

PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD



*gleaned from revealed and inspired sources
with brief commentary*

by Peter Terry

GLOBAL FAITH BOOK SERIES

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EXISTENCE OF GOD**

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Vol. 1 Studies in Bahá'í Philosophy

Vol. 2 Proofs of the Existence of God



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Compiled by Peter Terry

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FOREWORD

“In the beginning, God...” This has been the belief of most of our ancestors, for the better part of three millennia. For several centuries though, there have been doubters, and, in response to the doubters, there have been attempts to prove the existence of God. We will examine the response to these doubters in the divine philosophy¹ of Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892) and his son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), both born in Iran and deceased in the Holy Land. In most cases we will be citing statements by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, unless otherwise noted. In order to give the reader an intellectual context in which to consider these arguments, other proofs will be cited here, some of them ancient, and others of more recent provenance.

We may well ask, for whom are these proofs? One answer to this question is as follows:

“People are divided into two sections, one which is satisfied with the knowledge of the attributes of divinity, and the other which strives to establish the existence of divinity, and be informed of the fundamental principles of divine philosophy.”²

This answer points to two temperaments, the one satisfied with tradition and the other demanding proof. Another answer

¹ Divine philosophy (*hikmat ilahi* in Persian and *hikmat al-ilahiyyat* in Arabic) is a term used widely by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to denote philosophical theology and the wisdom and knowledge of God as revealed by the Manifestation of God and his chosen ones.

² *Star of the West* [SW], VI:8, 62. This statement and others cited from *Star of the West* are reported utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

points to those who are satisfied with another kind of status quo, the status quo of scientific consensus and sensory experience:

“The materialist comes to the conclusion that life in other words means composition; that wherever we find single elements combined in aggregate form there we behold the phenomena of organic life; that every organic composition is organic life. Now if life means composition of elements then the materialist may come to the conclusion of the non-necessity of a creator; for composition is all there is to it, and that is accomplished by adhesion or cohesion.”³

Proofs of the existence of God are for those who strive “to establish the existence of divinity, and be informed of the fundamental principles of divine philosophy”,⁴ to those who are already convinced of the existence of God and wish to establish this existence upon firm and enduring philosophical foundations; and for those who will reject the existence of God if they are not convinced otherwise.

We initially discovered three varieties of proofs for the existence of God—“rational” (logical, scientific) proofs⁵; “scriptural” proofs from the Old and New Testaments or the Qur’an⁶; and “spiritual proofs”.⁷ We propose that there are also sensory proofs for the existence of God, and our first Chapter is devoted to these. The Scriptural proofs are known to believers and rejected by unbelievers and hence of lesser significance and effect. It is acknowledged in the Epistemology of ‘Abdul-Bahá that inasmuch as scripture and other religious traditions are interpreted by way

³ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* [PUP], pp. 421–25

⁴ *Bahai Scriptures* [BS], #594, p. 290; alternate translation in *‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy* [ABDP], p. 104

⁵ SAQ I:1–3; SW VI:3, 21–24; SW VI:8, 62–64; SWAB 46–71; SW XIV:4, 101–109

⁶ BS #595, p. 290; SW VI:8, 62; ABDP p. 104

⁷ SAQ I:14; PUP 425; SW VI:8, 64; SW XIV:4, 108–109

of the intellect, that they serve as an adjunct criterion to the criterion of reason.

While the intellect is not regarded as an infallible source of truth, in the case of proofs for the existence of God it seems to be the best suited to contemporary man:

“These are rational arguments, which are what the people of the world require in this day.”⁸

However, these rational proofs are not necessary for those who have become illuminated with the Divine Light—they have no need of rational proofs:

“These are theoretical arguments adduced for weak souls, but if the eye of inner vision be opened, a hundred thousand clear proofs will be seen. Thus, when man feels the indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the grace of the spirit, it is necessary to set forth external arguments.”⁹

Likewise (and for references see the above cited list for spiritual proofs), the following quotations are pertinent:

“I ask God that His confirmations may encompass you; that your hearts may become radiant; that your eyes may become illumined through witnessing the signs of God; that your ears hearken to the anthems of heaven; that your faces be set aglow with the radiant light of the word of God...”¹⁰

“Thank God that He has given you such a power through which you can comprehend these divine mysteries. Reflect deeply, ponder carefully, think minutely, and

⁸ SAQ I:3.2

⁹ SAQ I:2.8

¹⁰ SW VI:3, p. 24; reprint in PUP 425

then the doors of knowledge shall be opened unto you..."¹¹

"The merciful outpourings of that Divine Essence, however, are vouchsafed unto all beings and it is incumbent upon man to ponder in his heart upon the effusions of the Divine Grace, the soul (of man) being counted as one (sign of it), rather than upon the Divine Essence itself. This is the utmost limit of human understanding."¹²

This compilation and commentary has been assembled over the course of several years by myself, with assistance from a number of authors¹³ and discussants, all of us fellow seekers after truth.

¹¹ SW VI:8, p. 64

¹² SW XIV:4, 108; reprinted as *Tablet to Dr. Forel*, p. 25

¹³ See bibliography for complete listing of books and websites, including http://www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/20_arguments-gods-existence.htm

SENSORY PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The world of nature is that world which we perceive through our senses. While human beings are certain endowed with fine sensory organs, the faculties of sensory perception are surely possessed by animals to a superlative degree, and, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the

“pathway of nature is the pathway of the animal realm. The animal acts in accordance with the requirements of nature, follows its own instincts and desires. Whatever its impulses and proclivities may be, it has the liberty to gratify them; yet it is a captive of nature. It cannot deviate in the least degree from the road nature has established... it is a captive of the senses and deprived of that which lies beyond them. It is subject to what the eye sees, the ear hears, the nostrils sense, the taste detects and touch reveals. These sensations are acceptable and sufficient for the animal.”¹⁴ “As to the animal: It is endowed only with sense perception... That is to say, the animal in its creation is a captive of the senses. Beyond the tangibilities and impressions of the senses it cannot accept anything.”¹⁵

Hence, in the animal we have a creature which is entirely informed by the senses.

¹⁴ PUP 177

¹⁵ PUP 357

Does the animal have the capacity to think abstractly and to know intellectually as does man? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answers in the negative:

“The animal possesses no power of ideation or conscious intelligence...”¹⁶ “The animal cannot apprehend ideal realities. The animal cannot conceive of the earth as a sphere. The intelligence of an animal located in Europe could never have planned the discovery of the continent of America. The animal kingdom is incapable of discovering the latent mysteries of nature—such as electricity—and bringing them forth from the invisible plane to the plane of visibility. It is evident that the discoveries and inventions transcend the animal intelligence...the bestowals of abstract reason and intellect are absent in its endowment. That is to say, the animal in its creation is a captive of the senses. Beyond the tangibilities and impressions of the senses it cannot accept anything. It denies everything. It is incapable of ideal perception and, therefore, a captive of the senses.”¹⁷

Does the animal know of the existence of God? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answers again in the negative:

“It is utterly lacking spiritual susceptibilities, ignorant of divine religion and without knowledge of the Kingdom of God...that which is beyond the range of the senses, that realm of phenomena through which the conscious pathway to the Kingdom of God leads, the world of spiritual susceptibilities and divine religion—of these the animal is completely unaware, for in its highest station it is a captive of nature...the animal is absolutely ignorant of the realm of spirit and out of touch with the inner world of conscious realization...it is entirely bereft of that which lies beyond,

¹⁶ PUP 177

¹⁷ PUP 357

absolutely oblivious of the Kingdom of God and its traces, whereas God has deposited within the human creature an illimitable power by which he can rule the world of nature."¹⁸ "The animals are without knowledge of God; so to speak, they are deniers of Divinity and understanding nothing of the Kingdom, they are utterly ignorant of spiritual things and uninformed of the supernatural world."¹⁹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not claim that all created things, that all things in existence know God, perceive God, or even are aware of the existence of God. This perception is a peculiar attribute of the human world.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá now describes the materialists in this fashion:

"One of the strangest things witnessed is that the materialists of today are proud of their natural instincts and bondage. They state that nothing is entitled to belief and acceptance except that which is sensible or tangible. By their own statements they are captives of nature, unconscious of the spiritual world, uninformed of the divine Kingdom and unaware of heavenly bestowals. If this be a virtue, the animal has attained to it to a superlative degree... The animal would agree with the materialist in denying the existence of that which transcends the senses. If we admit that being limited to the plane of the senses is a virtue, the animal is indeed more virtuous than man, for it is entirely bereft of that which lies beyond..."²⁰ "Therefore, if it be a perfection and virtue to be without knowledge of God and His Kingdom, the animals have attained the highest degree of excellence and proficiency."²¹

¹⁸ PUP 177

¹⁹ PUP 262

²⁰ PUP 177

²¹ PUP 262

In referring to a visit to the city of Paris, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “most of the scholars, professors and learned men proved to be materialists.”²² Likewise, after visiting cities in the United States, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá noted that

“In cities like New York the people are submerged in the sea of materialism. Their sensibilities are attuned to material forces, their perceptions purely physical. The animal energies predominate in their activities; all their thoughts are directed to material things; day and night they are devoted to the attractions of this world, schools and temples of learning knowledge of the sciences acquired is based upon material observations only; there is no realization of Divinity in their methods and conclusions—all have reference to the world of matter. They are not interested in attaining knowledge of the mysteries of God or understanding the secrets of the heavenly Kingdom; what they acquire is based altogether upon visible and tangible evidences. Beyond these evidences they are without susceptibilities; they have no idea of the world of inner significances and are utterly out of touch with God, considering this an indication of reasonable attitude and philosophical judgment whereof they are self-sufficient and proud.”²³

Whether in Europe or in America,

“some of the sagacious men declare: We have attained to the superlative degree of knowledge; we have penetrated the laboratory of nature, studying sciences and arts; we have attained the highest station of knowledge in the human world; we have investigated the facts as they are and have arrived at the conclusion that nothing is rightly acceptable except the tangible, which alone is

²² PUP 16

²³ PUP 261–262

a reality worthy of credence; all that is not tangible is imagination and nonsense."²⁴

In addressing these scholars, philosophers, scientists and other learned men, the argument of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is carried to its inevitable conclusion:

"In fact, from this standpoint the animal is the greater philosopher because it is completely ignorant of the Kingdom of God, possesses no spiritual susceptibilities and is uninformed of the heavenly world."²⁵

"Then the donkey is the greatest scientist and the cow an accomplished naturalist, for they have obtained what they know without schooling and years of laborious study in colleges, trusting implicitly to the evidence of the senses and relying solely upon intuitive virtues. The cow, for instance, is a lover of the visible and a believer in the tangible, contented and happy when pasture is plenty, perfectly serene, a blissful exponent of the transcendental school of philosophy. Such is the status of the material philosophers, who glory in sharing the condition of the cow, imagining themselves in a lofty station."²⁶

"The animal lives this kind of life blissfully and untroubled, whereas the material philosophers labor and study for ten or twenty years in schools and colleges, denying God, the Holy Spirit and divine inspirations. The animal is even a greater philosopher, for it attains the ability to do this without labor and study. For instance, the cow denies God and the Holy Spirit, knows nothing of divine inspirations, heavenly bounties or spiritual emotions

²⁴ PUP 360-361

²⁵ PUP 179

²⁶ PUP 262

and is stranger to the world of hearts. Like the philosophers, the cow is the captive of nature and knows nothing beyond the range of the senses."²⁷

"Strange indeed that after twenty years training in colleges and universities man should reach such a station wherein he will deny the existence of the ideal or that which is not perceptible to the senses. Have you ever stopped to think that the animal already has graduated from such a university? Have you ever realized that the cow is already a professor emeritus of that university? For the cow without hard labor and study is already a philosopher of the superlative degree in the school of nature. The cow denies everything that is not tangible, saying, 'I can see! I can eat! Therefore, I believe only in that which is tangible!' Then why should we go to the colleges? Let us go to the cow."²⁸

Everything that we perceive through the instrumentalities of our senses which is a creation of God is a revelation of the signs and attributes of that Unknowable Essence. Does this mean that everything that exists is a revelation of the attributes of God? On some level, of course. However, there is a vast difference between what God has created and what man may have done with that creation. What man may have done with a particular creation of God certainly reveals attributes of God firstly inasmuch as that creation reveals attributes of God in any condition, and secondly, that man demonstrates certain of those attributes in manipulating natural phenomena—it is through the gift of God that man has this power, possessed by no other of His creations, and one of the reasons why man is described as "created in the image of God". However, it may be more difficult to discern or even to affirm that perfections of God are directly revealed in whatever man does with God's creations—for man may make

²⁷ PUP 311–312

²⁸ PUP 361

something ugly and harmful out of what was originally beautiful and harmless.

Man's freedom of choice is a sign of God but man's every choice is not necessarily a sign of God in itself, for man may turn either towards God or away from Him, and if man turns away from God that act does not directly reveal the attributes of God at the same level as his turning towards God. Or does it? Man, in virtually every culture and civilization, has believed in a divine power, and in many cases has multiplied that divine power even to the point of believing that it animated every phenomenon of nature and many phenomena of human experience. Divine philosophy certainly affirms the spirit in all beings, in the mineral, the vegetable, the animal, the human, the prophets, the afterlife, dreams, visions, and beyond all of these phenomena, the Unknowable Essence. Many human beings, perhaps human beings generally have experiences, often triggered by specific sensory perceptions such as sunrises or sunsets, climbing to the summits of hills or mountains, coming to the banks of a river or the shores of a sea, witnessing a meteor shower or an eclipse or a volcanic eruption or a migrating flock of birds, which impel us to a feeling of gratitude for the gift of life or a feeling of awe and wonder at the miraculous beauty and variety of the world we inhabit. At such moments, at least some individuals feel that God must exist. Is this a sensory proof of the existence of God? Of course not. It is an intuitive response to a sensory experience, a convergence of highly pleasurable sensory impulses with sentimental memory significances. This perception of supernatural beauty or of the miraculous will be treated in the section devoted to spiritual proofs. Many of the rational, traditional and spiritual proofs for the existence of God can be perceived to some degree by the senses, but none of these proofs proceed from sensory experience unassisted.

Divine philosophy²⁹ considers that the criterion of the senses and the perception of the senses and hence pure and simple the

²⁹ Please see footnote #1 if you missed or want to be reminded of the definition of divine philosophy.

sensing of the world of nature are not operable in the realm of the spirit, the intellect, the ideal, religion, the afterlife, and in the knowledge of God.

“When thou dost carefully consider this matter, thou wilt see that a lower plane can never comprehend a higher. The mineral kingdom, for example, which is lower, is precluded from comprehending the vegetable kingdom; for the mineral, any such understanding would be utterly impossible. In the same way, no matter how far the vegetable kingdom may develop, it will achieve no conception of the animal kingdom, and any such comprehension at its level would be unthinkable, for the animal occupieth a plane higher than that of the vegetable: this tree cannot conceive of hearing and sight. And the animal kingdom, no matter how far it may evolve, can never become aware of the reality of the intellect, which discovereth the inner essence of all things, and comprehendeth those realities which cannot be seen; for the human plane as compared with that of the animal is very high. And although these beings all co-exist in the contingent world, in each case the difference in their stations precludeth their grasp of the whole; for no lower degree can understand a higher, such comprehension being impossible.”³⁰

The mineral cannot know God. The vegetable cannot know God. The animal cannot know God. How is it possible that man can know God, Who occupies a plane infinitely exalted above that of human existence and consciousness? This is not merely a question of appropriate and possible instrumentalities but an essential existential problem. We must seek the solution thereto before resuming our investigation of the proofs for the existence of God.

³⁰ SWAB 46

‘Abdu’l-Bahá attests that

“two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of the essence of a thing and the knowledge of its attributes. The essence of each thing is known only through its attributes; otherwise, that essence is unknown and unfathomed. As our knowledge of things, even of created and limited ones, is of their attributes and not of their essence, how then can it be possible to understand in its essence the unbounded Reality of the Divinity?”³¹

“When we glance at all phenomena, we discover that the real identity of any given phenomenon is unknown. Phenomena or created objects are known only by their attributes. Man discerns only manifestations or attributes of objects, whereas the reality or identity of them is unknown to him. For example, this flower—what do we understand by this flower? We understand the qualities apparent and appertaining to this flower; but the very elemental reality or identity of the flower remains unknown to us. As regards its external appearance and attributes, these are knowable; but as regards the inner being, the very identity, it is unknown. Now so long as earthly phenomena are unknown as regards their identity, and are known only through their properties or qualities, how much more is this true concerning the reality of divinity, that holy reality which cannot be comprehended by any human grasp?”³²

Divine philosophy asserts categorically that man is incapable of knowing the essence of any thing, of the mineral, the vegetable, the animal, the human, and hence certainly of the divine. Man can only know through the observation and understanding of attributes, qualities, manifestations of existences. How then is it possible for man to know God?

³¹ SAQ I:59.3–4

³² PUP 421

“Then how could it be possible for a contingent reality, that is, man, to understand the nature of that pre-existent Essence, the Divine Being? The difference in station between man and the Divine Reality is thousands upon thousands of times greater than the difference between the vegetable and animal. And that which the human being would conjure up in his mind is but the fanciful image of his human condition, it doth not encompass God’s reality but rather is encompassed by it. That is, man graspeth his own illusory conceptions, but the Reality of Divinity can never be grasped: It, Itself, encompasseth all created things, and all created things are in Its grasp. That Divinity which man doth imagine for himself existeth only in his mind, not in truth. Man, however, existeth both in his mind and in truth; thus man is greater than that fanciful reality which he is able to imagine. The furthestmost limits of this bird of clay are these: he can flutter along for some short distance, into the endless vast; but he can never soar upward to the Sun in the high heavens.”³³

“Know then: that divinity which other communions and peoples have conjured up, falleth within the scope of their imagination, and not beyond it, whereas the reality of the Godhead is beyond all conceiving.”³⁴

The reader may well be astonished to encounter such an argument in a text devoted to divine philosophy! That reader may well be disturbed that such a frank and fearless discussion should come so early in a voluminous work of this nature. This would appear to many of you as a classic description of the agnostic or even of the atheist position, similar in many regards to the propositions of Ludwig Feuerbach himself. The purpose of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in stating such a position is simply to acknowledge the truth that

³³ SWAB 46–47

³⁴ SWAB 50–51

all existing concepts of God are limited to the minds which have conceived of them, and have less claim to reality by far than their creators, human beings. The old “god” or “gods” are dead, meaningless, false. While some thinkers have stopped here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continues:

“That which comes within human grasp is finite, and we are infinite in relation thereto because we can grasp it. Assuredly the finite is lesser than the infinite; the infinite is ever greater.”³⁵

“In short, the point is this that the world of man is supernatural in its relation to the vegetable kingdom, though in reality it is not so. Relatively to the plant, the reality of man, his power of hearing and sight, are all supernatural, and for the plant to comprehend that reality and the nature of the powers of man’s mind is impossible.”³⁶

This would also appear to buttress the agnostic and atheist in their unbelief. However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá proceeds to point out that

“all created things are limited, and this very limitation of all beings proveth the reality of the Limitless; for the existence of a limited being denoteth the existence of a Limitless One.”³⁷

This assertion will be carefully examined in a subsequent section, one pertaining to the logical, rational, reasoned, scientific arguments for the existence of God.

“The question was, ‘What is the Reality of Divinity, or what do we understand by God?’...‘How shall we know God?’ We know Him by His attributes. We know Him by His signs. We know Him by His names...If we wish to come in touch with the reality of divinity, we do so by

³⁵ PUP 421–422

³⁶ SW XIV:4, 108–109

³⁷ SWAB 50

recognizing its phenomena, its attributes and traces which are widespread in the universe. All things in the world of phenomena are expressive of that one reality. Its lights are shining, its heat is manifest, its power is expressive and its education or training resplendent everywhere. What proof could there be greater than that of its functioning, or its attributes which are manifest?"³⁸ "It is clear, then, that the reality of God is revealed in His perfections..."³⁹ "How then can the reality of man which is accidental, ever comprehend the Reality of God which is eternal? It is self-evidently an impossibility. Hence we can observe the traces and attributes of God which are resplendent in all phenomena and shining as the sun at midday, and know surely that these emanate from an infinite source."⁴⁰

"As to the Holy Manifestations of God, They are the focal points where the signs, tokens and perfections of that sacred, pre-existent Reality appear in all their splendour... the Sun of Truth dwelleth in a sky to which no soul hath any access, and which no mind can reach, and He is far beyond the comprehension of all creatures."⁴¹ "In like manner for man to comprehend the Divine Essence and the nature of the great Hereafter is in no wise possible. The merciful outpourings of that Divine Essence, however, are vouchsafed unto all beings and it is incumbent upon man to ponder in his heart upon the effusions of the Divine Grace, the soul (of man) being counted as one (sign of it), rather than upon the Divine Essence itself. This is the utmost limit for human understanding."⁴²

³⁸ PUP 422

³⁹ SWAB 51

⁴⁰ PUP 422-423

⁴¹ SWAB 51

⁴² SW XIV:4, 348; reprint in *Tablet to Dr. Forel*, p. 25

“The invisible realm of the Divinity is sanctified and exalted above the comprehension of all beings, and all that can be imagined is mere human understanding. The power of human understanding does not encompass the reality of the divine Essence: All that man can hope to achieve is to comprehend the attributes of the Divinity, the light of which is manifest and resplendent in the world and within the souls of men.”⁴³

How then are human beings to know God?

“When we examine the world and the souls of men, the perspicuous signs of the perfections of the Divinity appear clear and manifest, for the realities of all things attest to the existence of a universal Reality.”⁴⁴

Man can discern the attributes, the perfections of God in all created things. This is the first assertion, and a challenging one certainly, in view of the previous statements regarding the inability of the animal and the physical man to perceive Divinity, and the inability of the intellectual man to conceive of any “god” but the “idol” of his own creation.

“The reality of the Divinity is even as the sun, which from the heights of its sanctity shines upon every land, and of whose radiance every land and every soul receives a share. Were it not for this light and this radiance, nothing could exist.”⁴⁵

Are these attributes, these perfections of God which are revealed in all of God’s creations, are they actually the attributes of God?

“As it hath previously been mentioned, these attributes and perfections that we recount of the Divine Essence,

⁴³ SAQ I:59.7

⁴⁴ SAQ I:59.8

⁴⁵ SAQ I:59.8

these we have derived from the existence and observation of beings, and it is not that we have comprehended the Essence and perfection of God. When we say that the Divine Essence understandeth and is free, we do not mean that we have discovered the Divine Will and Purpose, but rather that we have acquired knowledge of them through the Divine Grace revealed and manifested in the realities of things."⁴⁶

Hence, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that the perfections of God by which God is known by human beings are those perfections as they are revealed in all created things through the operation of the Divine Grace. What is this Divine Grace? The Divine Grace, the Divine Revelation are the Holy Spirit, the appearance of which is most complete in the Holy Manifestations of God.

“Now, all created things tell of this light, partake of its rays, and receive their portion thereof, but the full splendour of the perfections, bounties, and attributes of the Divinity shines forth from the reality of the Perfect Man, that is, that unique Individual Who is the universal Manifestation of God. For the other beings have each received only a portion of that light, but the universal Manifestation of God is the mirror held before this Sun, and the latter manifests itself therein with all its perfections, attributes, signs, and effects. The knowledge of the reality of the Divinity is in no wise possible, but the knowledge of the Manifestations of God is the knowledge of God, for the bounties, splendours, and attributes of God are manifest in Them. Thus, whoso attains to the knowledge of the Manifestations of God attains to the knowledge of God, and whoso remains heedless of Them remains bereft of that knowledge.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ SW XIV:4, 108–109

⁴⁷ SAQ I:59.8–9

The “First Intellect” or “Primal Will” which “appeareth resplendent in every Prophet and speaketh forth in every revealed Book”⁴⁸ is not identical to God Himself.

“Though the First Intellect is without beginning, this does not mean that it shares in the preexistence of God, for in relation to the existence of God the existence of that universal Reality is mere nothingness—it cannot even be said to exist, let alone to partake of the pre-existence of God.”⁴⁹ “Yet the Holy Manifestations of God are even as a looking-glass, burnished and without stain, which gathereth streams of light out of that Sun, and then scattereth the glory over the rest of creation. In that polished surface, the Sun with all Its majesty standeth clearly revealed. Thus, should the mirrored Sun proclaim, ‘I am the Sun!’ this is but truth; and should It cry, ‘I am not the Sun!’ this is the truth as well. And although the Day-Star, with all Its glory, Its beauty, Its perfections, be clearly visible in that mirror without stain, still It hath not come down from Its own lofty station in the realms above, It hath not make Its way into the mirror; rather doth It continue to abide, as It will forever, in the supernal heights of Its own holiness.”⁵⁰

To recapitulate then, in divine philosophy we find the realization that the concepts of God current and historical are the idols of our own imaginings. We find that we can only know the attributes of things, not the things in themselves. We find that our senses do not inform us of the existence of God. Hence, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has effectively devalued the traditional crutches for belief in God—the images which we have conceived of for ourselves or imitated from our families and neighbors; the fancy that some of us had that we understood the essence of reality, to which we

⁴⁸ SWB 126

⁴⁹ SAQ I:53.6

⁵⁰ SWAB 50

gave the name “God”; the contemporary conviction that we can perceive through our senses everything that really and truly exists and that any existence outside of such sensory perception is purely imaginary. What then are our fancies and misapprehensions replaced by? A firm and fearless affirmation that the attributes, the perfections of God are revealed in all of His creations, that we can know these attributes by studying those creations, that we cannot know the essence of God or anything else about God save His attributes, and furthermore, that the perfect Manifestation of those attributes is accessible to each one of us. That Manifestation of God is found in human history, in the person of the founders of most of the established religions.

Divine philosophy might have left us all to our own devices at this point. After all, having been told that God was revealed in His creations and in His Manifestations, we might be expected to investigate the two by studying the “nature” of the phenomena in this universe, and by looking into the traces of the prophet-founders of religions. Divine philosophy does not abandon the seeker for truth however. Rather, stunned, confused, skeptical, perhaps even disappointed, we are advised that we have just begun the voyage, that this is a long trip and we must be patient and attentive.

CHAPTER TWO

REASON, LOGIC AND SCIENCE DEFINED

‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not regard the way of the senses as a reliable standard for investigating the existence of God. As indicated earlier, his epistemology refers to four human standards, and the first of these is that of reason, of logic, of science. All three of these concepts are related to the functioning of the human mind or intellect, an attribute and power which makes man distinct from the animal kingdom.⁵¹

“Man is distinguished above the animals through his reason. The perceptions of man are of two kinds: tangible, or sensible, and reasonable, whereas the animal perceptions are limited to the senses, the tangible only...As to the animal: It is endowed only with sense perception. It is lacking the reasonable perception...Virtue, or perfection, belongs to man, who possesses both the capacity of the senses and ideal perception.”⁵²

What then do we understand by these words, “reason”, “logic”, and “science”? In search of uses of these words which will be recognizable to all readers of English as well as related to the author of these proofs, the definitions consulted are from a dictionary,⁵³ an encyclopedia,⁵⁴ and the writings and discourses of

⁵¹ PUP 356–357

⁵² PUP 357

⁵³ *The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles* [OUD], 3rd edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955

⁵⁴ *The International Cyclopaedia* [IC], A compendium of human knowledge. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1898

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. We will begin with “reason”, inasmuch as it seems to be the most seminal and comprehensive of the three.

REASON

“III. 1. That intellectual power or faculty (usu. regarded as characteristic of mankind...) which is ordinarily employed in adapting thought or action to some end; the guiding principle of the human mind in the process of thinking... IV. 1. The act of reasoning or argumentation. 2. Consideration, regard, respect. 3. Way, manner, method spec. the method of a science.”⁵⁵

“The word reason denotes that function of our intelligence having reference to the attainment of a particular class of truths. We know a great many things by immediate or actual experience. Our senses tell us that we are thirsty, that we hear a sound, that we are affected by light. These facts are truths of sense, or of immediate knowledge, and do not involve the reason. Reason comes into play when we know a thing not immediately, but by some indirect process; as when, from seeing a river unusually swollen, we believe that there have been heavy rains at its sources. Here the mere sense tells us only that the river is high; it is by certain transitions of thought, or by the employment of our thinking powers, that we come to know the other circumstance, that in a remote part of the country there have been heavy rains. In ascertaining these truths of reason, or of inference, as they are called, there are various steps or operations, described under different names. Thus we have (1) DEDUCTION, or SYLLOGISM; (2) INDUCTION; and (3) GENERALIZATION of notions,

⁵⁵ OUD 1667

of which ABSTRACTION and DEFINITION are various phases."⁵⁶

"Man is distinguished above the animals through his reason. The perceptions of man are of two kinds: tangible, or sensible, and reasonable, whereas the animal perceptions are limited to the senses, the tangible only. The tangible perceptions may be likened to this candle, the reasonable perceptions to the light. Calculations of mathematical problems and determining the spherical form of the earth are through the reasonable perceptions. The center of gravity is a hypothesis of reason. Reason itself is not tangible, perceptible to the senses. Reason is an intellectual verity or reality. All qualities are ideal realities, not tangible realities. For instance, we say this man is a scholarly man. Knowledge is an ideal attainment not perceptible to the senses. When you see this scholarly man, your eye does not see his knowledge, your ear cannot hear his science, nor can you sense it by taste. It is not a tangible verity."⁵⁷

"The philosophers of the East consider the perfect criterion to be reason or intellect, and according to that standard the realities of all objects can be proved; for, they say, the standard of reason and intellect is perfect, and everything provable through reason is veritable. Therefore, these philosophers consider all philosophical deductions to be correct when weighed according to the standard of reason, and they state that the senses are the assistants and instruments of reason, and that although the investigation of realities may be conducted through the senses, the standard of knowing and judgment is reason itself."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ IC 459–460

⁵⁷ PUP 357

⁵⁸ PUP 356

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Peter Terry has collected, compiled and correlated the proofs he found in English translations of writings and talks by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and presents them in this volume with minimal commentary and hopefully maximal clarity. This volume does not pretend to provide an exhaustive study of such proofs, as this would require access to, study and translation of many texts available only in Arabic and Persian, which is beyond the scope of this modest work. Perhaps others will be inspired by the perusal of this slender compilation to undertake a more comprehensive study of the subject.



PETER TERRY studied Arabic and Persian, Islamic art and architecture, history, historiography, mysticism and scripture at the University of Massachusetts and the University of Chicago. He has written books on the proofs of prophethood, also drawn from the writings and utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as articles on many other topics related to Bahá'í

doctrine and history, many of which are published online at *academia.edu* and *bahai-library.org*.

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