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Paper

A Thought Experiment from 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Implications for Hume's Problem of Induction

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Abstract

David Hume's analysis of induction establishes that inferences from past to future cannot be justified either deductively or without circular appeal to past experience. While the logic underpinning this view is widely accepted, he further asserts that should the course of nature change, past experience would lack rational relevance. This paper challenges the latter conclusion through analysis of a memorable thought experiment articulated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in dialogue with Henri Bergson. The argument advanced here is that experience, when sufficiently warranted, can impose enduring constraints on rational explanation even in the absence of demonstrative certainty. A single observation need not justify a universal generalisation in order to retain epistemic force; it need only disclose a feature that cannot be coherently excluded without compensating explanation. By distinguishing logical justification from epistemic relevance, the analysis argues that experience limits what may be rationally affirmed or denied, thereby preserving the rational standing of scientific and philosophical inquiry under conditions of uncertainty. The argument is deliberately minimal but structurally sufficient: it does not establish what must be the case, but restricts what can be coherently denied.

Introduction

One of the most enduring challenges in modern philosophy is the claim, articulated by David Hume, that inductive reasoning—our practice of inferring future events from past experience—cannot be logically justified without presupposing that the future will resemble the past. His associated secondary claim contends that if the uniformity of nature cannot be secured, then experience itself cannot provide a rational basis for inference[1].

Since this principle of uniformity cannot itself be established deductively, and any attempt to justify it inductively would be circular, Hume concluded that inductive inferences lack rational justification. This difficulty becomes clearer when the full structure of his argument is made explicit. Inductive reasoning cannot be justified deductively, since no contradiction arises from supposing that the future will diverge from the past. But neither can it be justified inductively without circularity: any appeal to the past success of inductive inference already presupposes the very principle at issue—that the future will resemble the past. The result is a familiar double bind. If one seeks a deductive justification, none is available; if one appeals to experience, the argument presupposes the conclusion.

[1] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), sec. IV, pt. I.

Hume acknowledged that such inferences are psychologically inevitable and pragmatically indispensable, yet maintained that their philosophical foundation remains unresolved[2]. The problem is not whether we use inductive reasoning—it is how to explain why that kind of reasoning is rational.

It is noteworthy that the two claims mentioned above are often treated as a single problem. The first claim is the well-known justificatory problem of induction: that no non-circular argument can establish that the future will resemble the past. This point is widely regarded as settled.[3] The second, sceptical claim is that if the course of nature should change, then experience becomes epistemically irrelevant, incapable of supporting any inference or conclusion. The present paper addresses the second, sceptical claim. It does not attempt to resolve the problem of justification, but argues that the irrelevance thesis does not follow from it.

Hume's Sceptical Critique

Hume's sceptical critique turns on a decisive escalation grounded in a prior impasse: induction can be justified neither deductively nor by appeal to experience. From this double bind, he proceeds to a stronger conclusion: that experience becomes epistemically useless if the course of nature may change. In Hume's words, "If there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion."[4]

At this point, the issue is no longer certainty, but relevance. Here, epistemic relevance refers to the role of experience in fixing conditions on the admissibility of explanatory claims, rather than providing support for predictive generalisations. Hume's formulation articulates a distinct and stronger thesis than the mere failure of justification. It asserts that without uniformity, experience loses not only its justificatory force but its epistemic relevance altogether. The question is not whether inductive inferences can be given a non-circular justification, but whether experience can rationally constrain explanation while future regularities remain uncertain.

Contemporary discussions have not eliminated this tension. While few philosophers explicitly endorse the conclusion that experience is wholly epistemically inert, influential accounts continue to deny that it possesses any non-circular rational grounding or independent justificatory role.[5] These positions preserve, in modified form, the pressure toward the conclusion that experience lacks rational authority if inductive justification fails.

Methodological Orientation and Scope of the Argument

The present analysis proceeds in four stages. In the previous section, Hume's formulation of the problem of induction was examined, with particular attention to his claim that experience becomes epistemically useless if the course of nature may change. Second, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thought experiment is presented and analysed as providing a counterexample to Hume's claim, demonstrating that the identification of a factor through experience imposes an enduring constraint on rational explanation.

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[2] Hume, *Enquiry*, sec. V, pt. I.

[3] Richard DeWitt, *Worldviews: An Introduction to the History and Philosophy of Science, 2nd edn (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 59–62.*

[4] Hume, *Enquiry*, sec. IV, pt. II, p. 35.

[5] See Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 52–68; Peter Unger, *Ignorance: A Case for Skepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 47–72; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 136–59.

Third, the implications of this insight for inductive reasoning and scientific explanation are considered through a brief exploration of general and particular conceptual frameworks. Finally, the broader consequences of this clarification are considered for ordinary reasoning, philosophical reflection, and the rational standing of scientific inquiry.

This orientation is consistent with numerous statements by 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the relationship between reason, empirical investigation, and religious understanding. In *Some Answered Questions*, for example, he argues that beliefs contrary to reason and established knowledge cannot ultimately be sustained, since truth must be coherent and unified rather than divided against itself.[6] Likewise, in *Paris Talks* and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* he repeatedly affirms that science and religion constitute complementary forms of inquiry, each requiring freedom from superstition, dogmatism, and blind imitation.[7] Read within this broader intellectual context, the Bergson conversation appears not as an isolated apologetic exchange, but as an instance of a wider epistemological posture: one that treats reason, experience, and metaphysical reflection as mutually informative while acknowledging the provisional and revisable character of human understanding.

Although the present argument is framed in terms accessible to the contemporary philosophy of science, it also reflects a distinctive but broadly accessible epistemological orientation—one that affirms the disciplined use of reason and empirical investigation while resisting both dogmatic certainty and sceptical negation. By reframing the epistemic role of experience, the paper does not seek to provide a deductive justification of induction, nor does it deny the force of Hume's critique regarding logical certainty. Instead, it challenges the escalation from the absence of deductive certainty to the stronger conclusion that experience itself is epistemically useless. The argument advanced here maintains that while inductive generalisations may lack logical proof, experience nevertheless imposes rational constraints on explanation.

The Meeting with Henri Bergson

The following description is drawn from two accounts of a conversation which took place between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Henri Bergson, recounted by Valíyu'lláh Varqá who travelled as a translator with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and who also attended the meeting.

> *"About a year before the First World War a memorable meeting took place in Paris. The famous philosopher Henri Bergson, who asserted the principle of the élan vital [life force] in evolution, had asked for and been granted an interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá at the latter's hotel."*[8]

> *"Bergson, accompanied by a few teachers, followers of his school of thought and reputed to be his students came to the home of 'Abdu'l-Bahá."*[9]

[6] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2014), pt. 1, chs. 1 and 83.
[7] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 143–46; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 107–09, 143–45.
[8] Hushmand Sabet, *Der Gespaltene Himmel* (Stuttgart: Verbum, 1967), pp. 82–83, trans. by O. Coburn as *The Heavens Are Cleft Asunder* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1975).
[9] ''Abdu'l-Bahá et Henri Bergson', Bahá'ís of France, <https://www.bahai.fr/origine-en-france/abdul-baha-et-henri-bergson/> [accessed 16 April 2026] (trans. by authors).

> *"They were welcomed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who himself poured the tea, then invited Bergson to open the conversation. But the philosopher said that this was more proper for his host. 'Abdu'l-Bahá started by observing that the difference between materialists and those who believed in God was by no means so great as was generally assumed. The materialists admitted that man had not yet grasped the reality of things, for if he had, there would be no possibility of progress left. For instance, if the essence of iron had been fathomed in its full complexity, this would exclude all further progress in the field of metallurgy. In reality we were meeting new unknowns every day and had to gain new knowledge within our field of cognition. The believers said there was an all-embracing reality which man could not grasp; a force they called divine. If we thought out these two views to their logical conclusion, we would see that they were not far removed from each other. Bergson replied with a smile that if 'Abdu'l-Bahá wished to find such common ground between the two parties, he had no objection."*[10]

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Thought Experiment

> *"'Abdu'l-Bahá said that in judging a point, however, one should let justice prevail: Bergson should imagine himself standing on the shores of an immense ocean, not knowing all that was in the ocean or aware of its extent"*[11]

> *"[If he then] takes some seawater in the palm of his hand, brings it to his mouth and tastes it, and his taste reveals that the water is salty, can he then claim that there is no salt in the sea, even if one assumes that only that handful of water was salty and the rest was fresh water?"*[12]

> *"Bergson thought for a while, then admitted that one could not make that assertion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued with the observation that we were in a world which was a small part of the infinite universe, with no possibility of exploring everything, nor did we know what levels of life existed. If we considered man as part of the unimaginably great realm of Being, we should find that he was endowed with reason and will. But if we found reason and will in human individuals, would it be right to exclude the possibility that the First Cause from which man had emerged – whether we called it Nature or God – also possessed reason and will?"*[13]

> *"Bergson fell into deep thought and suddenly, breaking the silence of the meeting, he violently struck the table with his fist, which shook all the empty teacups, and he added that no one until now had been able to solve such a complex problem with such simple words."*[14] He then rose, bowed, and departed, followed by his companions.

Commentary on the Thought Experiment

The conversation with Bergson has been interpreted in different ways, including as an argument concerning the rational plausibility of belief in God or the epistemic limits of materialism more

[10] Sabet, *Der Gespaltene Himmel*.
[11] Sabet, *Der Gespaltene Himmel*.
[12] ''Abdu'l-Bahá et Henri Bergson', Bahá'ís of France.
[13] Sabet, *Der Gespaltene Himmel*.
[14] ''Abdu'l-Bahá et Henri Bergson', Bahá'ís of France.

generally. The interpretation advanced here is therefore intentionally limited and conditional: if we take the analogy as illustrating a structural point about the continuing epistemic relevance of experience under conditions of uncertainty, then it may be read as bearing directly on the sceptical escalation identified in Hume's critique.

With courtesy, "simple words," and unassailable logic, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thought experiment discloses a factor that cannot fairly be excluded from the analysis of a complex metaphysical subject. While the chief significance of the thought experiment unquestionably lies in the implications of ascribing attributes such as reason and will to a First Cause, we focus here on the manner of its presentation and its relevance to Hume's sceptical treatment of past experience. This form of reasoning illustrates the persistence of epistemic constraint once a significant factor has been disclosed.

This can be seen in the seawater example, whose force lies not in establishing that all seawater is salty, but in how it reframes the familiar double bind. If inductive reasoning can be justified neither deductively nor without circular appeal to past success, then the epistemic role of experience cannot depend on securing the uniformity of nature in advance. What is required instead is an account of how experience retains its rational significance under these conditions.

Once a sufficiently warranted feature has been identified through experience, it cannot be coherently excluded from subsequent explanation without cost. This claim, however, requires qualification: observations vary in reliability, susceptibility to error, and dependence on interpretation. By "sufficiently warranted," we refer to findings that withstand standard epistemic checks within a domain—such as reproducibility, coherence with established knowledge, and resistance to plausible sources of distortion. Constraint arises not from raw experience alone, but from critically examined experience within a conceptual framework.[15] The threshold of warrant relevant here is therefore comparative and provisional rather than absolute; the argument requires only that some experiential findings may rationally constrain explanation more strongly than others. In this respect, the view resonates with Wilfrid Sellars' rejection of the "Myth of the Given," according to which experiential input must already be conceptually situated to have epistemic significance.[16]

The claim advanced here is intentionally minimal: not that experiential findings generate universally uncontested conclusions, but that once evidence attains sufficient credibility within an appropriately critical framework, its outright exclusion incurs an explanatory burden. Questions concerning who determines what counts as "sufficiently warranted," and by which standards, remain contested, and a fuller account of how warrant is negotiated across interpretive communities remains an important area for further investigation.

Such an approach does not treat any single, unexamined observation as decisive; rather, it marks a limiting case in which a sufficiently established factor must be taken into account. Such accommodation may take the form of incorporation, qualification, or explanation of apparent exceptions, but outright exclusion requires justification in terms of error, misinterpretation, or limiting conditions. In this way, experiential findings do not guarantee truth, but narrow the range of defensible explanation.

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[15] *Social Action: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2020) <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/social-action/> [accessed 16 April 2026] (paras. 1.3–1.5).

[16] Wilfrid Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 127–32.

To understand how this operates, it is helpful to distinguish between general and particular conceptual frameworks. A general framework governs what kinds of entities, properties, and explanatory relations are admissible within a domain, while particular frameworks are provisional models constructed to account for specific empirical situations. Scientific reasoning proceeds through their interaction, with anomalies typically prompting revision at the level of particular frameworks rather than abandonment of experiential input. Interpretation is therefore indispensable: experience is not self-interpreting, and its epistemic force depends on its ongoing articulation within an evolving conceptual context.

Applied to the seawater example, this distinction brings the limitation of Hume's sceptical claim into focus. If this had been a practical experiment and a second sample was found to be fresh, the initial observation of salinity would not be rendered epistemically inert. Instead, explanatory effort would shift—perhaps to localised variation, environmental conditions, or sampling context. Revisions would occur at the level of particular frameworks, and, where necessary, adjustments to the general framework would follow. Even when predictive expectations fail, prior observations still shape what counts as an acceptable account of the phenomenon.

The underlying structure of the thought experiment may be described in a more exact form: once a feature of experience is recognised as sufficiently warranted, its exclusion from explanation is no longer a neutral option but a position requiring justification. This constraint constitutes a fundamental basis of rational inquiry: established experiential findings impose enduring limits on rational denial.

Interestingly, Hume himself acknowledges a form of differential constraint in his discussion of miracles.[17] There he argues that reports of extraordinary events may be reasonably rejected when they conflict with a well-established body of experience. This is not merely a passing observation but a revealing tension: although Hume denies any rational foundation for induction, he nevertheless relies in practice on the comparative weight and stability of experience to adjudicate belief[18]. The implication is difficult to avoid—experience continues to exert a regulative constraint even within a framework that officially withholds its justification. This internal contrast strengthens the present claim that the authority of experience, while neither absolute nor uniform, remains ineliminable in rational inquiry.

Implications for Rational Inquiry and Scientific Practice

The preceding analysis has not attempted to secure deductive certainty for induction. Its narrower aim has been to clarify how experience may continue to constrain rational explanation under conditions of uncertainty. Yet this clarification is not philosophically neutral. It reflects an epistemological orientation that affirms the relationship between empirical inquiry and rational reflection while rejecting both dogmatic certainty and sceptical paralysis. The broader implications of this position therefore bear upon larger questions concerning the relation between experience, metaphysical interpretation, and the limits of human understanding.

Within this orientation, reason and empirical inquiry are not treated as provisional or inferior faculties, but as indispensable instruments of truth-seeking. At the same time, neither is regarded as self-sufficient or infallible. The thought experiment exemplifies this balanced posture. Significantly,

[17] Hume, *Enquiry*, sec. X, pt. I, pp. 86–88.

[18] For further commentary on this point, see John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument against Miracles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

in his exchange with Henri Bergson, 'Abdu'l-Bahá began by observing that the difference between materialists and believers in God was not as great as commonly assumed. This approach is methodologically significant in that it reduces polarisation at the outset and reframes the discussion as a shared inquiry. Rather than treating science and religion as antagonistic, it identifies common epistemic commitments—most notably, the acknowledgment of the limits of human knowledge and the evolving character of understanding.

For this claim to be persuasive, it is helpful to clarify in what sense religion may be understood as a disciplined mode of inquiry. In its more rigorous forms, religious inquiry is not constituted by unexamined belief or inherited doctrine as such, but by the systematic interpretation of experience—moral, existential, and, in some cases, revelatory—according to the criteria of critical reflection, coherence, and practical consequences. Like scientific inquiry, it operates under constraints: claims must exhibit internal consistency, explanatory scope, and responsiveness to experience, broadly construed. While the domains and methods differ, both forms of inquiry are subject to norms of intelligibility, revision, and justification, even if these norms are differently articulated.

The thought experiment itself does not claim exhaustive knowledge of reality, nor does it attempt to derive metaphysical conclusions from deductive necessity. Instead, it demonstrates how even a single empirical observation can establish conditions that responsible explanation must address. In doing so, it models a form of reasoning that is at once empirically grounded, logically disciplined, and metaphysically non-dogmatic. The practical implication of this posture is that disagreement need not entail intellectual isolation. If the divide between materialist and theistic perspectives is narrower than presumed, cooperation in the search for an accurate reading of reality becomes rationally justified. This analysis yields several further implications.

First, for ordinary reasoning and public discourse, it clarifies the rational status of ordinary reasoning while reducing grounds for polarisation. Hume himself acknowledges that his scepticism does not undermine ordinary practice. As agents, we continue to rely on inductive reasoning, guided by habit and custom. In this respect, the present argument does not seek to establish what Hume already grants—that inductive reasoning is practically unavoidable. Rather, it addresses a further question left unresolved in his account: whether such reliance can be understood as rationally constrained by experience, rather than merely explained in psychological terms. Everyday rational life proceeds without deductive guarantees; individuals revise expectations, adjust explanations, and refine understanding in light of new experience. As the example shows, even when future regularities remain uncertain, sufficiently warranted experience introduces considerations that later inquiry must take into account. Applied in social contexts, this principle justifies approaches to inquiry that prioritise cooperative problem-solving and shared understanding over adversarial debate.

Second, this account bears on the structure of scientific reasoning. Scientific inquiry proceeds through layered conceptual organisation: particular models are revised in response to anomalous data, while broader frameworks guide intelligibility. When predictions fail, this does not render experience irrelevant; rather, it requires modification of explanatory structures. A related but more specific position appears in *The Scientific Image*, where van Fraassen argues that empirical adequacy constitutes the condition for accepting a theory, without requiring commitment to the truth of its claims about unobservable entities.[19] While the present account emphasises the broader role of

[19] Bas van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 12–19.

experience in guiding inquiry, van Fraassen's view concerns what scientific acceptance involves, with a more circumscribed account of scientific commitment. Both perspectives suggest that modern science does not require an unattainable foundation of certainty in order to be philosophically legitimate.

Third, in relation to pragmatism, particularly in John Dewey's account, the present analysis differs by identifying a structural constraint on explanation rather than a purely functional account of inquiry.[20] While Dewey emphasises the role of inquiry in resolving problematic situations, the present argument identifies a minimal condition: that sufficiently warranted experiential findings cannot be coherently excluded without explanatory cost. This shifts the emphasis from the dynamics of inquiry to the structural constraints governing the admissibility of explanatory claims. The point is not merely that well-supported observations ought to be retained, but that their denial, absent further explanation, is epistemically incoherent within a given framework. This emphasis on constraint also resonates with naturalised approaches to epistemology, as developed by Quine, in which experience is understood as bearing on theory without providing foundational justification.[21]

This difference becomes more pronounced in the extension of the argument beyond empirical inquiry to broader metaphysical questions. While Dewey remains cautious about such extensions, the present analysis suggests that the regulative role of experience is not limited to the revision of hypotheses within a given domain, but may also bear on the boundaries of more general explanatory frameworks. In this respect, the position developed here may be understood as complementary to pragmatism while departing from it in scope: it retains the pragmatist sensitivity to fallibility and revision, but places greater emphasis on the limiting conditions that experience imposes on both scientific and metaphysical explanation.

Finally, the historical exchange between 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bergson illustrates a mode of engagement that seeks convergence without erasing difference. The thought experiment neither collapses theological claims into empirical generalisations nor insulates them from rational scrutiny. Instead, it suggests that observed features of reality—such as reason and will in human beings—may constrain explanatory exclusion at what may be termed the metaphysical level. That is, they may bear upon the most general accounts of what kinds of entities, properties, or principles are admissible in a complete description of reality. The mechanism of this constraint is not deductive entailment, but exclusionary pressure: once a feature is sufficiently well established within experience, accounts that categorically deny the possibility of such a feature at more fundamental levels incur a burden of explanation. They must either show how the feature arises from more basic conditions or justify its apparent status as derivative or illusory. In this way, empirical findings can delimit the range of coherent metaphysical positions without determining a single necessary conclusion. This form of constraint is therefore asymmetrical: it does not establish necessity, but instead limits what counts as an acceptable explanation.

Taken together, these considerations suggest that the present analysis does more than respond to a classical sceptical philosophical problem; it highlights a constructive model of inquiry in which empirical investigation and metaphysical reflection are mutually illuminating rather than mutually undermining. In this respect, the argument exemplifies the Bahá'í principle that science and religion, properly understood, are not competing authorities but complementary modes of disciplined inquiry.

[20] John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), pp. 104–10.
[21] W. V. O. Quine, 'Epistemology Naturalized', in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 75–79.

Both affirm the revisability of knowledge; both acknowledge that reality exceeds complete human grasp.

Conclusion

The failure of deductive justification does not entail the collapse of experiential knowledge into mere habit. Between demonstrative certainty and epistemic nullity lies a third possibility: experience as a continuing source of rational guidance. This form of relevance does not establish what must be the case, but it places pressure on positions that would exclude it without explanation. The argument therefore addresses not the problem of justification, but the problem of relevance. It shows that the failure to justify induction does not entail that experience is epistemically useless. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thought experiment provides a clear instance of this structure. A single observation, once sufficiently warranted, need not support a universal claim in order to retain epistemic significance. Its force lies in delimiting the space of admissible explanation: what has been disclosed cannot be coherently excluded without further account.

The argument remains deliberately modest in scope. It does not resolve broader disputes concerning the foundations of epistemic warrant, nor does it determine a single authoritative interpretation of the thought experiment itself. Its narrower claim is that sufficiently warranted experience retains rational significance even where deductive certainty is unavailable. What is preserved is not certainty, but restraint: it does not establish what must be the case, but restricts what can be coherently denied.

Biographical Notes for Key Figures

'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921)—born 'Abbás Effendi in Tehran—was the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh and the appointed interpreter and exemplar of His teachings. Following many decades of exile and imprisonment under the Ottoman Empire, he was released in 1908 and subsequently travelled to Egypt, Europe, and North America (1911–1913), promoting principles such as the unity of humanity, the harmony of science and religion, and universal peace. His major works include *Some Answered Questions* and *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. He is regarded by Bahá'ís as the authorized interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and a central figure in the development of the Bahá'í community.

David Hume (1711–1776) was a Scottish philosopher, historian, and essayist, born in Edinburgh. A central figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, he is best known for his empiricist philosophy and his influential critiques of causation, induction, and natural theology. His major works include *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), and *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously in 1779). Hume also authored the multi-volume *History of England*, which was widely read in his lifetime. His philosophical scepticism profoundly shaped subsequent debates in epistemology and the philosophy of religion.

Henri Bergson (1859–1941) was a French philosopher best known for his influential analyses of time, consciousness, and creative evolution. Educated at the École Normale Supérieure, he later taught at the Collège de France and became one of the most widely read philosophers of the early twentieth century. His major works include *Time and Free Will* (1889), *Matter and Memory* (1896), *Creative Evolution* (1907), and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). Bergson was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1927 for the clarity and vitality of his philosophical writing.

Philip Smith, originally from Canada, has spent the past half century living in Africa. He holds degrees in Mathematics and Engineering, Agricultural Development, and Agronomic Sciences and Biological Engineering. His interest in the philosophy of science and religion has been consolidated through research in multiple projects with Togolese smallholder farmers and participation in ABS workshops.

Homa Smith is originally from Tehran. She has worked in West Africa for over fifty years, including twenty-six at the University of Benin (Togo). She holds degrees as an agricultural engineer and in environmental management. Her research projects with IDRC, WUSC and Soroptimist International emphasised sustainable development while working with smallholder farmers, including women.

Daniel Salter is a technical information developer / editor with wide-ranging experience working with firms in public health informatics, education, transit, healthcare, and software development. He has fifteen years of international experience in West and Central Africa, and served two years at the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre.