

## *The 20th Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial Lecture*

# Some Aspects of Bahá'í Ethics

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I am really overwhelmed and deeply touched by your warm-hearted welcome and introduction. It is an unexpected, great honor to have been chosen by the Association to present the Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial Lecture. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude and that of my wife for this invitation.

The material that I am presenting—some aspects of Bahá'í ethics—is taken from the draft of a forthcoming book, *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture*.<sup>1</sup> A systematic presentation of the new standard of values is, as I feel, not only timely, it is rather a matter of urgency in the face of the increasing disintegration of traditional morality and the truly apocalyptic dimension of spreading immorality all over the world. When choosing my topic for this conference I had to decide between an outline of the new morality which, in the given time frame, could not have been more than a general survey, or some few central issues that can be dealt with more in depth. I chose the latter option, inasmuch as I can refer to my article published in the *Bahá'í Studies Review*, “The New Morality: An Outline.”

Let me start with a few general remarks on ethics: The term derives from the Greek *ethikos* which pertains to *ethos* (character). Ethics as part of practical philosophy is also called “moral philosophy,”<sup>2</sup> and, if it is a religious ethics based on revelation (a revelatory ethics like Bahá'í ethics), one can call it “moral theology,” as it is termed in Catholicism.

The subject of ethics is the human character and human conduct, so far as they depend on general principles commonly known as moral principles.

It is the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment. This field is vast, highly complex, and intricate, as the following groups of issues may indicate, the enumeration of which is by no means exclusive. One group refers to the a priori structures of the moral subject, to the anthropological presumptions and metaphysical objectives. It deals with the image of man: his freedom, moral responsibility, and dignity. The subject is expressed in the question: What is human nature, what is the purpose of life? What is the highest good of human conduct and what are its sanctions?

Another group refers to the central issue of the origin, derivation, and vindication of moral values. In the focus are questions such as: What is the ultimate standard of right or wrong? What is the categorical quality of ethical demands, the unconditioned nature of "ought"? Are there universally recognized values, unconditioned norms, moral principles of good and evil, right and wrong? Where do they come from, how are they recognized, and why should I follow them?

A major part of ethics is dedicated to concrete norms, values, and duties. Ethics tries to find answers to questions such as: What shall I do, how should human beings live in order to become happy? What is virtue; what are the motives which prompt right conduct?

Revelatory ethics raises some additional questions such as the relationship between reason and revelation, the concept of liberty and its relationship to obedience, the concepts of sin and conscience, the virtues and their relation to concrete divine commandments.

My lecture has three parts. Its major part is part 2 in which I will discuss the origin and vindication of moral values in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. The introductory part 1 will deal with the centrality of ethics in the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and the final part, part 3, will conclude the lecture by outlining some features of Bahá'í ethics that conflict with moral positions which are dominant in Western societies.

## I

The Bahá'í Faith is not interested in metaphysical speculations or dogmatic definitions.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis is, rather, on moral orientation and education,

on right action and right motivation. The main purpose of the divine message is the transformation of the human being. Consequently, ethics is the central theme in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The divine ordinances "which concern the realm of morals and ethics" are, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, "the "fundamental aspect of the religion of God" (*Promulgation* 403).<sup>4</sup>

Moral instructions and directives in the Bahá'í revelation which can be taken as a point of departure for detecting the underlying system of Bahá'í ethics are scattered throughout Bahá'í scripture. Not even the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the kernel of Bahá'í law and ethics, is a systematic code of laws and of moral prescriptions.<sup>5</sup> It is not organized logically, section by section, point by point, as are treatises and manuals on Islamic law. The Book of God has never come down in the form of a logically developed system of intellectual exposition; its laws and commandments have never been established in the form of a systematically structured design of general, abstract norms. Nor have they appeared in a rational form, that is, with appended reasons and explanations. The Word of God is, as I have already pointed out elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> an eruptive, visionary, and emphatic outpouring. It is neither systematically structured nor an arid instruction in plain terms; as Shoghi Effendi put it: "All Divine Revelation seems to have been thrown out in flashes. The Prophets never composed treatises. This is why in the Qur'án and our own Writings different subjects are so often included in one Tablet. It pulsates, so to speak. That is why it is 'Revelation'" (*Unfolding Destiny* 454).

This is why the Kitáb-i-Aqdas "jumps from one subject to the next without any obvious logical connection" (Lewis 123). The Holy, the Divine is in its very essence beyond the rational and its categories of thought. At all times, it has been up to man to order the laws of God systematically, an essential precondition for their later application.<sup>7</sup> My forthcoming introduction to Bahá'í ethics is intended as an attempt to systematically analyze the multifarious moral imperatives of Bahá'í scripture and to detect their inner architecture.

The eminent function of man's character, of his behavior, his actions, deeds, and works in Bahá'u'lláh's scheme of redemption becomes evident from His definition of the Covenant of God, the major constitutive principle of all Bahá'í theology. The initial verse of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas clarifies

the basic issue as to the relation of faith to works, which was the central controversy between Catholicism and Protestantism: Faith, that is, the recognition (*'irfán*) of the Manifestation, is the foundation, whereas works and deeds are "the essence of faith" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 10:13). Faith and works are "inseparable" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 1). Without faith man goes astray, "though he be the author of every righteous deed" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 1); but faith without works is, according to the Gospel, like a tree that "bringeth not forth good fruit": its destination is "to be hewn, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 7:19). Divine grace is not, as Martin Luther asserted, granted through personal faith alone (*sola fide*), but through both faith and righteous deeds. How essential man's works are becomes evident from Bahá'u'lláh's definition of "faith" in His Words of Wisdom: "The essence of faith is fewness of words and abundance of deeds" (*Tablets* 10:13) and from His admonition: "Let deeds, not words, be your adorning (Hidden Words, Persian 5)<sup>8</sup> . . . Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men . . . differ from their conduct" (*Gleanings* 139:8).

In numerous passages Bahá'u'lláh enjoins His followers to "strive . . . with heart and soul" (Hidden Words, Persian 76) to distinguish themselves from others by their deeds.<sup>9</sup> They should conduct themselves in such a manner that they may stand out "distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 35:5):<sup>10</sup> "Strive to be shining examples unto all mankind, and true reminders of the virtues of God amidst men" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 9:4).

What matters is right *being* ("a good character," Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 4:13<sup>11</sup>) and right *acting* ("good works,"<sup>12</sup> "good deeds" [*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 59, 70])<sup>13</sup> for they are "the fruits of the tree of man" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 26). Those that "yield no fruit on earth . . . are verily counted as among the dead" (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, Persian 81).<sup>14</sup> Thus the emphasis lies more on *orthopractice* than *orthodoxy*. However, this does not mean that religion is reduced to morals alone, as philosophers of the Enlightenment did in their endeavor to keep an equal distance between unbelief and superstition. The morality in religion is not above the mystery in it.<sup>15</sup> The Bahá'í ethos is based on the individual's participation in God's new

Covenant, that is, the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God and obedience to his teachings and laws (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 1).

The aim of religion is to guide man towards perfection through morals, and the aim of all morals is felicity and happiness, which is the ultimate desire of all human beings: "*Homo naturaliter desiderat beatitudinem*," as Thomas Aquinas put it—"Happiness is man's natural desire" (*Summa* I-II, 1.69, a1).<sup>16</sup> The scripture's moral instructions are "the everlasting torch of divine guidance" Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian 35), the "Straight Path" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 184)<sup>17</sup> to an "ultimate aim" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 225:5), to "human happiness."

What is happiness? How can it be defined? In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle defines "happiness" (*eudaimonia*), the prime mover of human actions, as living a life that is determined by reason (not by feelings, not by emotions!), as the activity of the soul which is in accordance with virtue (1097a 6–18).<sup>18</sup> It is a fundamental doctrine of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle that a good man and a happy man are the same. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá human happiness "consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 60). On the level of the individual, this means here on earth "a tranquil heart;" and, ultimately, "happiness in the after-life."<sup>19</sup> On the level of the political world it means "the illumination of the world of humanity" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 225:3) and "securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 60). The virtues required for the human being are "the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objective." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 60).

Bahá'í ethics is not merely descriptive, it is normative and prescriptive in nature. The scripture contains a wealth of different kinds of normative statements relating to ethics: passages that elucidate its doctrinal foundations, commandments, and prohibitions, catalogues of virtues,<sup>20</sup> praise of virtues, warnings against wrong-doing and the consequences of evil deeds, against a life spent in lust, passion, and vice; instructions and appeals to live a life of virtue and service pleasing to God, of service to one's neighbor,<sup>21</sup> to mankind (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 109:2),<sup>22</sup> and of service at the

“Threshold of Holiness” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament* 3:3). Thus, the scripture is not at all a mere textbook of religious and ethical doctrines, of abstract moral propositions, but rather a work of moral admonition, of general directives which have a driving power, a compelling force motivating people to pursue the moral good. Bahá’u’lláh’s ethical instructions should not be misconstrued as a dry, bloodless philosophy under the yoke of the law. Bahá’í ethics is rather a methodical way of life according to the Word and the Law. Bahá’u’lláh assures us that he who takes upon himself the “yoke” will find “days of blissful joy . . . in store” (*Gleanings* 153:9). Those who have been spiritually reborn and tread this path are on the way to becoming a “new man.”<sup>23</sup> In the *Suratu’l-Haykal* Bahá’u’lláh promises that in the fullness of time a “race of men, incomparable in character, shall be raised up” (*Summons* 1:8).

## II

1. The discussion of the ontological status of moral norms and values, their philosophical or theological justification, is the cardinal issue of ethics and the starting point of all reflection about it. The discussion of this subject is as old as philosophy. Positions deduced from the Bahá’í scripture can be more easily recognized and interpreted in the context of views which have been developed in the past by theologians and philosophers.

It was Plato who, in his early dialogue *Euthyphro*, raised the decisive question: “Is that which is holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?” (A10), which he clearly answered: “The holy is loved because it is holy, and it is not holy because it is loved” (E10). This judgment became the foundation of the philosophy of natural law. Over the millennia, from Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz, and beyond, the idea prevailed that God is not the world’s legislator, that the categories of good and evil, just and unjust, are not decisions of the divine will, but are rather objective realities, eternal truths preceding the will of God like the numerical proportions. God is bound to these eternal

truths, which can (at least to a certain extent) be recognized by human reason.

Another strain of thought in Christian theology, that of *ethical voluntarism*, can be traced back to St. Paul<sup>24</sup> and St. Augustine, and was formulated by the Franciscan monk John Duns Scotus (1270–1303) in categorical language: God is not subject to any principle or law. There is no higher law above Him, no moral law independent of Him, no preceding idea of good and evil, no a priori system of values, no *lex aeterna*, no natural law that can be deduced from the order of creation that God would be bound to. Not the law is eternal, but the lawgiver. It is God's will that creates every law there is. That is why His action is, as He proceeds, always and necessarily right and just. As His commandments are ordinances of His contingent will, God acts, wherever He does, always justly.<sup>25</sup> William Ockham followed on this path, as did later on Luther and Calvin, who saw the origin of all morals and all law in God's unfathomable will: "The supreme rule of justice is the Will of God, and every thing that he wills must be accepted as just because he wills it."<sup>26</sup>

In Islam the study of ethical principles, the discussions of the sources of law and ethics, started in the eighth and ninth centuries A.D. Here the two antagonistic strains of thought are recognizable as well in the schools of the *Mu'tazila*<sup>27</sup> and of the *Ash'arites*.<sup>28</sup> The *Mu'tazilites* were the proponents of rationalistic ethics. For them ethical value has an objective reality and cannot be reduced in essence to the will of God and his commandments. 'Abdu'l-Jabbár (935–1025)<sup>29</sup> and his predecessors stated that man has the natural ability to know what is right independently of any command or revelation. They allow "a place for revelation as an indispensable *supplement* to reason. It tells us some important truths on values that reason unaided could not have discovered although reason can recognize and accept them as rational once they have been revealed—e. g. the value of prayer in building character" (Hourani 18; author's emphasis).

The predominant theory in classical Sunni Islam was that of ethical voluntarism.<sup>30</sup> Traditionalists, in particular *Sháfi'í*, Ibn Ḥanbal, al-*Ash'arí*, Ibn Ḥazm, al-*Ghazálí* and *Shahraṣṭání*, stated that justice is nothing but

obedience to the revealed law of the *sharí'a*: right action is that which God has commanded. They objected to the belief that revelation was merely supplementary to human reason, and argued that "if God's commandments followed objective principles of value, such as a real justice, these would be something fixed pre-eternally and beyond His control, which would thus limit His power and make Him less than omnipotent" (Hourani 28). If man could judge what is right and wrong, he could rule on what God could rightly prescribe for man, and this would be presumptuous and blasphemous. Furthermore they objected "that the judgements of reason were arbitrary, based only on desire; that such judgements in fact always contradicted each other; and lastly they arrogated [to themselves] the function of revelation and rendered it useless" (Hourani 17). For them, the primary source of ethics was the divine revelation and tradition or their derivatives. Whereas a small stream of Mu'tazilí rationalism survived in the Imámí *Shí'a*, the orthodox view has prevailed in Sunni countries until the present time (Hourani 19).

2. Bahá'í ethics has its roots in the divine revelation. It is based on the scripture, that is, on the doctrines of God's absolute sovereignty and the infallibility of the Manifestation, of God's Covenant and of human nature (Bahá'í anthropology). God is the supreme source of all values. Thus, the Bahá'í value system is not a philosophical set of moral standards, not the outcome of methodical human endeavor to formulate concrete norms solely by means of argumentation and rational discourse (no "discourse ethics"), rather (as in other religions) guidance under the authority of an enlightened Teacher who claims that his book is the standard for good and evil, the "unerring Balance established amongst men" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 99).<sup>31</sup>

Bahá'í ethics is theocentric and theonomous<sup>32</sup> in its nature: Hence, God is the creator of the world and the lawgiver of mankind. He is the primal cause "of all good" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 10:2), the supreme source of all morals. His commandments (prescribed by the Manifestation) are "the essence of justice and the source thereof" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 88:1). The highest criterion in moral judgment is recourse to God's arbitrary will and to the infallibility of the divine messenger who mediates this will



to humanity. To this will (which is arbitrary in the sense of unlimited, absolute, depending on volition, not governed by principle), man owes absolute obedience.

Thus, the moral order is not, as Plato saw it, anchored in a preceding idea of good and evil, in eternal truths that can be identified by reason, nor in a rational concept of man, defining for all eternity the idea of the good, nor in a rationally recognizable "nature of things." but rather in the decisions of God's arbitrary will. God alone is *anarchos*, absolutely free: not submitted to any law or principle. Therefore He can never be unjust. He is "the Lord of all things and is the vassal of none" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 4:1). His Will has no reason to will as He wills, other than that He wills it so. His sovereign, unfathomable free will is the foundation of all moral obligations. There is no criterion of moral rectitude independent of His will: "Know thou for a certainty that the Will of God is not limited by the standards of the people. . . . Verily He is to be praised in His acts and to be obeyed in His behests. He hath no associate in His judgement nor any helper in His sovereignty. He doeth whatsoever He willeth and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 8:19). A preceding idea of the moral good, the existence of a moral order binding upon God, would limit his sovereignty and amount to *shirk*,<sup>33</sup> the association of a companion with God.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the norms set by divine legislation are absolute, independent from all empiricism, authoritative, categorical, apodictic, and not in need of rational justification. This is a clear confirmation of what is called "ethical voluntarism."

One could object that moral values are universal and perennial and not confined to any historical outpourings of divine truth. St. Paul had to deal with this problem when he promulgated the message of the Gospel to the "Gentiles, which have not the law" (Rom. 2:14). He could not ignore that they knew moral standards and that the Greeks were in possession of a highly developed ethics. According to St. Paul, the gentiles "do by nature the things contained in the law" (Rom. 2:14) because the law is "written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:15). This doctrine had a far-reaching impact on the development of ethical thought in Christian theology.

The Bahá'í Faith does not support the idea of an innate moral law.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that there is no "innate sense of human dignity" that prevents "man from committing evil actions and insure[s] his spiritual . . . perfection" (*Secret* 97). Bahá'u'lláh's new paradigm<sup>36</sup> of divine revelation as a progressively unfolding process, and of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) as a continuum that is open to the future, opens a new dimension in ethical thought. The fact that values, virtues, and vices have existed in all human cultures from time immemorial, that they are basically identical and are taken for granted in the scripture,<sup>37</sup> does not contradict the ontological status of these values as emanations of the divine Will. For God has revealed His Will and behest to man "from time immemorial" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 87:6). He has sent prophets to all peoples:<sup>38</sup> "Unto the cities of all nations He hath sent His Messengers, whom He hath commissioned to announce unto men tidings of the Paradise of His good-pleasure. . . ." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 76:1).<sup>39</sup> The mission of the prophets was always "to summon mankind to the one true God," (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 98:6) to guide it "to the straight Path of Truth" and to "educate all men" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 81:1) morally.

Thus, in its religious traditions humankind has a common supply, a reservoir, of normative principles of good and evil,<sup>40</sup> of basic values embodied in virtues and vices, of fundamental standards<sup>41</sup> (such as the Golden Rule, which exists in all religions<sup>42</sup>), even though the specific accentuation of the values and their mutual relationship in the respective religious context and in the hierarchy of values might vary in different cultural contexts,<sup>43</sup> and though the origin of values in divine revelation is often not apparent. These common values constitute the eternal law "revealed unto the Prophets of old" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic preamble), which "does not change nor alter," which has been confirmed and renewed in all religions and which "will never be abrogated" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 11:9).<sup>44</sup> One could call this law a *lex aeterna*, but it is not a natural law, derived from an order of being, but rather one that has its origin in the divine Will. It belongs to the core of God's "one and indivisible religion" (The Báb, *Selections* 2:24:2), as the Báb called it, and, as Bahá'u'lláh put it, the "changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 182); it belongs, as

'Abdu'l-Bahá formulated, to the "Holy of Holies" (*Some Answered Questions* 11:9). The values governing society, however, such as the social norms and laws on the family, inheritance, trade, and criminal law as well as the forms of worship (*'ibádát*), vary greatly in the different religions according to the varying conditions and demands of a steadily changing world and an "ever-advancing civilization" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 109:2).<sup>45</sup> This is why, according to Bahá'u'lláh, "in every age and dispensation all divine ordinances are changed and transformed according to the requirements of the time, except the law of love<sup>46</sup> which, like a fountain, always flows and is never overtaken by change."<sup>47</sup>

3. The doctrine of divine voluntarism should not be misconstrued. God is not a tyrant; His actions are not the result of a senseless, capricious, despotic arbitrariness. Man has not been created as an addressee of whimsical injunctions, but as a recipient of God's love, grace, and mercy.<sup>48</sup>

According to Bahá'u'lláh, God's commandments and all the duties prescribed for His servants are "but a token of [His] grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being" (*Gleanings* 1:5). They are, as it is said in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* "the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures" (par. 3), and constitute "the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples" (par. 2). Thus, the "fundamental purpose animating the faith of God," according to Bahá'u'lláh's definition, is "to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men" (*Tablets* 11:15). Bahá'u'lláh assures us that the one God "hath wished nothing for Himself. The allegiance of mankind profiteth Him not, neither doth its perversity harm Him" (*Tablets* 11:2). "He enjoineth upon you that which shall profit you. . . . Your evil doings can never harm Us, neither can your good works profit Us" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 59).

Consequently, the chosen way under the "yoke" (Matt. 11:29) of the law is not "an evidence of self-effacement," of "self-estrangement," of "slavery" (Nietzsche no. 54) and of "hetero-determination," but rather the path

to man's true self. Tertullian, a father of the church living in the third century, was referring to this way of life, which is the right response to God's grace and salvation, when he spoke of the "*anima naturaliter christiana*": "The human soul is Christian by its nature" (*Apologeticum* 17). Man has been created for this manner of existence.

4. God is "hidden from the sight and minds of men" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 8:31).<sup>49</sup> His knowledge can only be attained through knowledge of the Manifestations, the "Repositories of celestial wisdom" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 19:3). God's sovereign will is mediated to humanity through them, who are essentially<sup>50</sup> infallible,<sup>51</sup> "free of error" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 8:17) in their judgment: "Whatever emanates from Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 45:6), for each one of them is the "representative and mouthpiece of God" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 28:2) and "doth incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 88:1).

The Manifestation's *charisma* of inherent infallibility (*al-‘iṣma*) is a logical precondition, an "essential requirement" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 45:2) for being God's representative.<sup>52</sup> By this means God safeguards and protects His laws and ordinances from all error, all later questioning and all attempts to modify or to annul them. The doctrine of the "Most Great Infallibility" (*al-‘iṣmatu'l-kubrā*)<sup>53</sup> has been formulated by Bahá'u'lláh in captivating and powerful language in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*<sup>54</sup> and in His Tablet, *Ishráqát*,<sup>55</sup> culminating in the formula: "He doeth what He pleaseth. He chooseth, and none may question His choice" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 7).<sup>56</sup>

This formula is a frequently recurring motif throughout Bahá'í scripture. It is the very touchstone of man's faith. Its implications for the justification of moral values have been categorically formulated in challenging language:

Blessed is the man that hath acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs, and recognized that "He<sup>57</sup> shall not be asked of His

doings.”<sup>58</sup> Such a recognition hath been made by God the ornament of every belief and its very foundation.<sup>59</sup> . . .

Were He to decree as lawful the thing which from time immemorial had been forbidden, and forbid that which had, at all times, been regarded as lawful, to none is given the right to question His authority. Whoso will hesitate, though it be for less than a moment, should be regarded as a transgressor.

Whoso hath not recognized this sublime and fundamental verity, and hath failed to attain this most exalted station, the winds of doubt will agitate him, and the sayings of the infidels will distract his soul. He that hath acknowledged this principle will be endowed with the most perfect constancy. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 161–63)

God's laws must be obeyed even if they were to be “such as to cause the heaven of every religion to be cleft asunder” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 7) or to “strike terror into the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth,” because they are “naught but manifest justice” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 88:1). By anchoring the system of values in God's sovereign Will, in the infallibility of the Manifestations and the authenticity of the scripture, Bahá'u'lláh made it an Archimedean Point<sup>60</sup> of knowledge, a “sure handle” (*'urwatu'l-wuḥqá*) (*Tablets* 8:48)<sup>61</sup> for the individual as well as for society, an absolute framework of ultimate values. It is thus above all criticism and indicates the goal and the path, the “Straight Path”;<sup>62</sup> limits arbitrary human behavior; and offers society and culture a stable balance for the variety of diverging interests. This is the theological bedrock of divine legislation, a doctrinal foundation of all ethics and law that is unique in the annals of religious history.

5. The tablets of a new law with its categorical commandments, “Thou shalt!” revealed to a humanity that Bahá'u'lláh deemed “feeble and far removed from the purpose of God”<sup>63</sup> are taken as an “offence,”<sup>64</sup> as a “stumbling block” by those who still believe, and as “foolishness”<sup>65</sup> by those who desire to decide what is right and what is wrong according to their own promptings, to choose their own way of life, their own

lifestyle.<sup>66</sup> A concrete religious law with its binding rules, injunctions, prohibitions, and ordinances, with its demand for absolute obedience, is deeply challenging for a secular society with its political philosophy, according to which religion is exclusively a private matter and man an autonomous individual, wholly self-determined and morally responsible only to himself. For Western thought which has been shaped by the Enlightenment it is hard to accept the claim that the newly revealed word of God is the standard of all morals and not, as Bahá'u'lláh put it, “man’s fanciful theories.”<sup>67</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh has foreseen the commotion His law will provoke, as He speaks about “the fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men’s hearts.”<sup>68</sup> He nevertheless insists: “Were His law to be such as to strike terror in the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth, that law is naught but manifest justice” (*Gleanings* 88:1).

The commandments of the Manifestation must not be judged according to human standards. They derive from the *lógos* (which the philosophers called the “primal reason,” *al-‘aql al-awwal*), from the “divine, universal mind, whose sovereignty enlighteneth all created things” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys* 52). They are “absolute wisdom,” and are in accordance with “the reality of things” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 40:6; 45:6), a reality known to the Manifestation not through knowledge gained by reflection or experience, but a knowledge that is immediate, innate, and unacquired (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 40:6). This knowledge, by which the Manifestation is “aware of the reality of the mysteries of beings” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 40:4, 7)<sup>69</sup> is termed “existential knowledge” (*‘ilmu’l-wujud*).

Through the divine ordinances human reason partakes of the divine wisdom. Therefore the laws of God are above human wisdom<sup>70</sup> and not in need of rational justification. They are *ta ‘abbudí*;<sup>71</sup> they must be accepted as they are. For that reason Bahá'u'lláh admonishes His people to “[c]ast away the things current amongst men and to take fast hold on that whereunto ye are bidden by virtue of the Will of the Ordainer” (*Tablets* 6:56). He warns them not to “cavil” at the “Testimony of God” (*Gleanings* 129:5)<sup>72</sup> and not to judge the law of God according to human standards,

which are the result of historical processes and are essentially relative. Rather, everything which is taken for granted today and considered to be immune to criticism—secular society has its dogmas as well!—must be judged according to the infallible balance (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 148, 183): “Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard. . . .” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 99). And in the same book the warning: “Hold ye fast unto His statutes (*aḥwamir*) and commandments (*aḥkam*), and be not of those who, following their idle fancies and vain imaginings, have clung to the standards (*ḥudúd*) fixed by their own selves, and cast behind their backs the standards (*uṣúl*) laid down by God” (17).

7. If the origin of all morals is God's sovereign will, embodied in the revelation of the Manifestations, the primary source of ethical knowledge is revealed scripture. The question arises as to the part assigned to reason in Bahá'í ethics. Unfortunately this issue of Bahá'í epistemology cannot be discussed here because of the lack of time. I have to refer to my forthcoming book (*Bahá'í Ethics* 1:257–311) and to confine myself to a summary of the results of my research.

In the realm of values human rationality is limited insofar as it is dependent on a preordained framework, a God-given standard, an hierarchy of supreme values, which is not subject to reason—fixed points that constitute an immovable yardstick. Human beings cannot cognize the moral order by reason; they are dependent on divine revelation. Nevertheless, reason can under certain conditions attain such “discernment” that man “will discriminate between truth and falsehood even as he doth distinguish the sun from shadow” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 217). The conditions are

- that reason is not directed by “natural impulse and desire” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 41) and not guided by vital interests;

- that the human being has internalized the normative injunctions of the revelation, including the normative image of human nature proclaimed therein;
- that the individual is illumined by “the spirit of faith” (*ar-rúhu'l-imáni*)<sup>73</sup> and has burned away “the veil of self” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 147:1) that obscures his understanding, “with the fire of [God's] love” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 132, 171).<sup>74</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh has elucidated the condition that can be attained through reason in another passage: “They whose sight is keen, whose ears are retentive, whose hearts are enlightened, and whose breasts are dilated, recognize both truth and falsehood, and distinguish the one from the other” (*Epistle* 10).<sup>75</sup>

“Whose breasts are dilated” is a Qur'anic metaphor for embracing the faith.<sup>76</sup> With the guidance of the absolute standard of revelation and its normative anthropology, rational thought can independently recognize what is permitted and what is forbidden in all concerns and situations, even if these are not mentioned in the holy texts. When it is stated in the scripture that “man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty” (Bahá'u'lláh *Tablets* 4:8), or when the scripture refers man directly to his power of reason: “Approach not the things which your minds condemn” (*Gleanings* 128:8), it becomes clear that reason illumined by faith is granted a wide scope to distinguish good and evil within the framework of the revealed moral order. Without reason, moral judgment and a moral life are not possible at all. In this sense, Thomas Aquinas's judgment is valid that it is “reason that guides us to the works of morality,” as is also demonstrated in the emphasis Bahá'u'lláh has placed on the cardinal virtues of *ḥikma*: wisdom and prudence.

### III

I think I have already made it clear that the “Book of God” establishes a value system of its own<sup>77</sup> which is “not limited by the standards of the people” since “God doth not tread in their ways” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 8:19).



The Book is the divine law for the *whole* of humanity: no wonder it conflicts in some respects with moral views which are dominant in Western societies, which are no longer molded by the Christian faith and Christian morals. Let me conclude this lecture by outlining some features of the new morality that differ from moral positions which are current in secular society.

One fundamental difference can be seen in the concepts of liberty that underlie the two moral systems. In secular society the supreme authority as regards morals is reason, and reason draws the limits to personal freedom at the point where one person's liberty infringes on the rights of another. This idea that goes back to Immanuel Kant is expressed, for instance, in Article 2 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany: "Everyone shall have the right to free development of his personality insofar as he does not violate the rights of others."

The unlimited freedom of each individual is thereby both legally constrained and legally guaranteed within the bounds of its compatibility with the liberty of every other individual. The same article mentions the "moral law" as a further limit of personal freedom. The fathers of the German Constitution (enacted in 1949) considered the moral law as an objective, absolute barrier that restrains the freedom of the individual. Today, half a century later, it is interpreted by jurisprudence and jurisdiction as something relative, as "the moral consciousness of our society" (Maunz and Dührig, art. 2, §1, n.16)—a vague concept, since this consciousness is subject to social change and in constant flux.

In contrast to this, Bahá'u'lláh approves of liberty within "the limits of moderation" (*Tablets* 11:19; 6:31), "the moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the world of mankind" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 227:27). Unrestrained liberty "causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 123). It is unbridled liberty, licentiousness, that Bahá'u'lláh is speaking of when He states that liberty will ultimately "lead to sedition, whose flames none can quench" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 123). His concept of "true liberty" that "consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 125) is the liberty that results from obedience to the Will of God as manifested in the divine

laws. It is liberty in submission to God. Bahá'u'lláh's concept of "true liberty" is a rejection of revolutionary anarchy as well as of *permissive society*, of a society where there are no taboos and whose goal is emancipation from all traditional patterns of behavior; a society where everyone is allowed to do as he likes provided he does not violate the rights of others.

There is another basic difference between the two ethical systems. Whereas secular moral standards are based on the doctrines of individualism and liberalism,<sup>78</sup> the Bahá'í value system is balanced; it is—and in this point more similar to Islamic and Confucian ethics—less individualistic, less focused on the interests and rights of the individual and more concerned with the common weal. The Bahá'í position derives from the basic political concept according to which the common weal and the security of the public have priority to the rights of the individual, notwithstanding the community's duty to respect and protect the unalienable rights of the citizen.<sup>79</sup> Strong emphasis is placed on the "security and protection of men" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 7:32), the "common weal"<sup>80</sup> and the "prosperity, wealth and tranquillity of the people" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 7:29). The different emphasis in the two moral systems may be elucidated by Bahá'u'lláh's provisions relating to sexual ethics and to penal law.

In our largely hedonistic societies the idea prevails that the bounds of sexual freedom are usually set by the prohibition of violent sexual acts and the abuse of children and wards of court. All sexual behavior between mutually consenting adults that does not directly infringe on the rights of third parties is today generally regarded as morally permissible, analogous to the Roman legal formula "*Volenti non fit iniuria*" (No injustice is done to him who consents). Moreover, the idea is generally accepted that it is up to the individual to determine his own sexual orientation. Consequently, so-called ethical minorities have been placed under legal protection. Marriage between homosexual partners has recently been made lawful in Germany and other European countries.

In Bahá'u'lláh's revelation marriage is the exclusive place of legitimate human sexuality. Pre- and extramarital sexual activity is morally stigmatized as unchastity, and pre- and extramarital intercourse penalized as

*ziná*.<sup>81</sup> Marriage is only intended as a bond between heterosexual partners. Consequently, homosexual relationships and homosexual acts (*liwát*) have been condemned by Bahá'u'lláh as immoral.<sup>82</sup> The idea that it is up to the individual to determine his own sexual orientation is incompatible with Bahá'u'lláh's normative image of the human being. Bahá'u'lláh's sexual ethics correspond to the basic tenets of the other Abrahamic religions, and also of Buddhism, though it avoids the extreme positions represented by zealots.<sup>83</sup> Chastity does not amount to a defamation of human sexuality; its aim is not the suppression of the sexual urge, but the disciplined use and control of the reproductive force and the human ability to express love.<sup>84</sup>

As to penal law, it is today generally accepted in Europe by legal theory and jurisdiction that the supreme purpose of punishment is the rehabilitation of the criminal. The idea of retaliation and expiation as fundamental purposes of punishment, and capital punishment as well, are denounced as expressions of subliminal feelings of hatred and revenge, as barbaric relics of premodern times. The abolition of the death penalty has been celebrated as a milestone on the path to the progressive humanization of society. The abrogation of capital punishment is, so to speak, *le billet d'entrée*—the ticket of admission—for the states that want to enter the European community.

By contrast, the penal provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are based on the metaphysical principle of justice, “reward and punishment,” upon which “the structure of world stability and order hath been reared” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 11:6).<sup>85</sup> According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the primary purpose of punishment is retaliation and expiation,<sup>86</sup> as well as the protection of society. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas ordains capital punishment in cases of intentional killing of a person (*qatl* = murder and homicide) and arson (par. 62). This raises the question as to the Bahá'í Faith's attitude to the European Enlightenment.

The anchorage of penal law in the metaphysical principle of justice, and thus the reaffirmation of the idea of expiation and retribution, cannot be denounced as a return to pre-Enlightenment positions. While it is true that some Enlightenment philosophers emphasized the idea of crime

prevention by deterrence and resocialization instead of retaliation, and demanded the abolition of both torture and the death penalty,<sup>87</sup> Immanuel Kant, who marked the epitome of European Enlightenment thinking, and subsequently Hegel (*Philosophy of Right*, §§ 97–102), were radical advocates of the principle of retribution (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, Doctrine of Right) and of the death penalty. This was also the position upheld by Catholic and Protestant theology until the early 1960s.<sup>88</sup> Even the Catholic world catechism published in 1993 (no. 2266) justifies the death penalty under certain circumstances.

Furthermore, the message of Bahá'u'lláh can certainly be described as compatible with “Enlightenment values” with regard to many of its principles and demands, such as the unconditional dignity of every individual and the equality of all before the law; equality of the sexes; freedom of conscience, thought, and speech;<sup>89</sup> the high esteem for human reason (*‘aql*) as “the most precious gift bestowed upon man” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 11:4);<sup>90</sup> the abolition of the clergy; the democratic structure of the community; the preference for democratic forms of rule; the rejection of absolutism, tyranny, despotism, imperialism, colonialism, exploitation and religious fanaticism; as well as the protection of religious, political, and ethnic minorities. These are all positions upheld by Enlightenment thinkers. The vision of a federal world commonwealth in a peaceful global order corresponds to Kant’s conviction “that at last . . . the highest purpose of nature, a universal cosmopolitan existence, will at last be realised as the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop” (*Universal History* prop. 8, p. 51) and that “the perpetual peace is no empty idea but a task” that “comes steadily closer to its goal” (*Toward Perpetual Peace* 391). Kant’s definition of the Enlightenment as “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity” and his maxim, *sapere aude* (Horace)—“Have courage to use your own understanding!” (*An Answer* 54)—is remarkably similar to Bahá'u'lláh’s principle of the independent search for truth, according to which the people are admonished “to see with their own eyes and to hear with their own ears” (*Kitáb-Íqán* 176) and “know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic 2). That this is

a fundamental principle with far-reaching implications for ethics becomes evident from the many warnings against “vain imitation”<sup>91</sup> and the implicit rejection of the Islamic principle of *taqlíd*,<sup>92</sup> and of the necessity of having a “moral guide”—a *mujtahid* or a *shaykh*—without whom human beings go astray, as al-Ghazali put it: “He who has no *shaykh* to guide him will be led by the Devil into his ways” (Qtd. in Abdullah 225). The “coming of age of the human race,” the “stage of maturity,” is a recurring theme in the revealed scripture. In this context it is highly significant when Bahá'u'lláh states: “No sooner had mankind attained the stage of maturity, than the Word revealed to men’s eyes the latent energies with which it had been endowed. . . .” (*Gleanings* 33:2). Kant, through whom the European Enlightenment had reached its apex, died in 1804. Forty years later the Báb proclaimed His message.<sup>93</sup>

The conflict between the two different sets of values—that of Western secular civilization and that of the Book of God is inevitable, and it will be a long time before humankind will accept that not “man is the measure of all things,” as the Greek philosopher Protagoras (d. 410 B.C.) stated, but that rather it is God’s unfathomable will that is the “infallible standard” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 88:1) of all morality.

## NOTES

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1. Volume 1 of the book (*Doctrinal Fundamentals*) was published in 2007 by George Ronald, Oxford

2. From Latin *mos, moris*: custom, manner.

3. In this respect it resembles Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism. There is no “rage for defining,” for “dogmatising on questions of faith,” no tendency to “high flown speculations and sterile, abstract mysticism” such as prevailed in early Christianity (cf. Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions* 115). Moreover, the Bahá'ís are warned against “empty, profitless debates,” “useless hair-splittings and

disputes" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 106), "fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splitting" (Shoghi Effendi, qtd. in Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* n. 110).

4. He emphasizes: "The most vital duty, in this day is to purify your characters, to correct your manners, and improve your conduct" (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 21).

5. Bahá'u'lláh does not want the book to be considered as a mere code: "Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws (*aḥkam*). Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 5).

6. Schaefer, Towfigh, and Gollmer 340ff.

7. Saiedi has dealt with this issue at length (*Logos and Civilization*, 235ff., 259ff.). He detects not "a series of hierarchical arrayed categories," but "an organic and graceful order" (236), based on "four constitutive principles that create the hermeneutic structure of the text. Each time a principle is introduced, diverse laws and commandments which are implications and expressions of the principle are mentioned. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* can be seen as a discourse on the metaphysical and spiritual principles which underlie the diverse legal and moral reflections of these principles" (238).

8. This is in accordance with Matt. 7:21: "Not every one that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

9. See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 139:8.

10. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Selections*, exemplifies this injunction: "Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world. . . . Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God" (35:5).

11. "A goodly character" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 6:3; 11:28), "a saintly character" (*Tablets* 6:4; Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 127:4), "a praiseworthy character" (*Tablets* 6:27; 17:91, *Gleanings* 147:2; 158), "an upright character" (*Tablets* 8:56; 15:11; *Gleanings* 158).

12. See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 138:5.

13. "Goodly deeds" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 43; Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 15:11; 17:91, "praiseworthy deeds" (*Tablets* 8:56; 15:11), "pure deeds" (*Tablets*

11:28; 15:11; *Gleanings* 43:4; 101; Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian 39), "holy deeds" (*Gleanings* 137:4; 43:4; 101), "deeds of stainless holiness" (*Hidden Words*, Persian 35, 69).

14. See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian 81, 5, 76; Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 128:1; 139:8.

15. As asserted by the philosopher Charles Blount in his treatise, *Summary Account of the Deist's Religion* (1695).

16. "Beatitudo ultimus finis humanae vitae" (Happiness is the last end of human life) See also *Summa* q. 90, a2.

17 See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 4:13.

18. Baruch de Spinoza formulated in his *Ethica more geometrico* (1677): "Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself" (V, prop. 42).

19. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *Star of the West*, vol. 16, p. 404.

20. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 120; Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 213-14; Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 9:4-5; 15:2; Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 133; 134; 137:4; 139:8; Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 149; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 40, 55; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament* 1:8, 23-24.

21. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 225:3.

22. See also 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 46, 60.

23. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 99; 106:3. On this subject see Schaefer, *Imperishable Dominion* 206ff; Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics* 1:173ff; Schaefer, *Was ist der Mensch?*, 49ff.

24. Rom. 9:15, 20.

25. "Omne aliud a Deo ideo est bonum, quia a Deo volitum, et non converso . . . Quia est bonum, ideo acceptatum" (Duns Scotus, op. Oxoniense IIIId.19qu.1n.7). On the moral theology of Duns Scotus, see Welzel 66ff.

26. "Adeo enim summa est iustitiae regula Dei voluntas, ut quidquid eo ipso quod vult iustum habendum est" (Calvin III,23,2).

27. Cf. *al-mut'tazila*, in *Encyclopedia Iranica* 2:783-93. According to Hourani its literature "is all the more remarkable because it owes little to the Greeks except in an indirect and diffuse way." It appears to him "as chronologically the second major occurrence in history of a profound discussion on the meanings and general content of ethical concepts, the first being that of the ancient Greek sophists and Plato" (21).

28. Abu'l-Haşan al-Ash'arí was a leading conservative theologian in Sunni

Islam (260/873–324/935). An introduction to his work is given by Hourani (118–123). A summary of the controversies of both schools is provided by Saiedi: “These two schools took contradictory positions on five essential theological questions. First, the Mutazilites believed in the validity of reason and rational understanding. For them, the use of rational discourse to discover the hidden meanings of the verses of the Qur’án was necessary and valid. The Ash’arites, on the contrary, rejected the validity of reason and called for a blind and literal understanding of scripture—that is, the Qur’án and the Islamic traditions. Second, the rationalistic premises of the Mutazilites led them to maintain that God is a transcendental reality devoid of attributes and determinations. Ash’arites believed in an anthropomorphic God, with attributes taken to be real and literal, and not metaphorical. Third, the Mutazilites believed that the Word of God—the Qur’án—is not eternal and co-existent with God, but created and temporal. Hence for them, the verses of the Qur’án should be understood to be specific and applicable only to a relevant context. For the Ash’arites, however, the Qur’án was eternal and uncreated and, therefore, valid for any time, for any situation, and in any context. Fourth, Mutazilites accepted the notion of the law of causality and the laws of nature, while the Ash’arite theology causality was merely an illusion; every event in the world is directly created by the will of God, and nothing can be explained in naturalistic terms. Finally, Mutazilite theology admitted some freedom of will for individual human beings. Ash’arites advocated a deterministic philosophy. Unfortunately for the cause of reason, the religious and political battle between the rationalist Mutazilites and the literalist Ash’arites was concluded in the eleventh century by a decisive victory of the Ash’arites” (“Faith, Reason and Society” 12). For a brief discussion of this debate, see Rahman.

29. On “the rationalist ethics of ‘Abd al-Jabbár,” see Hourani 98ff.

30. Hourani calls it “theistic subjectivism” (17).

31. Cf. 148, 183.

32. From Greek, *theos*: God, *nomos*: law.

33. Polytheism. Cf. Qur’án 4:48, 116; 31:13. See also *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam (SEI)*, 542ff.

34. A philosopher, Baruch de Spinoza, came to the same conclusion: “I confess that this opinion, which subjects all things to a certain indifferent will of God,



and makes all things depend on his good pleasure, is nearer the truth than that of those who maintain that God does all things for the sake of the good. For they seem to place something outside God, which does not depend on God, to which God attends, as a model, in what he does, and at which he aims, as at a certain goal. This is simply to subject God to fate. Nothing more absurd can be maintained about God, whom we have shown to be the first and only free cause, both of the essence of all things, and of their existence" (*The Ethics* [*Ethica more geometrico*], I Proposition 33 [II/76]).

35. According to Thomas, the laws of the Decalogue belong to the natural law.

36. See Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash* 135ff., 147ff.

37. Cf. Baha'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 134:2; 133:2.

38. Qur'án 16:36; 35:24. According to Baha'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 87:1,6, there have been messengers sent down to mankind who have not been mentioned in the sacred scriptures, and revelation took place even before Adam.

39. See also Baha'u'lláh, *Tablets* 11:2.

40. Everywhere, even in "primitive" cultures, there are duties of parents towards their children, of children towards their parents; everywhere kindness, gratefulness, truthfulness, benevolence, rectitude are regarded as "good," greed and covetousness, envy, cruelty, malice as "evil."

41. This truth has been expressed by the declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions on 28 August 1993 in Chicago as a principle of a global ethic, according to which "there is already a consensus among the religions which can be the basis of a global ethic," a "fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes" (Küng and Kuschel 18 and 21). For more on this subject, see Küng, *Global Responsibility; Yes to a Global Ethic*.

42. On this subject, see Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash* 114ff.

43. It is true that the existing religious moral systems are different in many aspects, but what they have in common exceeds their differences by far, even if the differences are more conspicuous because we regard their common features as self-evident. Revelation is related to the capacity of the people to whom it is directed, and this capacity differs according to their spiritual, cultural, and social development: "These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in

which they were promulgated" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 132:1). On the relativity of the revelation, see Momen, "Relativism"; Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash* 131ff.

44. "[I]t is faith, knowledge, certitude, justice, piety, righteousness, trustworthiness, love of God, benevolence, purity, detachment, humility, meekness, patience and constancy. . . . These virtues of humanity will be renewed in each of the different cycles; for at the end of every cycle the spiritual Law of God—that is to say, the human virtues—disappears, and only the form subsists" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 9–10).

45. On the horizontal dimension of the revelation see Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash* 137ff.

46. "The law of love" appears here as *pars pro toto* for the unchangeable "Law of God" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 11:9).

47. Bahá'u'lláh, "Lawḥ-i-Umm-i-Raḥim," qtd. from *Bahá'í Scripture* 248f. (see also Esslemont 181).

48. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic 3, 4–6.

49. On the "hidden God" (*deus absconditus*), see Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash* 122ff.; Lambden, "Background and Centrality."

50. Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 45:2, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá elucidates the two categories, "essential" and "conferred" infallibility. For more detail on the concept of infallibility, see Schaefer, Towfigh, and Gollmer 168ff and Schaefer, "Infallible Institutions?" 7–11.

51. *Ma'ṣum*, from *'iṣma*, infallibility.

52. Manifested in the verse: "Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 21).

53. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 47, 183; Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 8:17–19; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 45. On this subject, see also ch. 2:4.

54. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 47, 162–63, 183.

55. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 8:17–19.

56. Cf. Qur'án 2:254, 22:14.

57. I. e., the Manifestation.

58. Cf. Qur'án 21:23.

59. This doctrine is also the subject of Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 8:17-19.
60. An imaginary fixed point outside the earth, after a legendary saying by Archimedes: "Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth."
61. See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 17:34, 45.
62. Qur'án 1:6; Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 4:8, 5:17.
63. Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Introduction to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 6.
64. Cf. Luke 17:1; Mat. 18:7; Gal. 5:11. The underlying Greek word *skandalon* means originally a snare, something that causes people to stumble.
65. Cf. I Cor. 1:28.
66. Refer to my essay "The Balance Hath Been Appointed" 46ff. and Schaefer, Towfigh, and Gollmer 411ff.
67. Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 109.
68. These fears "should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 88).
69. Their knowledge is "like the cognizance and consciousness man has of himself" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 40:4).
70. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8).
71. Cf. *SEI*, s.v. "*Sharí'a*," 525.
72. See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 8:30; 9:11; 11:41.
73. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 9:20; 17:10; 22:4-5.
74. See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 131:3.
75. See also 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 31:5.
76. *Sharaha*; cf. Qurán 6:125; 94:2.
77. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 5:5; 6:56.
78. Individualism is the view according to which the individual, his interests, and rights are superior to those of the society and the state. Liberalism is the doctrine that individual freedom in economic enterprise should not be restricted by government or social regulation (*laissez faire*).
79. Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 47:5.
80. Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 2, 3, 20, 32, 97, 103; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 47:5.
81. In the English edition of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (par. 19, 49) reductionistically translated as "adultery."
82. In an unpublished tablet quoted in a letter of the Universal House of

Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States dated 11 September 1995.

83. Such as Cyprian, Tertullian, Hieronymus, Augustine, and others, with reference to I Cor. 7:1ff.

84. For further details, see Schaefer, *Imperishable Dominion* 175ff.

85. See also Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 3:25 and 8:61.

86. Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 152; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 77:2-3, 6-10. On this subject see Schaefer, "Crime and Punishment" 51.

87. The great Italian jurist Cesare Beccaria who lived in the eighteenth century was the first to plead for this goal in his work *Dei delitti e delle pene* (1764).

88. *Lexicon* 1986, vol. 9, col. 1097, with reference to the dictum *Punitur quia peccatum est*.

89. See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 197.

90. See also 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 23:8; Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 83:1; 95:1; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Secret* 1.

91. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 75:1; 84:2; Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 10:23, etc.

92. *SEI* 562ff.; Halm 118ff., 133ff.; Momen, *Introduction* 175.

93. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* par. 189; Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 33:2.

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