

Methodology and Bahá'í studies: the bridge between realities

JOHN HATCHER

Abstract

In the Kitáb-i-Íqân, Bahá'u'lláh describes the resistance on the part of “divines” to accept new revelation. History also demonstrates the same resistance to revolutionary advances in the concept of reality that are introduced by enlightened individuals (e.g., Copernicus or Newton). It is in this context that the contemporary academy is often constrained by archaic notions of scholarship and even more particularly by the rejection of the notion of the interpenetration of the dual aspects of reality: the composite outer expression that is physical reality and the non-composite and unseen expression that is spiritual reality. However, this resistance is rapidly being overcome by the realization on the part of scholars in a variety of academic fields that the laws and relationships operant in the physical aspect of reality are the exact counterpart of the laws and relationships operant in spiritual aspect of reality. This paper posits the thesis that it is increasingly the role of Bahá'í academics to bring to light images of this interpenetration of the dual aspects of reality by showing how the dual methodologies described in the Bahá'í writings demonstrate the integration between these two expressions of reality.

These are spiritual truths relating to the spiritual world. In like manner, from these spiritual realities infer truths about the material world. For physical things are signs and imprints of spiritual things; every lower thing is an image.

‘Abdu'l-Bahá¹

Visualising the Elephant

In addition to my work in Bahá'í studies, I do research in medieval English literature, and as such I have witnessed a parade of critical vogues over the last forty years, a seemingly endless file of scholars who thought to make their mark. I, too, have thought I possessed my own special view of what Chaucer was saying. Often at conferences as I listened to presentations I mused about how delightful it would have been had Chaucer suddenly materialised before us (as Marshall McLuhan does in the Woody Allen's movie *Annie Hall*) to say “That is not what I meant at all./ That is not it, at all.”² But then I wondered were we to hear Chaucer utter those fatal words, would it faze us any more than Christ's responses to the grand inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamozov* or the Báb's responses to His interrogators in Tabriz?

When Faulkner was a visiting professor at the University of Virginia, he gave a

¹ Provisional translation of *Lawh-i-Aflak* (Tablet of the Universe) from Bahá'í World Centre.

² T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” ll. 97-98, *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (3rd edition) 994.

public reading of one of his stories. Afterwards he began explaining what the story meant, but he was suddenly interrupted by a scholar in American literature who pronounced his interpretation inadequate and misguided. So it goes in the world of literary criticism where ambiguity reigns and produces mostly aging scholars with broken hearts, unless our life's goal be nothing more than a list of publications adequate to garner tenure, a professorship, and a modicum of recognition among an insular community of peers.

In other areas of academia, life may be a bit more hopeful: scholars pursue important answers to questions about objective reality. But all too often, I suspect, they, too, strive like the blindfolded men in the proverb who examine various parts an elephant and argue about the validity of their individual perceptions: it is skinny like a whip, says the tailist; it is thick, round, and straight like a tree trunk, says the leggist; it is flat and thick like a blanket, says the earist. In time they might cease contending, might consult, collaborate, and assemble their findings and emerge with some consensus about the reality of the elephant. But how much more rapid their progress would be were one to appear among them who had actually seen the elephant, who would gladly share this knowledge, or, even better, one who would remove their blindfolds that they, too, might behold reality for themselves.

But would they welcome this enlightened one? Would the truth-bringer be celebrated, or would he be berated as were the prophets, as was Faulkner, and as is Plato's philosopher king when he dutifully descends back down into the cave of ignorance to teach others after his noble ascent to encounter reality first hand in its pure and exalted forms?

In the beginning of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh observes (as did Christ and Muhammad before him) how the prophets of God inevitably face scorn and ridicule from the learned in their midst, the very ones who should welcome their advanced vision of reality. This same ironic reception also greets ordinary human innovators who proffer enhanced visions of reality, such as Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. Of course, in time their re-visioned theories will be accepted, and the geniuses, like the prophets, will belatedly become lionized because their visions portray reality accurately and, therefore, offer the simplest, and, consequently, the most scientific description of reality. That's the nature of truth. It is practical and it works.

The scholar as servant

Whatever our particular field of study, we have the task of recognizing these visionaries and the visions they bring—these top-down, these integrative images of reality, especially if we ourselves are to understand how best to apply that image to the particular part of truth that we ourselves are studying.

Yet in this day when, according to the authoritative Bahá'í texts, humankind has attained maturity, the task of understanding and then actualising the integrative vision of Bahá'u'lláh into metaphorical social and physical forms of scholarship is no longer the province of a finite class of learned ones, of clergy or divines. Bahá'u'lláh has empowered all, has mandated all to read, to interpret, and to apply the text for themselves, to become scholars in their own right to the extent that they are able:

... every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified. Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure? ... For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself.³

The House of Justice has emphasised this axiom by stating that “all Bahá'ís, whatever their professions, are challenged to reflect on the implications of our common struggle to achieve Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race, including the use of our intellectual resources to gain deeper understanding of that Revelation and to apply its principles.”⁴

This mandate is thus bi-directional: no one else can think for us or become spiritual for us, and, conversely, we cannot assume this task for someone else. Therefore, no particular academic body of Bahá'í scholars has special status within the Bahá'í community, either to guide the community as a whole or to guide other Bahá'ís individually:

... Bahá'ís who are trained in various academic disciplines do not constitute a discrete body within the community. While the Baha'í institutions benefit on an ongoing basis from the advice of believers in many fields of specialisation, there is obviously no group of academics who can claim to speak on behalf of Baha'í scholars generally. Scholarly qualifications enable individuals to make greatly valued contributions to the work of the Cause, but do not set those possessing them apart from the general body of the believers.⁵

Expanding the concept of scholarship

However, while prohibiting any specific body of scholars from having the role of leadership, this passage also observes that the role of the scholar and of scholarship itself is no less crucial or valuable in this revised relationship between learned individuals and the community they serve. Indeed, the role of the scholar in the Bahá'í context has increased in value and become more universal in its application: scholarly assistance is now relevant and valuable to everyone in the community because understanding Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a spiritually based commonwealth and applying that vision to the material world is the job of every individual. Thus, the Bahá'í scholar has the most exalted station of becoming, like 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a servant to the servants of God.

There is, then, an urgent need for the Bahá'í community as a whole and for Bahá'í academics in particular to re-evaluate and re-define what is meant by the terms “Bahá'í scholarship” and “Bahá'í studies.” Heretofore we seem tacitly to have accepted definitions of scholarship based on traditional modalities of study and the traditional notion of the lack of any intimate relationship between the academy and the body politic.

This separation of the academic world from the so-called “real world,” a view that

³ *Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) 143.

⁴ From a letter dated 5 October 1993 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, in *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1999) 9.

⁵ Universal House of Justice, 20 July 1997 in *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith* 36.

we inherited mostly from previous religious history, has fostered an idea held by some that Bahá'í scholarship consists of well-defined fields explicitly relegated to those whose study focuses on the investigation of religion and religious communities and history. Perhaps it is because of this previously narrow and sometimes constraining concept of Bahá'í study that the Universal House of Justice made the following comment:

The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms "Bahá'í scholarship" and "Bahá'í scholars" in an exclusive sense, which would effectively establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those denied entrance to it.⁶

My personal sense of this statement is that its aim is to stimulate in us the goal of providing a more expansive view of scholarship by urging all Bahá'ís to accept their individual responsibility for their own spiritual and mental development. Likewise, this comment can be viewed as a mandate for scholars to assist the entire community in all fields of study:

The House of Justice seeks the creation of a Bahá'í community in which the members encourage each other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and common realization that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to contribute to the advancement of the Faith."⁷

In this regard, the House of Justice expresses confidence that the critical role of the scholar in serving the general body of believers will become increasingly apparent and essential:

The House of Justice feels confident that, with patience, self-discipline, and unity of faith, Bahá'í academics will be able to contribute to a gradual forging of the more integrative paradigms of scholarship for which thoughtful minds in the international community are increasingly calling.⁸

Thus, while all of us are commanded to become learned to whatever degree we are able, the Bahá'í academic is particularly exhorted to examine the reciprocal relationship between a given field of study and the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, the notion of an associative relationship between body and soul might impact the fields of medicine, psychology, and gerontology. The concept of human history as a spiritual dynamic will impact the fields of history, anthropology, and sociology. The image of the universe as an eternal and infinite expression of the unseen divine reality will impact the fields of theology, physics, and astronomy.

⁶ *Scholarship* (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1995) 5-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ From a letter dated 20 July 1997 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1999) 36.

In short, the Bahá'í vision of the essential unity of and the reciprocity between the seen and unseen aspects of reality and of the integration of all human activity in the process of fostering an “ever-advancing civilization” is not confined solely to the realization that true science and true religion are describing one organic creation. Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a “divine economy” implies that all human endeavours, all areas of scholarship, are integral expressions of this global enterprise and are, therefore, forms of Bahá'í study, something Peter Khan notes in his paper “Some Aspects of Bahá'í Scholarship”⁹ where he lists some fields that would particularly benefit from these integrative forms of Bahá'í study: theories of personality, the nature of creativity, the dynamics of group decision making, social organization and governance, theories of history, theories of environmental development, and many others. As he also notes, Bahá'í academics are already at work in many or most of these fields of study. The point is, then, that the Bahá'í revelation presents an accurate vision of reality which integrates all areas of human knowledge and study because it portrays physical reality as nothing less than the outer or metaphorical expression of the divine or spiritual world:

The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven.¹⁰

Methodologies for the new vision

While all scholarship might thus conceivably be capable of becoming “Bahá'í scholarship,” such an assertion does not mean that every Bahá'í in every academic field is *de facto* a “Bahá'í scholar.” Implicit in such an appellation, no matter how guardedly we apply it, must be a critical relationship between the Bahá'í perspective and a given field of study. Merely having declared oneself a Bahá'í hardly renders an academic capable of accomplishing this subtle and demanding task of performing “Bahá'í scholarship.” Furthermore, before a scholar can usefully apply the Bahá'í vision to a field of study, he or she must first be capable of understanding and accepting as a given the description of reality as presented in the authoritative Bahá'í texts. Stated another way, the Bahá'í scholar must first achieve confirmation that his or her “faith” or “belief” (as these terms are commonly understood in a religious context) has become transformed into what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls “conscious knowledge.”

This transformation occurs first by fashioning the initial attraction to the Faith or to the prophet—that inductive “leap of faith” that impels us to declare ourselves Bahá'ís—into a knowledge that is corroborated by what 'Abdu'l-Bahá terms the “standards of science”:

God has endowed man with intelligence and reason whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions. If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance,

⁹ “Some Aspects of Bahá'í Scholarship” appeared in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 9.4 (2000):43-64.

¹⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) 10.

and the child of ignorance is superstition.¹¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá thus redefines *faith* or *belief*: No longer does such a term designate an acceptance of that which cannot be proven; *faith* implies “first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds.”¹² But, again, what does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mean here by the “standards of science”? In the most general sense, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to imply the corroboration of information (i.e., the idea of reasonableness¹³), such as the five proofs of the Manifestation of God given by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*¹⁴ or the corroborative process given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when he describes the four sources of information commonly employed as standards of proof: the senses, reason, traditions, and inspiration. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that individually each of these methodologies is fallible and liable to error, but if a proposition be corroborated by all four, then one may be said to have a relative proof of its veracity:

But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete.¹⁵

If we apply this standard as we deepen our conviction about our beliefs as Bahá’ís, we can begin to accept as a reliable standard the verities articulated in the authoritative texts of the Bahá’í Faith, or, to employ Bahá’í parlance, we can “enter the City of Certitude.”

Of course, having entered that metaphorical city does not mean we will dwell there eternally. In another passage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that since each one of these standards is liable to error, then the only true test of a proposition is the test of the “inmost heart.” For example, in a talk cited in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concludes an examination of these same standards by stating,

This is a conclusive argument showing that all available human criteria are erroneous and defective, but the divine standard of knowledge is infallible. Therefore, man is not justified in saying, “I know because I perceive through my senses,” or “I know because it is proved through my faculty of reason,” or “I know because it is according to tradition and interpretation of the Holy Book,” or “I know because I am inspired.” All human standards of judgment

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹² Quoted in *Bahá’í World Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976) 383.

¹³ See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s discussion of the scientific methodology of the idea of reasonableness as discussed in *Promulgation* 357.

¹⁴ The five proofs he gives are: (1) the divine utterance of the Prophet from one who has had no schooling or learning “common amongst men,” (2) the heroic souls that arise to follow the Prophet, (3) the “constancy of the eternal Beauty in proclaiming the Faith of God, in facing death, and doing this unaided,” (4) the repudiation by the people of the earth, and (5) the fulfillment of ancient prophecies and traditions.

¹⁵ *Promulgation* 255.

are faulty, finite.”¹⁶

Thus, while the corroboration of these different sources of information is a helpful guide, it is not always a sufficient or even a relatively reliable guide compared with another standard he cites, namely, the awakening of the “human spirit,” “the standard of the inmost heart,” the standard or inner vision which God bestows upon whomsoever He willeth.

Here ‘Abdu’l-Bahá may be alluding to the prophet’s heart (the only infallibly inspired source of knowledge), or he may be invoking the more traditional concept of faith that is available to all alike, even to the most unlearned disciples whom Christ first chose, or to the eager Dawnbreakers who lay down their lives in the path of their belief in the Báb in spite of having never met Him or having read much of his teachings:

But if the human spirit will rejoice and be attracted to the Kingdom of God, if the inner sight becomes opened, and the spiritual hearing strengthened, and the spiritual feelings predominant, he will see the immortality of the spirit as clearly as he sees the sun, and the glad tidings and signs of God will encompass him.¹⁷

But since we cannot ascertain with certainty who possesses such purity of spirit and vision, nor even whether or not we ourselves possess it, we are still exhorted and challenged constantly to reinforce and confirm any claim to knowledge, just as we would in any other arena of study that presents us with theories of reality. Indeed, as Bahá’ís we are given an entire regimen by which to achieve ever greater degrees of certitude, a regimen that involves an empirical or corroborative process, not a catechism or an indoctrination.

Through this methodology, our “beliefs” in the station and claims of Bahá’u’lláh and in his Covenant can become as proven (i.e., as corroborated by both subjective and objective methodologies) and, therefore, as certain as any other assertions we might make in any other academic field of study. Furthermore, once having attained this station, we can rely upon the texts as the infallible *mizán* (Persian) or *qustás* (Arabic)—the standard, the balance, the scales or touchstone by which all other verities are assayed. In short, once having attained certitude about the infallible station of Bahá’u’lláh (i.e., the Most Great Infallibility) and consequently of His Covenant as well, we then have access to a treasure house of related images of reality that are likewise capable of putting us substantially ahead of other scholars, but only if we are sufficiently daring to employ this “head start.” In fact, I believe it is in this sense that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “It is incumbent upon Baha’i children to surpass other children in the acquisition of sciences and arts, for they have been cradled in the grace of God. Whatever other children learn in a year, let Baha’i children learn in a month.”¹⁸

Two methods of epistemology

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷ *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1981) 226.

¹⁸ *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Haifa: The Bahá’í World Centre, 1978) 141.

In addition to this general methodology of the “standard of science” by which the scholar can come to rely on the new image of reality set forth in the Bahá'í texts as a standard by which to judge other theories, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of two methodologies by which our conscious mind can examine all propositions and proofs regarding reality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá alludes to these two methods in various ways: as the indirect versus the direct method; as the objective versus the subjective method; as the rational method versus the intuitive method. But in every such discussion ‘Abdu’l-Bahá distinguishes between two epistemological pathways by which information arrives in our conscious mind.

In one passage ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discusses these two modes of knowing as the two kinds of “power and comprehension of the human spirit”:

Know that the power and the comprehension of the human spirit are of two kinds—that is to say, they perceive and act in two different modes. One way is through instruments and organs. . . The other manifestation of the powers and actions of the spirit is without instruments and organs. For example, in the state of sleep without eyes it sees; without an ear it hears; without a tongue it speaks; without feet it runs.¹⁹

The first method, the rational or indirect method (the pathway by which sensual data about reality is transformed into a mental image) is obviously tantamount to the common understanding of the scientific method. Therefore, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calls this the “objective” mode—a “knowledge derived from perception.”²⁰

For instance, sight is one of the outer powers; it sees and perceives this flower, and conveys this perception to the inner power—the common faculty—which transmits this perception to the power of imagination, which in its turn conceives and forms this image and transmits it to the power of thought...²¹

It is important to note here how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes “the common faculty” which transmits the information from the “outer” powers to the “inner powers”:

The intermediary between the five outward powers and the inward powers is the sense which they possess in common—that is to say, the sense which acts between the outer and inner powers, conveys to the inward powers whatever the outer powers discern. It is termed the common faculty, because it communicates between the outward and inward powers and thus is common to the outward and inward powers.”²²

¹⁹ *Some Answered Questions* 227.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 157.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 210-211.

²² *Ibid.*, 210. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in passages in *The Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* alludes to what seems to be this same capacity as being the function of the “sympathetic nerve.” However, this term is not used anywhere else by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, nor is the original text from which this was translated extant.

The second of the two methodologies which 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "subjective" knowledge is information obtained directly from the realm of vision (i.e., the spiritual world): insights such as those derived from dreams, inspiration, intuition, or meditation. But even when insights derive directly from the spiritual world, they still end up in the repository of our conscious minds so long as our souls associate with and function through the instrumentality of the physical body. Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is careful to note that we can never be certain when promptings of the heart are from the "inmost heart" and not from "satanic fancies":

What is inspiration? It is the influx of the human heart. But what are satanic promptings which afflict mankind? They are the influx of the heart also. How shall we differentiate between them? The question arises: How shall we know whether we are following inspiration from God or satanic promptings of the human soul? Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable.²³

Yet the conscious mind should not be confused with the physical organ of the brain. 'Abdu'l-Bahá notes, "the mind has no place, but it is connected with the brain."²⁴ Nevertheless, so long as the soul associates with the conscious mind through the instrumentality of the brain, our consciousness is fallible and subject to confusions as a result of illness or dysfunction. At death, however, we no longer need to examine reality through indirect or periscopic vision transferred through the common faculty—epistemology is entirely direct and subjective.

Thus, while we are in this life, our understanding is always filtered through our conscious mind, whether the source of that understanding be the direct or indirect pathway. That is why, in the final analysis, we are exhorted to weigh our conclusions against the standard, the *mizán* or *qustás* of the Bahá'í authoritative texts. But, of course, having achieved whatever degree of conscious knowledge we can, we are only half done with our task because we are further mandated by Bahá'u'lláh to couple that knowledge with action.²⁵

Conclusion

Because of our own fallibility, then, it is vitally important that we achieve sufficient certitude about the station and claims of Bahá'u'lláh and his Covenant so that we can always weigh the conclusions derived by our conscious minds against the infallible standard of the Bahá'í authoritative texts, and these texts include all decisions by the Universal House of Justice since, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself."²⁶

²³ *Promulgations of Universal Peace* 22.

²⁴ *Some Answered Questions* 242.

²⁵ See the first paragraph of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and a complete discussion of this paradigm in John S. Hatcher, *Arc of Ascent: The Purpose of Physical Reality II* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994).

²⁶ *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997) 20.

So it is that one of the most difficult challenges facing the Bahá'í scholar right now is to perform two tasks that are, more often than not, antithetical to each other: to do scholarship that is acceptable in the contemporary academy while remaining faithful to the authoritative and infallible vision of reality presented in the Bahá'í texts. This noble undertaking often subjects Bahá'í scholars to the scorn of colleagues who may view them as religious fanatics and to the disdain of fellow Bahá'ís who may view their scholarship as esoteric and as irrelevant to the immediate needs of the Bahá'í community.

Such reactions call to mind the story of Bahá'í poet Robert Hayden who now, twenty years after his death, daily leads people through his poetry (which is being increasingly anthologized throughout the world) to his belief in Bahá'u'lláh and to his vision of the world as a Bahá'í, a theme which permeates and underlies all his verse. Yet, during his life, Hayden was little regarded by the Bahá'í community because the practice of his art seemed self-indulgent and unrelated to "Bahá'í activities" as these activities were commonly understood in the context of Bahá'í community life.

Naturally, some fields of study are more perilous than others in this regard, particularly those fields that deal pointedly with the interpenetration between the spiritual and physical aspects of reality. For while there may be ways of avoiding or circumventing conflicts that can arise between the methodology or assumptions in one's field and one's personal assumptions as a Bahá'í, the forthright assertion of Bahá'í concepts within the context of an academic field can often incur great risk to the scholar's acceptance and professional progress. For example, how does the Bahá'í historian discuss theories of causality about the growth of the Bahá'í community and not present its claims of divine intervention? Indeed, Shoghi Effendi notes that the scriptures themselves are more reliable than scholarly commentaries when it comes to evaluating Christianity and Islám:

The truth is that Western historians have for many centuries distorted the facts to suit their religious and ancestral prejudices. The Baha'is should try to study history anew, and to base all their investigations first and foremost on the written Scriptures of Islam and Christianity.²⁷

Likewise, a Bahá'í scholar in the field of religious studies can hardly discuss the Bahá'í administrative order without discussing the Covenant or the concept of the Manifestation as an inherently infallible and divinely empowered emissary from another reality.

To attempt to circumvent these subjects from the methodological perspective of what the House of Justice has termed "dogmatic materialism" is to run the risk of introducing a variety of logical inconsistencies, the most lethal of which may well be the *post hoc* fallacy of attributing causality to incidental circumstances surrounding major events: e.g. the sudden emergence of the Báb's leadership and eloquence after his meeting with the learned Mullá Husayn.

In short, once engaged in discussions of causality, the Bahá'í scholar can no longer avoid the challenge of discussing events and ideas that can have valid and accurate

²⁷ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 27 April 1936, qtd. in *Lights of Guidance* compiled by Helen Hornby (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988) 495.

description only in terms of the Bahá'í assertion about the reciprocal relationship between the dual aspects of reality, any more than could a physicist agree to discuss falling objects so long there was no mention of an unseen force whereby masses are attracted to each other.

It is precisely in this context, I feel, that the House of Justice has admonished Bahá'í scholars to see as fundamentally unsound and baseless those materialistic methodologies that disallow out-of-hand any assertion that the progress of the Faith has proceeded from the influence of spiritual reality. Such a methodology implicitly denies the freedom of the scholar to set forth an explanation that is both logically consistent and accurate, especially when such a methodology insists *a priori* without proof “that even the nature of religion itself can be adequately understood only through the use of an academic methodology designed to ignore the truth that makes religion what it is.”²⁸

Of course, the resourceful Bahá'í scholar can prove the spiritual verities upon which the Bahá'í Faith is based: the existence of a spiritual dimension, the existence of God, the theory of history as a succession of divine interventions, the concept of consciousness and cognition as powers of the soul, the power of consciousness and prayer to affect material reality. Indeed, many Bahá'í and non-Baha'í scholars have already accomplished such studies.²⁹ The Bahá'í scholar can also choose to explicate Bahá'í theories through the methodology of apologetics, thereby articulating Bahá'í theories and hypotheses for the academy to test and explore.

In the final analysis, each Bahá'í scholar must discover individually the best methodology for integrating the Bahá'í perspective into his or her field of study. What should excite and motivate all Bahá'í academics is what the future holds as each day more and more of the verities revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, discussed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and elucidated by the House of Justice are vindicated because of one simple fact—these authoritative texts are accurate descriptions of reality.

²⁸ Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice dated 7 April 1999.

²⁹ e.g., See William S. Hatcher, *Logic and Logos, The Law of Love Enshrined*, and *Love, Power and Justice* regarding proofs of the existence and nature of God. See Melvin Morse, *Transformed by the Light*, Larry Dossey, *Recovering the Soul: A Scientific and Spiritual Search*, Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, and Fred Alan Wolf, *The Spiritual Universe* for proofs of the existence of the soul. See Jahn and Dunne, *Margins of Reality*, and Larry Dossey, *Healing Words* for proofs of the consciousness to affect material reality.