

Neoplatonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Metaphysics

Exported from Holy-Writings.com on 2026-06-19 — 1 clipping

Abstract

The term Neoplatonism was coined in the nineteenth century by Thomas Taylor to denote the peculiar type of Platonic philosophy expounded by Plotinus (204/5-270 CE) and his successors and to distinguish it from that of the Old Academy of Plato's immediate successors and Middle Platonism. A quintessential religious philosophy, Neoplatonism has motivated the development of both systematic metaphysical speculation and mysticism in the three Abrahamic traditions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Emerging out of the matrix of an Islamic intellectual ethos, the Bahá'í Faith is informed by many of the central themes of Neoplatonic thought. Such notions as a radically transcendent Godhead (deus absconditus), the overflowing of God or the principle of "undiminished giving," the divine hypostases, the Primal Will (al-mashiyyah al-awwal) as the first self-manifestation of the Absolute and its contemplation of and reversion (epistrophe) to Its Source, creation as emanation and the eternity of the world, and the great chain of being, etc. figure prominently in Bahá'í theological metaphysics and can be traced directly to their Neoplatonic roots. In this paper I will discuss the major concepts of (1) Plotinian and (2) Islamic Neoplatonism, and (3) highlight the dominant features appearing in the Bahá'í system.

Contents:

The Neoplatonism of Plotinus

Islamic Neoplatonism

i) Sources of Neoplatonic thought in Islamic Philosophy

ii) Avicenna's Peripatetic Neoplatonism

iii) Suhrawardi's Metaphysics of Illumination

Neoplatonic Aspects of Bábí-Bahá'í Metaphysics

Notes

The Neoplatonism of Plotinus

For Plotinus the order of reality consists of three primary¹, vertically graded realms or hypostases: the One (to hen) or Good (to agathon), Intellect (nous) and World-Soul (psuche). The One/Good is the first² cause, primal existent, source and goal of all things³ and the central axis upon which Plotinus' overall worldview revolves around⁴. The One is a God-beyond-God, transcending all predications of being, number⁵, essence⁶, existence⁷, name⁸, form, attribute, thought and limitation; a complete and absolute self-contained unity-in-itself. It is the Supreme Reality and Being-beyond-being (metaousia). The One is identified as such so as to deny all multiplicity of it⁹.

From the One proceeds a second principle, the Intellect (nous), which, as the Divine Mind, functions as the efficient cause of all things. Nous is the

Intelligible universe holding the Ideal Forms (eidos) or perfect archetypes of every existent within itself and as such is the realm of Being (ousia)¹⁰.

Therefore, it would be more correct to call the Intellect Theos (or God) rather than the One. Intellect begets the World-Soul which in turn engenders nature (phusis) and the material cosmos. At the furthest end of this reality is privational Matter (hyle) - absolute negation and source of evil.

The procession of hypostases from the One to the World-Soul is one of necessary emanation. The One is superabundant source and it overflows and emanates Intellect without in anyway diminishing¹¹. Intellect contemplates its Source, overflows and emanates its offspring, the World-Soul, and so on.

...the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance produces and makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it. Its halt and turning turning towards the One constitutes being, its gaze upon the One, Intellect (Enn. V.2 [1], 7-11)¹².

This creative process of spontaneous¹³ emanation and procession from the One to Intellect and the World-Soul is one of eternal outpouring extending to all levels of the universe down to the lowest levels of the material world. In other words, the universe exhibits a continuous and uninterrupted "Great Chain of Being¹⁴." Since the One is perfect in-itself, it is compelled by its very nature to give, or rather radiate, something outside itself.

Whenever anything reaches its own perfection, we see that it cannot endure to remain in itself, but generates and produces some other thing. Not only beings having the power of choice, but also those which are by nature incapable of choice, and even inanimate things, send forth as much of themselves as they can: thus fire emits heat and snow cold and drugs act upon other things...How then should the Most Perfect Being and the First Good remain shut up in itself, as though it were jealous or impotent - itself the potency of all things?...Something must therefore be begotten of it (Enn. V.4, [1]; V.1, [6]).

The cosmos subsists by this overflowing of the One in all things, while the One itself is not spent in its creation: it is inexhaustible sui generis Source¹⁵. While forever rapt in its own transcendence, the One is at the same time immanent in the world - the cause abounds in its effect and is not spatially separate¹⁶. Given this, Plotinus says that the three hypostases endure within the human microcosm as well as in the universe of the macrocosm.

A key point to stress about this process is that it does not occur in time. Plotinus, somewhat contrary to Plato's account in the *Timaeus* - but in general agreement with Aristotle - maintains the eternity of the world and by extension the eternal outpouring, or undiminished giving, of the Divine: there cannot have been a time when the world did not exist. The conventional Judeo-Christian-Islamic notion of temporal *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing in time) is a repugnant idea to Plotinus, as it implies change and reflection in the Godhead. Hence, like Plato before him, Plotinus declares time

to be the moving image of eternity (Timaeus 37d 5).

The One is attributeless. Nothing can be said of it positively, as it is beyond any positive (kataphatic) enumeration, and any pronouncement can only be made in figurative reference and to negate what it is not; for it is everything and no-thing, everywhere and nowhere, the container of all things but itself uncontained, the possessor but unpossessed, etc.

The One is all things and no one of them; the source of all things is not all things; all things are its possession - running back, so to speak, to it - or, more correctly, not yet so, they will be (Enn. V.2, [1]).

This dialectical interplay between transcendence and immanence is called the *via negativa* or *apophasis* (unsaying)¹⁷, since, except to point the way, the One is beyond description: "we say what it is not, not what it is..." (Enn. V.3, [49], 14-7). A poignant example of this apophatic theology is the following passage:

...It is...not a determinate being, is without quality and quantity, and is neither Intellect nor soul; it is not in motion nor yet at rest; not in place, not in time, but 'self-contained, unique form' (Plato, Symposium 211 b1) - or, rather, formless, existing before all form, before movement, before rest; for these are attributes of Being, which make it manifold. Why, then, if not in motion, is it not at rest? Because it is to Being that one or both of these must pertain, and Being is at rest in virtue of rest, and is not identical with rest; so it will have rest as an attribute and cease to be simple. Even to describe the One as cause is not to attach a predicate to the One, but to ourselves, because we take gifts while it exists in itself. Strictly speaking, we should not say 'it' or 'exists', but we chase round about it in our desire to make sense of our experiences, at times coming close, but sometimes falling aside in the perplexity that it causes us (Enn. VI.9, [3]).

In Ennead III.8 [30], 8, we read that the relation of the nous (the Intellect) to the One is like a wave surging and moving outward like a concentric circle from its center. As the One is a complete unity-in-itself, the Intellect, the second hypostasis, is a unity-in-diversity¹⁸: its nature is undivided while multiplicity simultaneously subsists within it¹⁹.

Everything is clear, altogether and to its inmost part, to everything, for light is transparent to light. Each, There, has everything in itself and sees all things in every other, for all are everywhere and each and every one is all, and the glory is unbounded; for each of them is great, because even the small is great: the sun There is all the stars, and each star is the sun and all the others (Enn. V.8, [31], 4, 5-10)²⁰.

The Intellect is held to be the *logos* of its prior hypostasis and the *arche* (principle) of the subsequent. That is, it represents the One on a lower level of existence as a formative and governing principle and the World-Soul on a higher²¹. The Intellect's self-activity arising out of its principle unity-in-diversity is categorized by Plotinus as Existence/Being, Motion, Rest,

Sameness and Otherness.

The nous (Intellect) is in effect the Divine Mind contemplating itself, or the intelligible realities subsisting within itself, the perfect archetypes of all things. Not only does it contain the universal genera of every form but even those of particular species and differentia in an infinity (albeit not a numerical infinity). Everything that exists in the sensible world has its perfect counterpart in that world. For example, both the forms of man (as genus) and particular men mutually co-exist there²². Moreover, each one of the Ideal forms is a living mind, and Intellect the unified totality of all minds²³. Plotinus says this life of Being is Eternity itself: an absolute fullness of being and plenitude in an eternal now.

...in that world...there is no poverty or impotence, but everything is filled full of life, boiling with life. Things there flow in a way from a single source, not like one particular breath or warmth, but as if there were a single quality containing in itself and preserving all qualities, sweet taste and smell and the quality of wine with all other flavors, visions of colours and all that touch perceives, all too that hearing hears, all tunes and every rhythm (Enn. VI.7 [38], 12, 22-30).

Moreover, in this fullness of being even thought and life are a unity and all truth(s) immediately self-evident.

This life is wisdom, wisdom not acquired by reasoning, but always present, without any failing which would make it need to be searched for (Enn. V.8, [31], 7).

Consequently, nous is the efficient cause of whatever engages in cognitive activity (as well as that of anything which maintains substance/essence and lives).²⁴

Plotinus took issue with those philosophers like Numenius of Apamea who posited two or more Intellects. Rather, he insisted on the necessity of three - and only three - vertically graded hypostases. Accordingly, Plotinus adds the World-Soul (psyche) as the mediate hypostasis between the spiritual world of nous and the material universe. Of Plotinus' three hypostases the World-Soul, which roughly approximates the peripatetic Agent or Active Intellect (nous poietikos), is "the most wide-ranging and various in its activities²⁵." As the Intellect is a unity-in-diversity, the World-Soul is a unity-and-diversity. Transcending all corporeality, it enjoys eternal nearness to its source, the Intellect²⁶, and, like the other two hypostases, is simultaneously immanent and transcendent.

Taking his cue from Timaeus 37d 5 (i.e. "time as the moving image of eternity"), Plotinus defines time as "The Life of Soul in movement" (Enn. III.7, [9]). Whereas intellection in nous is immediately present in a boundless and eternal now, that of the World-Soul is successive and sequential: its internal processes is like that of discursive reasoning, logically moving from premises to conclusions, so to speak. It is this "restless nature" which

separates the World-Soul from nous' natural disposition of tranquility and which is the progressive mutation towards a more complex form of life suffered by each lower hypostasis in turn which is tolma: self-assertion and the fallen nature (a Neoplatonic version of the primordial "Fall"). Plotinus declares this life of movement and action on the part of psuche to be an aberration from the life of simple contemplation and immediate presence characterized by Intellect.

The creative procession of the material universe from the World-Soul is an unplanned and spontaneous act arising out of the formers contemplation of its parent, the Intellect. However, it is the lower principle of the World-Soul, the mediate soul or Nature (physis) -- Plotinus also calls it the "governing providence" -- and not the higher aspect which enjoys perpetual union with Intellect, that is actually responsible for producing the material world. Nature for its part is completely unconscious in its ordering. It is important to note that this image of spontaneity and involuntariness is in sharp contrast to both Plato's account in the *Timaeus* and those of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic teachings of conscious design and planning on the part of God.

In *Enn. IV.3, [6]*, Plotinus asserts that our world and all entities are ensouled. The World-Soul is immanently present everywhere and everything. The plurality of souls, moreover, are nothing more than the particularized subsistences within a totality²⁷: individual souls are in fact the many facets of the world soul itself. Plotinus, repudiating the materialistic conception of the Stoics, the Pythagorean theory of harmony, and Aristotle's entelechy²⁸, argues that the body is embodied in an incorporeal, immortal soul and not vice versa. The literal interpretation of certain obscure passages of Plato's *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus* and *Meno* led Plotinus to espouse metempsychosis and the transmigration of souls as a result.

In the *Physics* and *On Generation and Corruption*, Aristotle made the important distinction between potentiality and act to explain the phenomena of generation, change and decay in the material world. Our sage uses the Stagirite's postulate as his point of departure on the issue of matter (hyle). For Plotinus Matter by itself is nothing but pure, uncompounded potentiality.²⁹ It is neither modified nor tempered by the forms which are reflected in it and as such (against Aristotle's thesis) it is utter privation, non-existent, completely impassable and the principle of evil; it is a mere phantom, as is our entire material world.³⁰

In spite of Plotinus' dubbing of Matter as evil, or the source thereof, it must be stressed that this image is used for no other purpose than, perhaps, as a rhetorical point.³¹ The theodicy of Neoplatonism will not admit of any independent source of evil in the universe; by definition the world generated by the One/Good cannot be but good³². Therefore, Matter is no more than the furthest limit of possibility in the indefinite dyad, or tolma. On the other hand, in an interesting passage of *Enn. IV. 8, [6]* Plotinus admits that Matter is good by virtue of the fact that it participates in the One/Good:

Nothing is debarred from participation from the Good, to the extent of its receptivity...Matter, therefore, if it always existed could not but share in that Source that bestows Good on its creatures, universally and to the capacity of each; and if it came to birth of necessity as a consequent of prior causes, not even so could it be excluded from the Good. For he who brought it to existence in his gift could not withhold himself through failing power.

Moreover, in the same passage Plotinus engages yet another positive example, that of evolutionary unfoldment and plenitude, to illustrate the nature of Matter as the underlying substrate by which things come to be in our world from the primary hypostases:

The process is like the unfolding seed, moving from simple origin to termination in the world of sense, the prior always remaining in its place, while begetting its successor from a store of indescribable power - power that must not halt within the higher realm, as if circumscribed by jealousy, but continue to expand until the universe of things reaches the limit of its possibility, lavishing its vast resources on all its creatures, intolerant that any one should have no share in it...³³

Like any good Platonist, Plotinus believes the physical cosmos to be a reflection, albeit an imperfect and shadowy reflection, of the intelligible world³⁴. Hence, unlike his contemporaries, the Gnostics, Plotinus does not share in the conviction that this world is inherently evil or created in error. Compared to its progenitor, the World-Soul, the world is corrupted - no doubt - but that is only because it falls short of the image it symbolizes, the world of Forms. Thus its defectiveness must be blamed upon lack and not purpose. This world is unreal, a mirage if you will, and Plotinus takes serious issue with those like the Peripatetics and Stoics who uphold the reality of bodies and objects of sense³⁵. In a Zen-like passage of *Enn. III.6, [6]*, Plotinus declares "physical objects like mountains, rocks and the whole solid earth, and the matter which underlies them," to be illusory and "unreal." However, the world of sense is in a way real as well; real - and only so - because it shares in the eternal beauty of the intelligible world.

One of the most engrossing positions propounded in the *Enneads* is that of cosmic sympathy. Paraphrasing *Timaeus 30 d3-31 a1*, in *Enn. IV.4, [32]*, Plotinus states that the universe is "one giant living organism embracing all living beings within it," or, as the Peripatetics would claim, "the world is an ontological bloc without fissure³⁶." This is due to the inherently ensouled nature of the universe itself (see above) and the fully integrated nature of the whole. All things share in degrees of participation in psyche and universal sympathy pervades the entire cosmos as a consequence. Prayer, and including magic, are effectual due to this cosmic, universal sympathy and not because God, or the gods, consciously or deliberately answer the prayers of men³⁷.

...the sun or other stars [do] not listen to...prayer. The prayer is answered by the sympathy of the universe, connecting part with part as in a single taut string, which if plucked of one string is sensed by another, in harmony with it

and tuned to a similar scale; and vibration can pass even from lyre to lyre, so great is the sympathy. In view of this, throughout the universe, though composed of contraries, a single harmony exists, and even those contraries share an affinity and kinship (Enn. IV.4, [41]).

Strife and conflict is the requisite corollary of the diversity of the material universe and the necessary imperfection of its parts vis-a-vis the whole. Notwithstanding, the overall pattern of the whole must by definition be good in-itself, since by the regulation of the Intellect, the divine logos, "...unity results, even if composed of opposites (Enn. III.2, [17])." Thus, actions are not predetermined eo ipso, yet our choices do contribute to the providential order of the cosmos. Like all Platonists, Plotinus cleaves to the Socratic dictum that no one does wrong voluntarily but only as a result of ignorance. Yet, punishment for evil³⁸ is dictated, almost like a Newtonian law, by providential reason. Fate, therefore, operating in the world here below through the agency of higher providence, ensures that "...virtue is everywhere in control (Enn. III.3, [3])."

Man in the Neoplatonic scheme is not completely of this world and his membership here is only partial. Our lower soul is of the physical universe, but the higher nature, independent of the body, belongs eternally to the realm of Intellect, the world of Being³⁹. However, we have lost our primordial, pristine unity by being thrust into this physical world and "another person," as it were, has emerged and been embodied in an individual receptacle which we falsely identify as our real selves.⁴⁰ Hence, we must seek to free ourselves from this mortal coil ("cut away," says Plotinus) through the contemplative life of the intellect (noesis) -- true freedom⁴¹ and happiness (eudaimonia) and that which guides us to the One/Good. It is the striving "...to lead the divine within you to the Divine in the All" (Vita Plotini).

The salvation⁴² of the soul does not end with its realization of the intellectual realities. Its "journey home" and final awakening - to use a Buddhist metaphor - is its ascent and union with the One, "...the flight of the alone to the Alone" (Enn. VI.9, [10]). To attain this union the intellectual soul must cut away everything it has witnessed in nous, move to the center of being and into the voidal emptiness of the One. There it will find its true identity with the Ground of Being which it was never divorced from to begin with, despite the mundane illusion of separation.

Existence finally resolves where it began, with the One: the chain of being moving from a circle of descent out to the world and of an ascent back to the One. In point of fact, the whole ladder of existence is nothing more than the facets of the One itself. Thus, the cosmos is a journey of the One to the One by the One in the One.

Islámic Neoplatonism

(i) Sources of Neoplatonic thought in Islámic Philosophy

The late second/eighth-third/ninth centuries witnessed a profuse flowering of

learning in the Islámic world. Major Greco/Hellenistic scientific, mathematical, medical and philosophical texts (i.e. Galen, Euclid, Ptolemy, Theophrastus, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius and others) were translated, studied and commented upon in this period under the encouraging patronage of the Abbasid Caliphs al-Mansur, Harun ar-Rashid and Man'mun. This trend was facilitated by the encounter with Syraic Christians who maintained a rich, long-standing intellectual tradition of their own, had established Greek learning long before the arrival of the Muslims, and were often called upon to translate these texts from Greek and Syraic into Arabic⁴³.

Among these translations were two pseudepigraphic works that were to exert a profound influence upon the development of all subsequent Islámic metaphysical speculations. The first was the *Uthulijyya Aristutelis*, otherwise known as the *Theology of Aristotle*, translated by the Syrian Christian, `Abd'ul Masih ibn Na'imah al-Himsi⁴⁴, for the philosopher al-Kindi. This work, falsely attributed to Aristotle, is in fact a paraphrastic epitome of *Enneads IV-VI*, interspersed with a purported commentary of Porphyry's on a theological treatise of Aristotle (now lost)⁴⁵. The spurious nature of this work was never doubted. However, most peripatecized Muslim thinkers - perhaps due to religious or political reasons of their own⁴⁶ - insisted on attributing it to Aristotle or the enigmatic Shaykh al-Yunani (the Greek sage) - the name Flutinus, an Arabized form of Plotinus, occurs a few times in the later commentaries on the *Theologia* which proves of awareness that this work belonged, in fact, to other than Aristotle⁴⁷. The second work in question is the *Kalam fi'l mahd al-khair* (The *Theology of the Pure Good*)⁴⁸. Like the *Theologia*, the *Kalam fi'l mahd al-khair* is also a paraphrase: it is a paraphrase of thirty-two propositions of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (*Stoikheiosis Theologike*), also ascribed to Aristotle⁴⁹.

Needless to say that both the *Theologia* and the *Kalam* are far removed from Aristotle's genuine teachings. The doctrine of entelechy, for example, so central to Aristotle's theory of the soul, is rejected outright. Both works expound at length a doctrine of emanation from the One (al-Ahad) who generates the whole order of existence in the cosmos through two lower, vertically graded hypostases and a cycle of return back to Him. In the *Theologia*, for instance, in a thoroughly Plotinian fashion, the author outlines his intention as being:

To discuss the divine nature and exhibit it, by showing that it is the First Cause and that time and the aeon [al-dahr] are both beneath it, and that it is the cause of causes and their author, after a fashion; and that the luminous virtue (of power) shines forth from it upon the universal and heavenly Soul; and from Reason, through the intermediary of the Soul upon Nature upon the objects of generation and corruption; and that this action [of the One] issues forth from it and through it; and that things gravitate toward it through a species of desire and appetite⁵⁰.

The *Kalam fi'l mahd al-khair* deals with the Proclian heptads (unities participating in the One) and the tetradic relation of the One with Being, Reason and Soul. Both works are the seminal blueprints of Muslim Neoplatonism.

(ii) Avicenna's Peripatetic Neoplatonism.

Owing to the influence he exerted upon the medieval Latin Scholastics (most notably the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas), no other Muslim philosopher is perhaps as well known as Abu `Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina (Avicenna) (d. 429 AH/1037 CE).

Even a cursory study of the subjects covered by Avicenna's works will reveal the encyclopedic range of topics covered by this great polymath. His massive philosophical summa, the famous Kitáb ash-Shifa' (The Book of Healing), includes chapters not only on metaphysics, but practical (ethics) and natural philosophy as well as medicine, optics, theology and astronomy.

A Neoplatonized peripatetic, Avicenna's point of departure is the system of al-Farabi. Al-Farabi had laid out the rudimentaries of the essence/existence (mahiyah/wujud) question and as such this issue becomes the central crux of Avicennan metaphysics. Ibn Sina, like most peripatetics, defined the study of first philosophy (metaphysics) as the investigation of Being qua being or of existent(s) (mawjud/mawjudat), since only they can be real objects of investigation and not God who transcends any objectification⁵¹. All objects of knowledge exhibit an essence which defines what they are in their thatness and existence/being which is accidentally⁵² added to them, their suchness. These objects, moreover, share in one of the three categories of participatory being: 1. necessity (wajibiyah), 2. potentiality (imkaniyyah) - i.e. a thing which is necessary through another (viz. everything in the world), and 3. impossibility (mumtaniyyih). There must, however, be that which does not share in the bi-polarity of mahiyah/wujud, whose essence (mahiyah) is its existence (wujud) and its existence its essence, and who is completely necessary of-himself (wajib bi-dhatihi). There is such a being and this is Ibn Sina's God, the Necessary Being (wajib al-wujud).

Since Ibn Sina's metaphysics is a metaphysics of Divine Necessity, in the Avicennan universe there is no such thing as the Qur'anic Creator paradigm of a pre-eternal fiat by God vis-a-vis the creation of the world. Hence, the Avicennan model is informed by the necessary emanation of the world by a transcendent God and the eternity (but dependance) of the world with Him - this was to be the single most controversial aspect of Avicenna's philosophy⁵³. God, the Necessary Being, much like Aristotle's model, is Divine thought thinking Itself. This self-thinking, the first emanation, constitutes the First Intelligence (al-aql al-awwalu), the beginning of the process of creation and the moving out from unity to multiplicity, since from the One only one can proceed. To summarize the Avicennan emanation scheme and the nature of the Ten Intelligences which proceed vertically from each other, Corbin says,

The First Intelligence contemplates its Principle ([the Necessary Being]); it contemplates its own Principle which makes its being necessary; it contemplates the pure possibility of its own being in itself, considered fictively as outside its Principle. From its first contemplation proceeds the Second

Intelligence; from the second contemplation proceeds the moving soul of the First Heaven ([falak al-aflak, the Sphere of Spheres]); from the third contemplation proceeds the etheric, supra-elemental body of this first Heaven - a body which proceeds, therefore, from the inferior dimension, the dimension of shadow or non-being, of the First Intelligence. This triple contemplation, which is the origination of being, is repeated from Intelligence to Intelligence, until the double hierarchy of the Ten Cherubic Intelligences (karubiyun, angeli intellectuales), and the hierarchy of the celestial souls (angeli caelestes). These Souls do not possess any faculties of sense, but they do possess Imagination in its pure state, that is to say liberated from the senses; and their aspiring desire for the Intelligence from which they proceed communicates to each Heaven its own motion. The cosmic revolutions in which all motion originates are thus the result of an aspiration of love which forever remains assuaged⁵⁴.

This process of emanation "explodes," so to speak, with the final and Tenth Intelligence, the Agent or Active Intellect (al-aql al-fa'al, the nous poietikos of Aristotle), the soul of the sublunary region. It is the giver of form (wahib al-suwar) to the world of generation and corruption, from it the multiplicity of human souls emanate and "...its illumination (ishraq) projects the ideas or forms of knowledge into those souls which have acquired the ability to turn towards it⁵⁵." In his mystical treatises, Avicenna identifies the Active Intellect with the Angel of Revelation, Gabriel, the Holy Spirit. Thus, reminiscent of the mystical theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, Avicennan cosmology becomes a metaphysics of angelology.

As mentioned before, Avicenna upholds the primacy of Being/existence. To demonstrate he posited the famous "floating-man" argument⁵⁶. Briefly, Avicenna says that were a man to be cut off and disengaged from his body, where all his organs of sense perception are made non-operative, he would still be aware of his existence.

Avicennism was to exercise not just an important influence upon the Latin Scholastics in the West but also on the peripatetic schools of the East. The philosophical terminology of Ibn Sina was to prove indispensable to the Illuminationists later on who, while generally critical of Avicennan rationalism, incorporated it into their own system.

(iii) Suhrawardi's Metaphysics of Illumination

Shihab ad-Din Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak al-Suhrawardi-i Maqtul (the murdered) (d. 587/1191), customarily referred to as Shaykh al-Ishraq (The Master of Illumination)⁵⁷ or Suhrawardi-i Shaheed (the martyred)⁵⁸ by his followers, next to Mulla Sadra stands as, perhaps, the most important Iranian Islāmic theosopher since Avicenna and ancient Knosrowani sages of Persia.

The guiding motif dominating Suhrawardi's theosophy is the restoration of the illuminationist wisdom of the ancient Iranians. In the thirteenth century the

Byzantine philosopher Gemistus Pletho would also embark upon a similar project of conjoining the names of Zarathustra and Plato. Suhrawardi's theosophy is an attempt at bringing together Hermeticism, Neopythagoreanism, late Neoplatonism (especially that of Proclus) and Zoroastrian angelology under the general rubric of interpreting the Platonic theory of Forms/ideas, Qur'anic light imagery and the universal solar philosophy, which his system is the perfect exemplar of. He saw himself as heir to a philosophia perennis begun with the wisdom teachings of the Prophet Idris (sometimes identified with the Egyptian Thoth, the Prophet Enoch of the Old Testament and Hermes Trimegistus), transmitted to his son Seth (possibly the Hermetic figure Agathedemon), the Persian Priest-Kings known as the Knosrawani sages, the Greeks (viz. Pythagoras, Empedocles, Plato, Aristotle and the Neoplatonists), culminating with Sufis (i.e. Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri, Abu Sahl al-Tusari, Husain ibn Masur al-Hallaj and Abu'l Hassan al-Kharraqani) and finally with himself.

Rather than calling Suhrawardi's system a philosophy, it is more appropriate to call it a theosophy (in the sense of the Greek theosophia and the Arabic hikmah [transcendent wisdom]), as Corbin and Nasr have many times pointed out, since a philosophy that does not ultimately lead to spiritual realization is a purely vain undertaking according to him. Discursive philosophy, therefore, must function as the handmaid to mystical unveiling, as spiritual realization alone can lead to dangerous flights of fancy and crude antinomianism, which, ironically enough Suhrawardi was himself accused of by the ulama of Aleppo at his trial.

Suhrawardi's works constitute a series of cycles culminating in his magnum opus, the Hikmat al-Ishraq (The Philosophy of Illumination).

As mentioned, the paramount leitmotiff of Suhrawardi's thought is ishq (Arabic for illumination). The lexical meaning of the word literally denotes the illumination of the sun when it rises at dawn in the east (the Aurora Consurgens which Corbin likes reminding us of)⁵⁹. "Transposed to the spiritual plane, it means a type of knowledge which is the very Orient of knowledge⁶⁰," since it orients its subject toward the cosmic north of being (Mt. Qaf or na-koja-abad [nowhere land, viz. the placeless utopia of the illuminated soul]). Suhrawardi's doctrine, says Corbin,

...deals with a philosophy that is Oriental because it is illuminative and illuminative because it is Oriental. Between these two terms there is reciprocity rather than opposition⁶¹.

"Oriental" knowledge is essentially a direct, instantaneous and intuitive perception of things as they really are. Suhrawardi's epistemology rests upon this presential (hoduri) knowing of things, for instance of oneself during the acme of introspection, as opposed to the representational (suri) kind touted by the Peripatetics.

The Oriental nature of Suhrawardi's doctrine presupposes an ontological framework based entirely upon light. Light (nur) is the most basic and self-evident substance (actually a beyond or meta-substance) underlying

existence, all reality is nothing but light in varying degrees of intensity. "In fact, all things are made evident by it and should be identified in reference to it⁶²." God, whose first attribute is unity, is pure light. He is described as the Light-of-lights (nur al-anwar) by which all things in existence subsist:

The Essence of the First Absolute Light, God, gives constant illumination, whereby it is manifested and it brings all things into existence, giving life to them by its rays. Everything in the world is derived from the Light of His essence and all beauty and perfection are the gift of His bounty, and to attain fully to this illumination is salvation⁶³.

All beings share in His light, but their reality depends to large extent on how close in proximity they come to it: the closer they are the more real; the further, less real. Light, therefore, is existence and darkness (zolma), non-existence.

Proceeding from the Light-of-lights, Suhrawardi posits a pleromatic angelic order of longitudinal (vertical) and latitudinal (horizontal) lights who emanate from the Light-of-lights. At the top of this hierarchy, below the Light-of-lights, is the chief Archangel, the first emanant. This angel apprehends its dark nature which gives rise to the first shadow of the "highest empyrean heaven." Then, it contemplates its source which gives rise to the second Archangel of light⁶⁴, and so on until the generation of the latitudinal order which Suhrawardi calls the "Lord of the Species" and Perfect Nature (tabia at-tamm) - i.e. the Platonic Forms. Suhrawardi does not limit the number of angels to the Ten Intelligences of the peripatetics, however, which itself was based on the ten heavens of medieval astronomy⁶⁵. Rather, he determines them by the number of fixed stars; indefinite and therefore beyond practical enumeration⁶⁶. The identification of the latitudinal order with the Platonic Forms led Suhrawardi towards the opposite formulation of Avicenna in the essence/existence issue. Namely, he upheld the primacy of essence/quiddity (asalat al-mahiyyah) over being/existence (asalat al-wujud). This controversial point would again be reversed by Mulla Sadra in the sixteenth century.

A significant development for Islámic philosophy and Sufism issuing from Suhrawardi's ontological schema, is the notion of the `alam al-mithal (the World of Image Exemplars, what Corbin has dubbed the Mundus Imaginalis or the Imaginal [not imaginary] World)⁶⁷. The Mundus Imaginalis is analogous to Plato's "World of Forms" and is situated as intermediary realm between the world of pure angelic intelligences (jabarut) and our sensible cosmos. It is an isthmus (barzakh), world of the Kingdom (malakut) and the plane where all visionary, mystical, eschatological and initial after-death experiences occur. As such, on this level "bodies are spiritualized and spirits corporealized⁶⁸."

Suhrawardi's theosophy gave rise to a current of Islámic spiritual philosophy quite distinct from kalam (dogmatic theology), falsafa (peripatetic philosophy) and Sufism. In the Muslim East ishraqi thought was to exert a tremendous influence upon all subsequent developments, especially since it was absorbed by

Shi'ism and came to exert a pronounced influence upon both the sixteenth century "School of Isfahan" and Shaykh Ahmad Ahsai.

Neoplatonic Aspects of Bábí-Bahá'í Metaphysics: Some Basic Reflections

In his highly acclaimed monograph, *The Concept of the Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings* (Ottawa: 1982), Juan R. Cole aptly points out that "...the mystical theology of Plotinus...particularly influenced the cultural context of the Bahá'í Writings⁶⁹" Emerging of the bosom of an Islámic intellectual milieu, it is no wonder therefore that Bahá'í theological metaphysics acquires much of its technical philosophical terminology from Islámic Neoplatonism. However, it is not the case that the Central Figures borrow the former system lump-sum. Rather, they utilized the language and concepts of the already existing theoretical framework in order to better communicate their teachings to a specific cultural intelligentsia. Even more importantly, the Bahá'í system should not be seen as merely a historical permutation of Neoplatonism (an erroneous judgement often leveled by some orientalists upon the theosophical currents in Islámic thought, such as Sufism). It is a self-contained system in its own right as much as a continuity in the Neoplatonic ethos.

In *Some Answered Questions* `Abdu'l-Bahá delineates the basic Bahá'í ontological schema in a highly Plotinian manner. Like Plotinus, `Abdu'l-Bahá upholds three primary, fundamental hypostases: The World of God (al-Haqq, Deity), the World of Command (‘Amr, the realm of the Manifestation) and the world of creation (khalq). God is the axis mundi of this design, radically transcendent and unknoweable.

A somewhat strong apophatic stance is taken in the Bahá'í Writings in regard to God as ipseity (the essence).

...For God is, in His Essence, wholly above ascent and descent, entrance and exit; He hath through all eternity been free of the attributes of the creatures, and ever will remain so...(The Seven Valleys, pp. 22-3).

To every discerning and illuminated heart it is evident that God, the unknoweable Essence, the Divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. "No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving." (Gleanings, pp. 46-7)

Like the Plotinian One, there can be no question of the possibility of qualifying the nature of the transcendent God. He is the "beyond-beyond" (wara' al-wara'). Nothing can be said of Him positively. Therefore, Bahá'í metaphysics upholds the radical nominalism of the Muta'zilah on the question of the Divine attributes (sifat'ullah).

Interestingly, the Central Figures assert that all affirmative ascriptions predicated of the Godhead are in reality belonging to the Primal Will (al-mashiyyah al-awwal, the essential reality of the Manifestation who is the perfect mirror of the Divinity) and not God Himself. The Primal Will is the first self-manifestation, or emanation, of the Absolute from the concealed station of the Unicity of "I was a Hidden Treasure" and shares in the pre-existence of God. Bahá'u'lláh, somewhat reminiscent of the Johannine logos theology of the New Testament, states in the Kitáb-i-Íqán that, "The Primal Will existed before the creation; the Primal Will was with God; and the Primal Will shared in the Attributes of God (p. 98)." Invariably, the Primal Will is called the First Mind, Word of God, the Supreme Pen, Identity of the Self and Soul of God and the Manifestation of the Command of God (mazahar-i amr-i illahi).

Much like the Universal Intellect of Plotinus, the Primal Will, and not the deus absconditus (the absent Godhead), operates as the direct creator of the world. For instance, in the Báb's hyper-esoteric commentary on the opening Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim (In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful) of the Qur'an, the point below the first ba' of the Bismillah is held to represent the Primal Will, the Perfect Man and the goal of existence. As such, the world shares in a transcendent unity of being with the Primal Will, who functions as the essential reality of all things, and not the Godhead Himself. `Abdu'l-Bahá says, "The Primal Will, which is the World of the Command, is the inner reality of things, and all existing things are the manifestations of the Divine Will, and not the manifestations of the Divine Reality and Identity [(the ipseity)]" (Tablet of `Abdu'l-Bahá on Wahdat al-Wujud, provisional translation by Keven Brown from *Min Makatib-i `Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 274-277). As a side note, it is intriguing how in the prolegomenon of the Seven Valleys Bahá'u'lláh, in a somewhat elliptical language, seems to suggest in the strongest possible terms that the annihilated wayfarer becomes annihilated in the station of the Manifestation: "...to the end that every man may testify, in himself, by himself, in the station of the Manifestation of His Lord, that verily there is no God save Him...(p. 1)"

This notion of the Primal Will or Manifestation of God being the goal of existence, harks back to the Perfect Man (al-insan al-kamil) axiology of the wahdat al-wujud (Unity of Existence) school of the thirteenth century Andalusian Sufi mystic, Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi (d. 1240). Briefly, according to this doctrine the first thing God created was a mirror through which His consciousness would be perfectly manifested to Himself (see *Fusus al-Hikam, The Bezels of Wisdom*, translated by R.W.J. Austin, Paulist Press (1980), passim). This is the Perfect Man, the inner reality of all the prophets, who superlatively is represented by the Nur or Haqqiqah Muhammadiyya (The Light of Muhammad or Muhammaddan Reality). `Abdu'l-Karim Jili, one of the most important commentators of Ibn `Arabi, developed an entire hermeneutic identifying the Quranic amr'ullah (the Command of God) with the Muhammad Reality. He says the amr represents the archetypal Muhammad (the Muhammad who is cited in a hadith-qudsi (extra-Quranic utterance of God) as being a prophet while Adam was

still between water and clay) (see *Al-insan al-kamil, The Universal Man*, translated by Titus Burckhardt, Beshara (1995)). "That would lead one to see the command...as the cosmic Muhammad who becomes the working principle in the world⁷⁰." Annemarie Schimmel comments,

The Perfect Man is the spirit in which all things have their origins; the created spirit of Muhammad is, thus, a mode of the uncreated divine spirit...One can say in this context that the whole world is created from the Light of Muhammad: Israfil, the angel of Doomsday, is created from his heart; Gabriel becomes equivalent to the First Intelligence; Muhammads Intelligence corresponds to the heavenly pen; and his soul to the Well-Preserved Tablet (*al-lawh al-mahfuz*).⁷¹

Thus, Muhammad operates as the theophanic exteriorization of the Hidden Essence, which what the Perfect Man essentially is in this doctrine. To further support their position, the Sufis often cite another hadith qudsi, considered spurious by some, the famous "ana Ahmad bila mim" (I am Ahmad without the mim (Ahad, the One))." Certain Sufi exegetes even went so far as to interpret the cryptic "alef-lam-mim" of the Sura al-Baqara as representing the various cosmic, manifestational stations of the Muhammadan Reality: alef, the Godhead; lam, the Archangel Gabriel and the inner being of Muhammad; and mim the historical Muhammad himself. The Báb's esoteric Quranic hermeneutics fully endorses this kind of interpretation (see B. Todd Lawson, *The Qur'an Commentary of Siyyid `Alí Muhammad-i Báb*, Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, McGill University, 1987).

While the Manifestation of God represents the Primal Will as the first emanation of the Divinity of the vertical, "lahuti" level, on the horizontal the first things emanated by the Divinity, says `Abdu'l-Bahá, is the World of the Kingdom (*malakut*). This is the Supreme Center from which our world proceeds. The transubstantiation of being (*harakat jowhariyyah*), to use a term coined by Mulla Sadra, begins with an arc of descent out to the material world through the receptacle of etheric matter which forms the basic stuff of our material universe and forms the foundation of life as we know it. From this process proceeds the elementary levels of material being (i.e. atomic, mineral, vegetable, animal) which culminates in the human being who occupies the lowest point of descent but the most elevated station of material existence and who in himself forms an isthmus between the material cosmos and the spiritual world.

From man, who stands...opposite the 'Supreme Center,' begins the second arc of existence, the arc of ascent, the arc of the spiritual worlds. This arc comprises the spiritual degrees of existence and is termed 'progress' (literally: producing some-thing new (*khalq-i jadid?* NH)). This is the arc culminates in the world of the kingdom (termed also First Mind, Primal Will, Word of God, Logos, Identity of the Self and Soul of God). The circle of existence therefore has its beginning in the elemental atom, follows the arc of descent, with degrees of the material world - mineral, animal, vegetable and animal kingdoms - and culminates in man. From man, who stands at the end of materiality and the beginning of spirituality, the second arc of existence

begins: it is the arc ascent which, traversing the various degrees of the spiritual worlds such as the spirit of faith, the Holy Spirit, the Most Great Spirit, culminates in the Logos, which manifests itself in the world of creation as the Manifestation of God, Perfect Image of God, Perfect Man, perfect expression in the plane of the world of creation of all the qualities of the world of the Kingdom⁷².

This is the standard Neoplatonic view of evolution as presented by such thinkers as Avicenna and Mulla Sadra. This process, it must be stressed, does not occur in time. It occurs in an "eternal now." One the evolution of the human species, for instance, the Bahá'í view advances a variation of St. Augustines "seminal reasons": man may not have existed in the form he is seen today, however the archetypal man has forever existed. Hence, the Bahá'í model seems to reject the teleological ramifications of the Darwinian scheme, on the one hand; on the other, the Writings do implicitly allow for the possibility of of the physical evolution of the species. The point is not to confuse the vertical level (lahuti, jabaruti & malakuti respectivilly) of sacred timelessness with the horizontal nasuti level of temporality, change, mutation and corruption.

Another important Neoplatonic concept to be found in the Bahá'í Writings is the notion of the eternity of the world and the symbiotic relationship between the Divinity and the world of creation. One the one hand, using the analogy of the sun and the globe, `Abdu'l-Bahá explains,

The sun in its essence is independent of the bodies which it lights, for its light is in itself and is free and independent of the terrestrial globe; so the earth is under the influence of the sun and recieves its light [from it], whereas the sun and its rays are entirely independent from the earth....

On the other, He states, "But if there were no sun, the earth and the earthly beings could not exist (Some Answered Questions, p. 202)." The Bahá'í Writings especially stress the necessity of the eternal effusions of God. Again, to quote the Master,

The Creator always had a creation; the rays have always shone and gleamed from the reality of the sun, for without the rays the sun would become opaque darkness. The names and attributes of God require the existence of beings, and the Eternal Bounty does not cease. If it were to, it would be contrary to the perfections of God (Some Answered Questions, p. 281).

Therefore, there cannot have been a time when the world did not exist. However, Bahá'u'lláh seems to avouch a highly Ibn `Arabian explanation by suggesting that the eternity of the world and the traditional creatio ex nihilo doctrine are in essence two sides of the same coin:

As regards thine assertion about the beginning of creation, this is a matter on which conceptions vary by reason of the divergences of men's thoughts and opinions. Wert thou to assert that it hath ever existed and shall continue to exist, it would be true; or wert thou to affirm the same concept as is

mentioned in the sacred scriptures, no doubt would there be about it, for it hath been revealed by God, the Lord of the Worlds. Indeed He was a Hidden Treasure. This is a station that can never be described or alluded to. And this station of "I did wish to make myself known," God was, and His creation had ever existed beneath His shelter from the beginning that hath no beginning, apart from its being preceded by a firstness which cannot be regarded as firstness and originated by a Cause inscrutable even unto all men of learning (Tablet of Wisdom, in *The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 240-1).

Although I have not been able to place an explicit passage in the Writings that would support this thesis, I believe this synthesis given by Bahá'u'lláh would logically lead to along the same lines as that given by Ibn `Arabi. That is, the idea of "perpetual creation" (*tajaddud al-khalq*): that creation while eternal on one level is also being perpetually re-created at each instant.

The principle of the transcendent unity of existence (*wahdat al-wujud*), often confused with philosophical pantheism, panentheism and existential monism, has been said to have been rejected by the Central Figures. On the face of it, the point is a valid one: the world of being is clearly demarcated by the worlds of God, Command and creation. However, the Writings also seem to uphold a variant of this idea. For example, `Abdu'l-Bahá says, "Reality is one and does not admit of multiplicity." Certainly Bahá'í metaphysics rejects the crude formulations of some Sufis or Hindu Vedantists such that the universe is nothing but God: i.e. the famous "hame ust" (everything is He) or "Everything other than the Lord is illusory" (Shankara). But the statement, "Reality is one and does not admit of multiplicity," indicates in very strong, explicit terms the universal existential interconnectedness of all things, material and spiritual, with the Divine Ground. To be on the safe side for the moment, one can say that the locution has more in common with Plotinus' cosmic, universal sympathy than with the "wujudi" ontology of Ibn `Arabi and his interpreters.

The Plotinian doctrines of the transcendent ineffability of the One, the Universal Intellect standing as the cosmo-ontological intermediary between the One and the world of creation, the eternity of the world and the unity of being, thoroughly inform all discussions in Islámic philosophy and mysticism to the present. In point of fact, any treatment of the history of Islámic philosophy would be quite misleading, to say the least, if it failed to acknowledge the overwhelming influence and influx of Greco-Hellenistic thought on the cultural heritage of Islám. The Bahá'í Faith seeing itself as both the inheritor and abrogator of the Islámic ethos preserves much in the tradition of employing Greco-Hellenistic philosophical axioms when systematically addressing itself to specific issues of a philosophic, metaphysical nature.

In conclusion, it is my belief that the Neoplatonism the Bahá'í Faith articulates is not so much the historical Neoplatonism of Plotinus and his Islámic apostles, despite the fact that obvious conceptual parallels do exist. But, rather, the particular Neoplatonism the Bahá'í Writings espouse is one shared in the sapiential teachings of all sacred traditions; a

meta-philosophical philosophia perennis (perennial philosophy) transcending all barriers of time, place, culture and historical development; the wisdom (theosophia) underlying the "...Ancient Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future."

Nima Hazini Albuquerque, New Mexico November 24, 1995

Notes

1. And only three...see Enneads V.1, [10].
2. Enn. V.1, [10], 1.
3. Enn. V.1, [10], 7; V.5, [32], 1.
4. Enn. V.1, *ibid.* In point of fact, some modern Neoplatonic scholars have dubbed Plotinus' system as henological (from "to hen," Greek for the One).
5. Enn. V.5, [32], 4.
6. Enn. V.6, [24], 6.
7. Enn. V.5, [32], 6.
8. Enn. VI.9, [9], 5.
9. Enn. V.5, [32], 6.
10. Enn. V.3, [49], 4.
11. This is also true for each of the other two hypostasis below the One.
12. Stephen Makenna says, "The system of Plotinus is a system of necessary EMANATION, PROCESSION, or IRRADIATION accompanied by necessary ASPIRATION or REVERSION-TO-SOURCE: all forms and phases of Existence flow from the Divinity and all strive to return THITHER and to remain THERE...", from the Extracts from the Explanatory Matter In The First Edition in his translation of the Enneads, Penguin (1991), p. xxxi.
13. "There is no deliberate action on the part of the One, and no willing or planning or choice or care for what is produced." Armstrong, *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, p. 240.
14. For a thorough account of the history of this idea in Western thought, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: 1933).
15. Enn. III.8, 10.
16. At the end of Enn. V.1, [5], Plotinus says, "...only separated by otherness," a classic example of this dialectical interplay between transcendence and immanence replete throughout the Enneads. Perhaps the paradox can be partially resolved by saying the world is in the One but the One not in the world.
17. See Enn. VI.7, [12]. Throughout the Enneads wherever Plotinus discusses the

nature of the One, apophatic markers such as "as it were" or "so to speak" always follow. For a valuable discussion of Plotinian apophasis, see Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: 1991), chapter 1.

18. Enn. III.8, [30], 8.

19. Enn. IV.1, [21], 1.

20. Cited in Armstrong, p. 245.

21. Enn. V.1, [6].

22. Enn. V.7, [1].

23. Enn. VI.7, [38], 9.

24. Enn. III.7, 5-6.

25. Armstrong, *ibid.* p. 250

26. The World-Soul's nearness to Intellect is closer than that of nous to the One.

27. Enn. II.9, [2].

28. Immanent form of living body.

29. Enn. III.6, [7].

30. Enn. II.5, [4].

31. Enn. I.8, [2].

32. *ibid.*

33. This idea of the unfolding seed was to later play a very important role in St. Augustine's "seminal reasons."

34. Enn. V.8, [7].

35. Enn. II.9, [16].

36. See Toshihiko Izutusu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, Keio Institute (Tokyo: 1971), *passim*.

37. Enn. IV.4, [40].

38. Plotinus says that it is due to the indeterminate dyad and *tolma* that Matter causes delusional vices in the soul, Enn. I.8, [4].

39. Enn. IV.4, [32].

40. Plotinus' position on this point of descent is ostensibly paradoxical. On the one hand, the decline of the soul is contemptible, as it is a manifestation of *tolma*; on the other, it is a necessary fulfillment of the order of creation. In a sense, our soul is sent here by the Divinity to perfect the physical world in the image of nous, but the choices we make determine how this fulfillment will play itself out. We can either exploit the body for lofty ends or be

enslaved by it, Enn. IV.8, [5]. Which is to say, the body is nonessential in the pursuit of eudaimonia but not blameworthy either; it is somehow neutral, Enn. I.4, [16].

41. Freedom is nothing other than to do what one ought, rather than what is desired (Enn. VI.8, 1-4). The imposition of order and measure upon the lower soul constitutes moral freedom (Enn. I.8, [4]).

42. I use this word here as a loose analogy. The Western confessional notion of salvation, with all its doctrinal ramifications, is quite alien to Plotinus' world-view.

43. Under the direction of Hunayn ibn Ishaq they were responsible for producing a veritable translation industry in Gundeshapur overnight.

44. He also translated all of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

45. The commentary in question is other than *Isagoge* which is on Aristotle's *Categories*. For an English translation of the *Theology of Aristotle*, see Henry-Schwyzler, *Plotini Opera II (Maior)*, passim.

46. As Majid Fakhry points out, this had a lot to do with the attempt at "...harmonizing...Greek philosophy..." with "...Islamic dogma..." History of Islamic Philosophy (New York: 1983), p. 20; and since many of the ideas of the Stagiraite sage were seen by the more orthodox elements of society as bordering on the heretical and incompatible with the Qur'anic creed, what better strategy to introduce the *Theologia* by attributing to Aristotle in order to placate the conservative literalists of the time.

47. Fakhry, *ibid.*, cites the fihrist (table of contents) of Badawi's edition of the *Theology of Aristotle* and al-Qifti's *Tarikh al-Hukama*. On the origins of the *Theologia* see F.W. Zimmerman, *The Origins of the So-Called Theology of Aristotle in Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages: The Theology and Other Texts*, (ed.) J. Kraye, W.F. Ryan and C.B. Schmitt; see also Franz Rosenthal, *Ash-Shaykh al-Yunani and the Arabic Plotinus Source*, *Orientalia* vol. 21 (1952), pp. 461-529 and vol. 22 (1953), pp. 370-400.

48. This work later played an important role in the systematic re-assembly of early Neoplatonism by the Latin Scholastics in the Catholic West and was dubbed the *Liber de Causis*.

49. See Richard C. Taylor, *A Critical Analysis of the Kalam fi'l mahd al-khair in Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*, (ed.) Parviz Morewedge (New York: 1992), pp. 11-40.

50. Translated by Fakhry, *ibid.*, p. 21. "In this movement of desire, the author finds the clue not only to the nature of the Soul, which acts as the link between the sensible and the intelligible worlds, but also emanation of all things from the One (the First). Thus the Soul, which is none other than Reason in the guise of desire, performs one of two functions: it orders or governs either the world of forms or that of particulars, depending upon whether it is moved by desire for the universal or for the particular. When it desires the

particular, owing to its yearning to reveal its active nature, it moves downward, dominated and directed by Reason, and dwells in animals, plants, or humans, in the form of an indivisible, incorporeal substance which, upon the distintegration of the body, will rejoin the realm of separate substances (or forms), after passing through a series of progressive purifications. In support of this view, the author invokes the authority of Heraclitus, Empedocles, Pythagoras and Plato, who are all said to have held that the Soul descends into the body from the intelligible world and will rejoin it upon its release from the bondage. This body Plato has described as a dungeon to which the Soul is temporarily consigned, whereas Empedocles has described it as the rust which attacks it..." *ibid.*

51. "Those two Neoplatonic compilations contain virtually all the germinal elements that went into Islámic Neo-platonism: the utter transcendence of the First Principle or God; the procession or emanation of things from Him; the role of reason as the instrument of God in his creation, and the locus of the forms of things, as well as the source of the illumination of the human mind; the position of the Soul at the periphery of the intelligible world and the link or "horizon" between the intelligible and sensible worlds; and finally the contempt in which matter was held, as the basest creation or emanation from the One and the lowest rung in the cosmic scale." *ibid.*, p. 31.

52. "Accident" (*arad*) for Ibn Sina does not mean chance - this point cannot be over-emphasized enough since it became it a constant cause of controversy, confusion, misinterpretation and misrepresentation by his detractors, notably Averroes and Thomas Aquinas. For the Shaykh ar-Ra'is "accident" denotes a very special kind of accident vis-a-vis the contingent possibilities and is only such due to the inherent bipolarity of the possible. Being/existence for Avicenna is a primary category and cannot be divided into the five predicables (*genus, specie, differentiae, substance and accident*).

53. See al-Ghazzali's *Tahafut al-falsifa*.

54. Henri Corbin, *The History of Islámic Philosophy*, p. 171.

55. Corbin, *ibid.*, p. 172.

56. Avicenna's "floating-man" argument presupposes Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* by almost six centuries.

57. He is not to be confused with the Sufis Abu Najib and Shihab ad-Din Omar al-Suhrawardi.

58. One of the accusations leveled against the Master of Illumination was that he disbelieved in Muhammad's "seal of prophecy" and espoused the possibility of continued revelation after him. See Hossein Ziai, *The Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Political Doctrine in The Political Aspects of Islámic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi*, (ed.) Charles E. Butterworth (Cambridge: 1992), pp. 304-344.

59. Corbin, *Sohravardi* in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 7, (ed.) Paul

Edwards, p. 486. See also the first chapter of his *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth...*(New Jersey: 1977).

60. *ibid.*

61. *ibid.*

62. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 69.

63. Translated by Margaret Smith, *Readings from the Mystics of Islám*, p. 53.

64. This layout harks back to Plotinus' indefinite dyad and the generation of psuche from nous. For a very valuable, lengthy expose, see John Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights: Qutb al-Din Shirazi and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islámic Philosophy*, (Cambridge: 1992), pp. 55-73.

65. See Nasr, *ibid.*, p. 71-2.

66. Nasr, *ibid.*

67. While there are certain features in Avicenna's mystical recitals (Salman va Absal, Tayr, Hayy ibn Yaqzan, Ishq, etc.) which seems to strongly suggest this point of view, Suhrawardi was really the first to develop it in any systematic fashion. Other Sufis, Ibn `Arabi and his school especially, were to expand upon this doctrine, although there is virtually no evidence whatsoever that the Great Shaykh was influenced by Ishraqi thought, ever came into contact with Suhrawardi's works or even knew of him for that matter.

68. See Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, part ii.

69. Pp. 1-2.

70. Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystical Dimensions of Islám*, p. 223.

71. *ibid.*

72. Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God*, p. 64.

— Neoplatonism: Framework for a Bahá'í Metaphysics (Used by permission of the curator)