument; the "five ways of Aquinas," Avicenna's kalam argument and its modern revival by William Lane Craig; Anselm's "ontological argument and its modern revival by Kurt Goedel; William Hatcher's "relational proof."
- 133 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 54.
- 134 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18. He seems to have accepted Aristotle's distinction between theoretical and actual infinities. We can think of an infinite series of numbers without contradiction, but an actual line of physical things or events leads to paradoxes that show such a real series is impossible. See Hilbert's Hotel.
- 135 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2: 6; p. 6.
- 136 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen E. Wood, p. 490.
- 137 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Paul Guyer and Allen E. Wood, p. 492.
- 138 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 2: 6; p. 6.
- 139 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 19.
- 140 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 183.
- 141 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 47: 5; p. 208—209.
- 142 See Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings" in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 14, 2013.
- 143 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 175.
- 144 Man-made atrocities such as the Holocaust, the Holodomor, the Gulag archipelago or the Laogai; natural disasters such a Hurricane Katrina or the increasing desertification of Sub-Saharan Africa.

#### Which World Are You In?

- 145 Ian Kluge, "Review of Udo Schaefer, Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture," in *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* vol. 25, no. 1-2 (2015).
- 146 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, "The Antinomy of Pure Reason." p. 490.
- 147 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, Part II, I, V, "The Existence

of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason,” p. 100.

148 Roderick M. Chisholm, “Theodicy,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 911.

149 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. 5, Ch. 4,

[https://www.google.com/search?q=ivan+karamazov&rlz=1C1DIMA\\_enCA705CA705&oq=ivan+karamazov&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5j46j0.5498j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=ivan+karamazov&rlz=1C1DIMA_enCA705CA705&oq=ivan+karamazov&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5j46j0.5498j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

com/search?q=ivan+karamazov&rlz=1C1DIMA\_enCA705CA705&oq=ivan+karamazov&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5j46j0.5498j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

150 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 35; 4, p. 156—157.

151 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 72.

152 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words*, # 4.

153 James Collins, *The Existentialists*, p. 40.

154 The current over-emphasis on diversity without adequate and clear considerations given to unity is one of the causes of today's fragmenting societies as seen

in the rise of 'identity politics.'

155 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 77: 4; p. 310.

156 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 84: 4; 347.

157 William Rowe, “Agnosticism,” in *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p.17.

158 `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 60: 7; p. 260.

159 “Buridan's Ass” in Wikipedia,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buridan%27s\\_ass](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buridan%27s_ass)

This illustration goes as far back as Aristotle who described the frustration of

a man who was equally hungry and thirsty; by Jean Buridan whose example we use in this essay; and Al-Ghazali's example of a man trapped between two bundles of equally delicious dates.

160 Over thirty years of high school teaching (more than 6,600 students) have shown me that with rare exceptions, teenagers are very interested in these topics.

Harnessing their interest and energies was foundation of my teaching career. I would describe virtually all teens as 'natural born philosophers' and that, as

Mortimer Adler's says, “Philosophy is everybody's business.” With P4K methods

(Philosophy for Kids) the philosophic nature of even primary students can be harnessed.

Lights of 'Irfán Book Twenty-One

161 See the work of Bahá'í psychiatrist and professor emeritus of psychiatry at

McGill University, Dr. Abdul Missagh Ghadirian: *In Search of Nirvana; “Alcohol and Drug Abuse: A Psychosocial and Spiritual Approach to Prevention.”*

162 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CIX, p. 214; emphasis

added.

163 William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act. 1, Sc. 5.

164 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 46.

165 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 82: 5; p. 336.

166 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 2: 6; p. 6.

167 Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXV,  
p. 143.

168 `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 60: 7; p. 260.

169 `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 113.

— Which World Are You In? (Used by permission of the curator)