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Search for Values

Ethics in Bahá'í Thought



Edited by
John Danesh & Seena Fazel



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Towards a Bahá'í Ethics

by Udo Schaefer

This paper proposes that Bahá'u'lláh's ethical teachings and injunctions, the "Straight Path" to human happiness, provide a coherent moral system. It suggests that a Bahá'í "hierarchy of virtues" rests on several metaphysical premises: God is the source of absolute moral values; individuals are in full control of their drives and actions, and therefore morally responsible; virtuous behavior is rewarded in the afterlife. Bahá'í ethics can be divided into two types of ethical instructions which are complementary. One is teleological (an ethic of virtue, aiming at "good deeds" and "a praiseworthy character"); the other is deontological (laws, commandments, prohibitions). There are three possible categories of virtues, constituting duties to God, to oneself, and to others: the "theocentric virtues," the "virtues of the Path," and the "worldly virtues," of which justice has been assigned the highest rank.

THE ULTIMATE REASON for Western society's crisis of morals is, as I have pointed out elsewhere,¹ the decline of the Christian faith, in which the value system of the West is rooted. It is striking that at the very time when Friedrich Nietzsche² announced the "death of God," and, in its consequence, the collapse of the moral order (a process which would inevitably result in nihilism³), Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed this apocalyptic event:

The way of God and the religion of God have ceased to be of any worth in the eyes of men . . . The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land . . . The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society.⁴

Bahá'u'lláh made it very clear that the "weakening of the pillars of religion" would "lead in the end to chaos and confusion."⁵ Indeed, when there is no God, no metaphysical responsibility, no metaphysical sanction for misdeeds—when our existence is purposeless—there is little motivation to do good and to shun evil.

It has been increasingly recognized that humankind's global society is in need of a global code of ethics,⁶ of a universal standard of values. The Bahá'í Faith offers a new ethical standard. In the writings of Bahá'u'lláh we find a new law of God, an immense wealth of ethical ordinances, which infuse humanity with a new ethic. Like the prophets of the past, Bahá'u'lláh summons individuals to change their ways and proclaims that the Kingdom of God must first be built in their hearts.

This paper is not an introduction to Bahá'í ethics, it merely outlines some features of this new morality, which is destined to fill the ethical vacuum left by the dying morality. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the details of concepts such as "virtue" and "character," or to illuminate the inner structures of particular virtues, let alone discuss the vast field of social ethics.⁷

General Views

The Bahá'í Faith is not concerned with metaphysical speculation or dogmatic hair-splitting. Instead, it is focused on right action and right motivation; in other words, on ethics. According to Bahá'u'lláh's own definition, "the essence of faith" consists in "fewness of words and abundance of deeds."⁸ The divine ordinances "which concern the realm of morals and ethics" are, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, "the fundamental aspect of the religion of God."⁹ The aim of all morals is happiness. Scripture's moral instructions are "the everlast-

ing torch of divine guidance,"¹⁰ the "Straight Path"¹¹ to human happiness which "consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God."¹²

Moral instructions and directives that can be taken as a point of departure for a Bahá'í system of ethics are scattered throughout the Bahá'í writings and are not presented in a systematic way. The whole body of this scripture contains a wealth of different kinds of normative statements: commandments and prohibitions; catalogues of virtues; warnings against evil deeds; predictions about the dire consequences of a life spent in pursuit of lust, passion, and vice; and injunctions to live a life of virtue and service that is pleasing to God.

Bahá'í morality is based on divine Revelation: God is the Law-giver, the supreme source of all values. Like Moses on Sinai,¹³ Bahá'u'lláh has brought to humanity the "tablets of stone," bearing a new hierarchy of values. Thus Bahá'í morality is not a philosophical set of standards. Rather, it is (as in past salvation history) guidance under the authority of an enlightened teacher who claims that his Book is the standard for good and evil, "the Infallible Balance which the hand of God is holding."¹⁴ According to Bahá'u'lláh, God is the source "of all good"¹⁵: "He, verily, enjoineeth on all men what is right and forbiddeth whatsoever degradeth their station."¹⁶ This verse suggests that Bahá'í ethics is not based primarily on human reason, but rather on God's sovereignty,¹⁷ on the "Most Great Infallibility"¹⁸ of the Manifestation, and on his new Covenant. Nevertheless, reason has its indispensable functions within the system (which is a subject beyond the scope of the present paper¹⁹).

Bahá'í morality is also based on anthropological presuppositions—Bahá'u'lláh's image of human beings—and metaphysical objectives. Of all creatures, human beings are "nearest to God." They have been created "rich" and "noble," and are potentially "the most perfect of all created things." In human beings "are potentially revealed all the attributes of God." Whereas "the animal creation is captive to matter, God has given freedom to man." They have the choice "between justice and injustice," "the power both to do good and to do evil."²⁰ Thus, human beings are responsible for their actions.

It is undeniable that individuals are strongly influenced by their genetic and social determinants. However, despite these determining factors, they have the capacity to override the needs of their lower nature in keeping with ethical imperatives. Humans have the capacity to master their natural drives, to control, channel and sublimate their urges, to utilize and transform them "into human perfections."²¹ As in the Gospel,²² Bahá'í scripture calls individuals to acquire perfection. They should "sanctify [their] heart[s],"²³ and free themselves "from the fetters of this world."²⁴ Through the knowledge, love, and fear of God; goodly deeds, self-sacrifice, and detachment from the world, they may attain spiritual rebirth and enter the "Kingdom of everlasting life."²⁵

Bahá'u'lláh's image of human beings is a clear rejection of the pessimistic image associated with Christianity (especially with Protestant theology),²⁶ as well as of the simplistic message of the Enlightenment that man is good. In contrast to Church dogma, Bahá'ís believe that individuals are not born with a corrupt nature, in a state of sin. They are not fallen beings who have lost their freedom in "Adam's Fall" and have lived thereafter in corruption, their nature perverted and their reason completely clouded. On the other hand, humans are not programmed for good either, so that under the right social conditions happiness and peace follow inevitably. Even in "the best of all possible worlds," happiness and peace are not achieved if individuals fail to develop—through their own efforts and through the grace of God—into that for which they were created.

Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh's concept of human beings also dismisses philosophical determinism and the materialistic concepts advocated by some empirical humanists who have suggested that individuals are not free to act, but rather their actions are determined by their own drives and by external restraints imposed by society. I have called such materialistic notions the "Innocence Mania,"²⁷ a secular dogma which insists that nobody is responsible for anything, that crime is determined exclusively by social conditions, and that the individual is the victim of circumstance. When such doctrines are taken to their logical extensions, they absurdly suggest that the

individual is good whereas society is bad, a notion which can theoretically provide the criminal with an alibi.

Finally, Bahá'u'lláh's image of humanity is a verdict on hedonism,²⁸ on the insatiable desire for enjoyment and pleasure, for satisfaction of the urges, immoderate strivings for material prosperity and luxury, the cult of mammon and orgasm—in short, a verdict on the lifestyle of modern people. Individuals have not been created for a life of constant enjoyment, fun, and unrestrained self-indulgence, but to free themselves “from the fetters of this world,”²⁹ to become “the recipients of the effulgences of divine attributes,”³⁰ and to act as a standard-bearers of an “ever-advancing civilization.”³¹ Bahá'u'lláh castigates those souls who have “made a God” of their passions,³² who move “as the beasts of the field . . . within the pastures of desire and passion,”³³ and are “like the bats of darkness.”³⁴ Bahá'u'lláh points to the futility of the material world and the transitory nature of earthly riches, and he counsels his people to acquire imperishable treasures.³⁵ The shortness of life and the transitoriness of worldly goods are subjects often repeated in Bahá'u'lláh's writings:

The days of your life flee away as a breath of wind . . . Reflect, O people! What hath become of your bygone days, your lost centuries? . . . The days of your life, that are less than a fleeting moment . . . Rejoice not in the things ye possess; tonight they are yours, tomorrow others will possess them . . . Know ye that the world and its vanities and its embellishments shall pass away.³⁶

Asceticism and escapism from the world, however, are also strongly rejected by Bahá'u'lláh.³⁷

Another presupposition of Bahá'í ethics is the metaphysical significance of human actions. Ethical principles devoid of reward for suitable behavior or sanctions against contrary behavior would have little chance of being obeyed. Like other religions, the Bahá'í Faith proclaims that individuals will find retribution according to their “faith and conduct.”³⁸ “Reward and punishment”³⁹ are basic pillars of revealed religion and the emanation of divine justice. All of an individual's good and evil deeds, even “the secrets of the heart,”⁴⁰

are "open and manifest as the day"⁴¹ to the heavenly judge. Thus, theonomic⁴² ethics has two decisive mechanisms which a secular society and an ethics purely based on reason lack.

First, it reserves a metaphysical reward for people who obey the statutes of God⁴³ (whereas in society, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "no laws exist to reward him" who acts in conformity with the law and shuns evil⁴⁴). Second, one's conduct is judged in an omnipresent court which can lay "bare and manifest"⁴⁵ even concealed wrong-doings, whereas—as 'Abdu'l-Bahá pointed out—the state can only punish "the manifest crime and not the concealed sin"⁴⁶ (and—as I add—only for those who have been apprehended⁴⁷). This belief in the immortality of the soul and in an all-knowing, judging God ought to provide the believers with sufficient motivation for moral conduct. Yet, the highest morality does not consist in actions performed in the hope of heavenly reward or in fear of punishment. Good deeds should be done for the sake of God.⁴⁸

The New Dimension

As with the religions of the past, Bahá'u'lláh's revelation aims at a change, at the "transformation"⁴⁹ and spiritual rebirth⁵⁰ of both the individual and society by the creative Word of God. The purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's mission is:

. . . to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.⁵¹

What is the new dimension of this morality? Compared with religious moral systems of the past, Bahá'u'lláh's morality is not new. The values he proclaims have been "revealed unto the prophets of old"⁵² and "described in all the heavenly books."⁵³ They are the eternal values which belong to the "one and indivisible religion of

God.”⁵⁴ They are universal, constituting the “spiritual, immutable law,”⁵⁵ which is “the fundamental reality of all religions,”⁵⁶ “changeless and eternal.”⁵⁷ Bahá'u'lláh called it the “law of love, which, like a fountain, always flows and is never overtaken by change.”⁵⁸

However, as in the previous salvation history, the new revelation purifies these values from any encrustations, distortions, misinterpretations, and shifts in emphasis which have arisen since their previous exposition by the past revelation. The new revelation, which is the true divine “reformation”⁵⁹ provides these values with a new language, with new meanings and nuances and, above all, with a new spiritual power. In contrast with the eternity of individual ethics, the norms of social ethics are liable to abrogation and change by the new divine legislation according to the needs and requirements of the age.⁶⁰

Structures

What are the outlines, structures and contents of this morality? Although reason demands that a subject be presented systematically, it is very difficult to implement this in the case of ethics.⁶¹ The structures and classifications which I am presenting here are the result of my own research and interpretation of scripture. Two different categories of normative statements can be identified clearly: Bahá'í ethics is *teleological*,⁶² injunctions that aim at a religious ethics of being (*Seinsethik*), at virtues, i.e. basic dispositions, which are not natural gifts but which must be acquired and practised from childhood in order to become part of one's character. Those who are adorned with “goodly deeds”⁶³ and “a praiseworthy character,”⁶⁴ according to Bahá'u'lláh, carry “the best mantle for men from God”: “The light of a good character surpasses the light of the sun and the radiance thereof.”⁶⁵

Another category is moral instructions that can be found in the writings, especially in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i Aqdas: laws and ordinances, commandments, and prohibitions. They are *deontological*,⁶⁶

presenting supreme values in a concrete form. They are obligatory, and a duty. These two forms—teleological and deontological—are not contradictory, but different, complementary forms directed at the same final goal: God's pleasure and human perfection.

The manifold ethical imperatives within Bahá'í scripture make it clear that the virtues are not a mere accumulation of moral values, but they exist in an hierarchy as indicated in the writings.⁶⁷ They condition, support, and limit one another; and it is the constant task of those who live according to these values to ensure that this harmonious order not be disturbed by a shift of emphasis.⁶⁸

This hierarchy of virtues exists on three levels: There are virtues that pertain to God, which I would call "theocentric virtues." They are assigned "the highest rank" whereas all others are described as "secondary and subordinate to them."⁶⁹ Among these "highest and most laudable"⁷⁰ virtues are the love of God⁷¹ and the twin-duties of the Covenant,⁷² self-surrender, trust in God,⁷³ submissiveness⁷⁴ and fear of God,⁷⁵ "steadfastness in His Cause,"⁷⁶ fortitude,⁷⁷ patience,⁷⁸ servitude⁷⁹ and piety,⁸⁰ "purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty has decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him."⁸¹

A second category of virtues is closely related to Bahá'í anthropology, to the purpose of human existence. I would call them the "virtues of the Path." It is our goal in this earthly life to actualize our potential nobility, to free ourselves "from the assaults of passion and desire" and from "the shackles of this nether world,"⁸² to become perfect⁸³ and to manifest "the attributes of God."⁸⁴ The keywords for this path, this process of human self-realization are: detachment, purity, chastity, and sanctity. The way of humankind to God, the "Straight Path," is the "path of detachment."⁸⁵ Specifically:

a) Detachment, the purification of the heart from the dross and shackles of this transient world is a *leitmotiv* throughout the writings.⁸⁶ The associated virtues of self-renunciation, selflessness and self-denial are prerequisites for all the "worldly virtues."

b) Purity,⁸⁷ the core of which is “purity of the heart,”⁸⁸ is a central value in this ethical system.⁸⁹ Purity and cleanliness, which are the subject of numerous admonitions in the Qur’án⁹⁰ and the traditions⁹¹ have been stressed also by the Báb in his Persian Bayán: “God loveth those who are pure . . . Purification is regarded as the most acceptable means for attaining nearness unto God and as the most meritorious of all deeds.”⁹² Bahá’u’lláh enjoins the servants of God “to be pure and to fear God,”⁹³ thereby summarizing his ethical injunctions. In the Kitáb-i Aqdas there are injunctions regarding cleanliness, ritual and moral purity as well.⁹⁴ A key term of Bahá’í ethics is *latáfah* (refinement): “Hold ye fast unto refinement under all conditions.”⁹⁵

c) Chastity is the virtue which keeps human drives within the limits of moderation. It is related to purity—chastity is sexual purity—and to the virtue of moderation.

I would like to make a few comments on the concept of chastity, which was at the core of traditional Christian morals. It has become alien to modern people. Its decline is related to the reaction against St. Paul’s zealous anti-sensualism⁹⁶ and to later Manichean exaggerations. The Bahá’í concept of chastity, however, should not be misconstrued as suppression or deformation of one’s sexuality. It is rather the control and cultivation of the procreative power. The virtue of chastity and the complementary prohibition of fornication in the Kitáb-i Aqdas⁹⁷ means the confinement of sexual relations within the institution of marriage, the legal bond between two heterosexual partners. Marriage appears in scripture as a “divine institution” and a “fortress for well-being and salvation.”⁹⁸ Chastity, which involves renouncing pre-marital and extra-marital sexual intimacy prevents people from becoming playthings of their desires. Bahá’u’lláh’s sexual morality is a return to a position supported by the moral systems of all revealed religions, and yet, it is a position which does not hold contempt for the body or identify sensuality as sinful.

The third category is the "worldly virtues" which concern our relationship to others and guide our daily conduct.⁹⁹ Here the cardinal virtues are justice, wisdom, and moderation; and the foundation is love. All other worldly virtues such as kindness, righteousness, courage, fortitude, hospitality, courtesy, meekness, modesty, contentment, impartiality, freedom from prejudice, forbearance, thankfulness and so on are related to one of these three cardinal virtues and subordinate to them.

Nevertheless, there are two virtues that are not only of crucial importance for one's attitude and behavior to others, but also for one's own spiritual life:¹⁰⁰ truthfulness and trustworthiness.¹⁰¹

a) Truthfulness (and the associated virtues of honesty, uprightness and sincerity) is "the foundation of all human virtues,"¹⁰² without which "progress and success in all the worlds of God is impossible."¹⁰³ Truthfulness is of crucial importance for one's spiritual health. It is the opposite of falseness, hypocrisy, dissimulation, untruthfulness, and lying, which is "the worst of qualities," the "most odious of attributes", the "foundation of all evil," "a destroyer of all human perfections and the cause of innumerable vices."¹⁰⁴ Hypocrisy, a constant danger particularly in religious circles, is strongly condemned.¹⁰⁵

b) Trustworthiness has been elevated in Bahá'í scripture, where it appears as "the supreme ornament of the people of Bahá," "the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people."¹⁰⁶ Trust is a fundamental condition of life. Mistrust, which stunts an individual's spiritual life and people's relationships to one another, can only be overcome in an atmosphere of trust.

c) Justice has a unique rank. It is the sum of all worldly virtues.¹⁰⁷ Its precedence over all the worldly virtues is in accordance with the philosophical tradition.¹⁰⁸ Justice is a complex concept and its many different ramifications cannot be covered here. It should be mentioned that the Golden Rule¹⁰⁹ is also an

expression of justice, as are such injunctions and commandments as to pay "regard for the rights that are due to one's parents" or to "refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men," "from backbiting or calumny."¹¹⁰

d) Moderation, one of classical ethic's four cardinal virtues, aims at the "happy mean." It is a fundamental value for individual and social ethics. According to Bahá'u'lláh, everything "carried to excess" exercises "a pernicious influence upon men," especially freedom and material civilization. Hence, moderation should be exercised "in all matters,"¹¹¹ an injunction which applies even to the practice of the virtues themselves.

e) Wisdom and prudence, which are concerned with the right way of thinking correspond to the complex concept of *hikma*.¹¹² This term denotes the discernment of relations and connections, the knowledge of the practical conditions and requirements of life; the real assessment of concrete situations, the clear and right way of knowing, concluding, judging and planning, and the choice of the "right means" and "right ends."¹¹³ "The sword of wisdom is hotter than summer heat, and sharper than blades of steel."¹¹⁴ Individuals should "put on the armour of wisdom" and "be guided by wisdom" in all their doings, and "under all conditions."¹¹⁵ The source of wisdom is the fear of God, which is "the essence of wisdom."¹¹⁶ Wisdom and prudence are the beginning of all moral action and thought. Both are always focused on the good. Not only must the end be good, but the means must be good as well. The end does not justify the means. Wisdom and prudence should be applied especially when propagating the message of God¹¹⁷ or implementing the laws of God, "so that nothing might happen that could cause disturbance and dissension or raise clamor among the heedless"¹¹⁸—a clear warning against fanatical rigidity and excessive legalism.

f) Devotion to others: love, loving-kindness, mercy, and compassion. Whereas justice is the sum of all virtues,¹¹⁹ love is the

foundation of all morality, the very prerequisite of the "worldly virtues." These two are interdependent: love which is devoid of justice, is mere sentimentality and emotive effusiveness, it is, as Thomas Aquinas put it, "the mother of disintegration."¹²⁰ Justice without love, however, turns into cruelty.¹²¹

All human beings should "show forth love, affection, compassion and harmony," not "perversity and rancor." The motivating power of such an all-embracing love is the love of God, which is inseparably linked to the first commandment, to love one's neighbor, and which is expressed in the attitude of "loving sympathy," benevolence, affection, and kindness: "Look not upon the creature of God, except with the eye of kindness and mercy." "A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men." Tolerance, the opposite of fanaticism, described as one of the "two lights amidst the darkness of the world,"¹²² is an expression of love. Compassion expresses itself in the consolation of the sad, assistance of the weak, charity to the poor, and care of the sick and suffering.

Whilst love is a virtue of the individual, it has also far-reaching effects on society. It unites people, is a cause of fellowship and friendship: "Be ye as the fingers of one hand, the members of one body" ... "Be united in counsel, be one in thought."¹²³ Regarding religious differences that provoke dissension, Bahá'u'lláh admonishes us: "The religion of God is for love and unity, make it not a cause of enmity and dissension."¹²⁴ Hence his commandment to "consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship," with "amity and concord."¹²⁵ The spirit of love is to overcome "the dissensions that divide the peoples and kindreds of the earth" in such a way that "all mankind become the upholders of one order and the inhabitants of one city."¹²⁶ In the message of Bahá'u'lláh, the love of one's neighbor is elevated to a new dimension to include an all-embracing love to humankind.¹²⁷ "That one is indeed a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race", "to the best interests of the peoples and the kindreds of the earth."¹²⁸ Thus, people should not be preoccupied solely with

their own interests,¹²⁹ but rather be concerned with the common weal and the welfare of humankind.¹³⁰

Complementary to the enumeration of virtues,¹³¹ Bahá'í scripture contains numerous warnings, not to commit "anything which will bring shame upon you," to "eschew all manner of wickedness," not to be "of the mischiefmakers,"¹³² and condemns of all vices such as envy, covetousness, malice, haughtiness, pride, sloth, idleness, craftiness and suspicion, cruelty to animals, tyranny, bigotry and hate, strife, dissension and rancor, unseemly talk, backbiting and calumny, cursing and reviling, hypocrisy and fanaticism.

Bahá'u'lláh's ethical instructions should not be misconstrued as a dry bloodless philosophy of duty under the yoke of the law. Bahá'í ethics is rather a methodical way of life according to the Word and the Law. The "yoke" of the law is, as the Gospel says, "meek."¹³³ Bahá'u'lláh assures us that he who takes it upon himself will find "days of blissful joy"¹³⁴ in store. Those who tread this path are on the way to becoming the "new man."¹³⁵ "A race of men" promises Bahá'u'lláh, "incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay."¹³⁶

Notes

Udo Schaefer, formerly chief prosecutor at the state court in Heidelberg, wrote his doctoral thesis on the relationship between Bahá'í law and canon law, and is the author of many books and articles, most recently coauthoring *Making the Crooked Straight* (George Ronald, 2000).

This paper is a preliminary exploration of ideas that will be described more fully in a forthcoming book. Note that where no paragraph number is given, Bahá'í Scripture is quoted as chapter or section, followed by paragraph number after the colon.

1. "Ethics for a global society," *The Bahá'í Studies Review*, Vol. 4, no.1 (1994) pp. 47-56.
2. German philosopher (1844-1900).
3. "Nihilism stands at the door: Whence comes the uncanniest of all guests?" (*The*

- Will to Power, Towards an Outline* [London: Widenfeld and Nicolson, 1968] p. 1).
4. Cited in *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1963) p. 117; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, rev. edn., 1978) p. 99.
 5. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 6:19; cf. also 8:53.
 6. Cf. Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility. In Search of a New World Ethic* (London: SCM Press, 1991); Hans Küng/Karl-Josef Kuschel eds., *A Global Ethic. The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1993); Hans Küng, *Ja zum Weltethos. Perspektive für die Suche nach Orientierung* (München-Zürich, 1995).
 7. As far as I am aware, the only works analyzing Bahá'í perspectives on ethics in a systematic fashion are a doctoral thesis by Fiona Missaghian-Moghaddam, "Die Verbindlichkeitsbegründung der Bahá'í Ethik. Ihr theologischer Hintergrund im Schrifttum Bahá'u'lláhs unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Kitáb-i Aqdas" (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2000) and a brief contribution by Ihsan Halabi, "Ethische Aspekte des Aqdas," in Gesellschaft für Bahá'í-Studien, ed., *Aspekte des Kitáb-i Aqdas* (Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1995) pp. 276-302.
 8. Tablets 11:13; see also *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1954) Persian, No. 8.
 9. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace. Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) p. 403.
 10. *The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 35.
 11. *Kitáb-i Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992) p. 86; *Tablets* 4:13.
 12. *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970) p. 60.
 13. *Tablets* 17:60; 5:11, 16.
 14. *Kitáb-i Aqdas* 183.
 15. *Tablets* 10:2.
 16. *Gleanings* 92:3.
 17. "He doeth what he pleaseth" (*Kitáb-i Aqdas* 7, 78).
 18. *Kitáb-i Aqdas* 47, pp. 161-163.
 19. I refer to my publication *Die Freiheit und ihre Schranken. Zum Begriff der Freiheit in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i Aqdas* (Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2nd ed., 2000), pp. 38 ff., where the central significance which scripture assigns to reason, its role and its limits, and the concepts of "true liberty" (*Kitáb-i Aqdas* 125; *Gleanings* 45) and reason which is enlightened by the Holy Spirit (cf. *Paris Talks. Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-12* [London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971] 9:20; 17:10; 22:5) are discussed. See also *Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Bahá'í Thought* (Seena Fazel and John Danesh, eds., Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2002).
 20. *Paris Talks* 5:13; *The Hidden Words*, Arabic nos. 11, 13, 22; *The Kitáb-i Íqán. The Book of Certitude* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) paras. 110, 108; *Paris Talks* 9:19, 11, 16; 49:16; 18:3.

21. *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 29:7.
22. Matt. 5:48.
23. The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 59.
24. The Hidden Words, Persian, no. 40.
25. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 226.
26. Whereas according to Martin Luther the *peccatum originale* resulted in the complete perversion of human nature, which is therefore exclusively dependent on the divine grace, according to Catholic doctrine Adam's fall has caused a "deterioration" of man's nature, which retained, supported by grace, its urge to be good: "*gratia supponit naturam.*"
27. Cf. *The Imperishable Dominion. The Bahá'í Faith and the Future of Mankind* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983) p. 49 ff.; p. 202 ff.
28. From Greek: *hedoné*, pleasure, lust, the philosophical doctrine founded by Aristippos and Epicur that pleasure is the principal good and should be the aim of our actions. Hedonism denotes a pleasure-seeking lifestyle as well.
29. The Hidden Words, Persian no. 40. Bahá'u'lláh's prohibition of intoxicating drinks, of all habit-forming drugs and gambling should be seen in this light (Kitáb-i Aqdas 119, 155, 190). Those who use these substances, which inevitably reduce man's responsibility or in the case of those who gamble are in constant danger of becoming addicted, and addiction is the worst of all bondages in this world. Bahá'ís are aiming at a drug-free society.
30. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 404.
31. *Gleanings* 109:2.
32. Qur'án 45:22.
33. The Hidden Words, Persian, no. 45.
34. *The Kitáb-i Íqán*, p. 251.
35. Cf. *Tablets* 17:96 (p. 258); *Gleanings* 153:8; 123:1-4; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 1:7.
36. Kitáb-i Aqdas 40; The Hidden Words, Persian no. 44; *Gleanings* 65:8.
37. "Should a man wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties." (*Gleanings* 128:4 [cf. Qur'án 5:87; 2:171]; cf. also *Tablets* 3:13; 6:57; *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976) 84 [p. 49]).
38. *Gleanings* 86:2.
39. *Tablets* 3:25; 8:61; 11:6.
40. The Hidden Words, Persian, no. 59.
41. The Hidden Words, Persian, no. 60.
42. From Greek: *theos*, God, and *nómos*, law. An ethics which is based on God's legislation.
43. The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 38.
44. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 105:1.
45. The Hidden Words, Persian no. 67.
46. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 127:21.

47. As the German proverb expresses: "Die Nürnberger hängen keinen, sie hätten ihn denn."
48. In the Persian Bayán, the Báb revealed: "Worship thou God in such wise that if thy worship lead thee to the fire, no alteration in thine adoration would be produced, and so likewise if thy recompense should be paradise . . . That which is worthy of His Essence is to worship Him for His sake, without fear of fire or hope for paradise." (*Selections from the Writings of the Báb* [Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976] 3:2:1, pp. 77, 78)
49. *Gleanings* 99; in Christian faith metanoia, cf. Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:15; Luke 15:7.
50. *Gleanings* 106:3; *Some Answered Questions*, Ch. 3.
51. *Gleanings* 137:4.
52. The Hidden Words, Arabic, Preamble.
53. *Gleanings* 134:2; 131:4.
54. The Báb, *Selections* 2:24:2 (p. 54); see also Kitáb-i Aqdas 42; *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 18 (p. 13).
55. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 44:14.
56. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 106.
57. Ibid. The whole passage reads: "These [ordinances] are essential or fundamental, one and the same in all religions, changeless and eternal—reality not subject to transformation. Abraham heralded this reality, Moses promulgated it, and Jesus Christ established it in the world of mankind. All the divine Prophets and Messengers were the instruments and channels of this same eternal, essential truth."
58. Quoted from J. E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) p. 163. "Love" is standing as a pars pro toto for the unchanging core of religion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá called it "the Holy of Holies, which is the essence of the Law of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad and Bahá'u'lláh, and which lasts and is established in all prophetic cycles. It will never be abrogated, for it is spiritual and not material truth" (*Some Answered Questions* 11:9).
59. On this subject, see U. Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash of Religions. The Emergence of a New Paradigm* (Prague: Zero Palm Press, 1995) p. 139 ff.
60. Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 23:3; *Some Answered Questions* 11:12; 20:6-8.
61. Aristotle stated, "all statements concerning matters of action should be made sketchily and not with precision" (*The Nicomachean Ethics* [Dordrecht-Holland/Boston-USA: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1975] 1104a).
62. From Greek: *télos*, an end; and *lógos*, a doctrine; teleological: being directed toward a definite end, having an ultimate purpose.
63. *Tablets* 6:3.
64. *Gleanings* 147:2; *Tablets* 4:13; 6:27; 8:56.
65. *Tablets* 4:13.
66. From Greek: *deon*, that which is binding, duty.
67. *Gleanings* 134:2.
68. As Plato taught, the balance of virtues is decisive for living a good and happy life. On this subject, see also U. Schaefer, *The Imperishable Dominion*, pp. 213, 218-219.
69. *Gleanings* 134:2.

70. Ibid.
71. The Hidden Words, Arabic, nos. 5,7,9; *Gleanings* 15:5; 140:1-2; *Some Answered Questions* 34:3.
72. Kitáb-i Aqdas 1.
73. Arabic: *tawakkul*, "the source of all good" (*Tablets* 10:2; Kitáb-i Íqán 214).
74. *Gleanings* 5:2.
75. "The essence of wisdom" (*Tablets* 10:3, which corresponds to Prov. 9:10; Joel 28:28; Ps. 111:10); "the fountain-head of all goodly deeds" (*Tablets* 8:39; see also *Gleanings* 15:5; 66:1,2,6; 114:2; 118:4; 126:4; 134:3; 153:1).
76. Arabic: *Al-istiqa'ma*, *Gleanings* 133:2; 134:1,3; 143:1.
77. The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 48; The Kitáb-i Íqán 251; "Rock-like stability" in His Cause (*Gleanings* 162:2).
78. Arabic: *abr*, *Tablets* 14:11; The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 48; *Gleanings* 100:4; 114:18; Kitáb-i Aqdas 42.
79. Kitáb-i Aqdas 38, 153.
80. *Tablets* 4:16; *Gleanings* 5:2. The Hidden Words, Persian, no. 47.
81. *Gleanings* 134:2.
82. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 146:9.
83. Matt. 9:48.
84. *Paris Talks* 5:15.
85. The Hidden Words, Persian, Envoi.
86. Cf. *The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 8; Kitáb-i Aqdas 54, 83, 84, 129, 178; *Gleanings* 46:4; 81.
87. The subject is further discussed in my monograph, *In a Blue Haze. Smoking and Bahá'í Ethics* (Stockholm: Zero Palm Press, 1997).
88. *Gleanings* 134:2.
89. Cf. The Hidden Words, Persian, nos. 44, 55, 68, 69; The Hidden Words, Arabic, nos. 1, 58, 59.
90. Cf. 2:222; 5:8-9; 9:109; 74:3-4; 79:18 etc.
91. "Purification is called half of the faith" is a hadíth, quoted from Maulana Muhammad 'Alí, *A Manual of Hadíth* (Lahore: The Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, n.d.) IV:2; see also *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961) "tahará," p. 559.
92. Quoted from *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 98.
93. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 40 (p. 23).
94. Cf. verses 10, 18, 74, 76, 106.
95. The Kitáb-i Aqdas 46; see also *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 129. On the purity of heart see *Gleanings* 141:4; 60:3; The Hidden Words, Arabic, nos. 58 and 59; The Kitáb-i Íqán 214 (p. 172).
96. Cf. I Cor. 7:1 ff.; more on this subject see U. Schaefer, *The Imperishable Dominion*, p. 176 ff.
97. Arabic: *ziná*, cf. Kitáb-i Aqdas 49; "Questions and Answers" 49.
98. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted from *Bahá'í Prayers* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982) p. 105, whereas Martin Luther regarded it as merely "permitted fornication." This was in accordance with I Cor. 7:1-2: "... It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication let every man have his own wife"; cf. also I Cor 7:6-7.

99. The philosophers (especially Aristotle and Kant) have focused on them in their ethical treatises.
100. Thus they belong to both categories, 2 and 3.
101. Cf. *Gleanings*, pp. 134:2.
102. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) 22.
103. *Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1919) p. 459.
104. *Some Answered Questions*, 57:12.
105. The Kitáb-i Íqán 29; Kitáb-i Aqdas 36, 108 (see also note 135); *Tablets* 6:4; *Gleanings* 128:6; *Some Answered Questions* 19:6; 76:3.
106. *Tablets* 4:19-20; 8:40,44,57; *Gleanings* 114:3.
107. "The most fundamental among human virtues" (*Gleanings* 100:6), "the best-beloved of all things" (The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 2), "the sign of My loving-kindness" (ibid.), the "essence of all that We have ordained for you" (*Tablets* 10:23).
108. Cf. Plato, *The Republic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955) marg. no. 336; Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, E3,1129b; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964) II-II qu. 58.
109. Kitáb-i Aqdas 148; Kitáb-i Íqán 215 (p. 194); *Tablets* 6:20; *Gleanings* 66:8.
110. Kitáb-i Aqdas, "Questions and Answers" 104, 106; *Tablets* 15:2; Kitáb-i Aqdas 19.
111. *Tablets* 6:31; 11:19; 6:31; *Gleanings* 163:2; *Tablets* 11:19. For more information on this subject, cf. *The Imperishable Dominion*, p. 217 ff.
112. Arabic's *hikma* comprises both *sapientia* and *prudentia*.
113. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1144a.
114. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 93 (p. 55).
115. *Tablets* 9:5; *Gleanings* 96:4; *Tablets* 11:38.
116. *Tablets* 10:3.
117. "Subdue the citadels of men's hearts with the swords of wisdom and utterance" (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 93 (p. 55); see also *Tablets* 17:43; *Gleanings* 163:5).
118. Cf. *A Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1973) p. 4.
119. *Tablets* 10:23.
120. In *Matthaeum* 5,2 (*S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, Vol. V: *Commentaria in Scripturas* [Stuttgart: Friedrich Fromann Verlag, 1980]).
121. Ibid.
122. *Tablets* 6:42; 9:5; *Gleanings* 154:1; *Tablets* 6:16; 7:4; *Gleanings* 5:3; 82:3; 109:2; 136:4; 146; 14:15; 132:5; *Tablets* 4:12; 11:21.
123. *Tablets* 11:6,38; 6:38; 8:74; *Gleanings* 92:3; 146; Kitáb-i Aqdas 58; *Tablets* 9:5.
124. *Tablets* 15:4.
125. *Tablets* 3:5; 4:10; 7:13; Kitáb-i Aqdas 144.
126. *Gleanings* 156.
127. Cf. *Tablets* 7:13, 16, 34; *Gleanings* 156.
128. *Tablets* 11:13; *Paris Talks* 55:2.