

Reflections on Infallibility

William S. Hatcher

Abstract

The historical claim to possess infallible authority has often been associated with ideological dogmatism and/or attempts to buttress political power on behalf of a certain thought system. In modern times, the notion of infallibility has been regarded with suspicion, and viewed as antithetical to rational inquiry, which by its very nature acknowledges its limitations and relativity. This paper advances the following theses: (1) The degree of social and intellectual progress exhibited in human history would have been impossible without the existence of periodic external truth referents (i.e., points of infallible authority). (2) Far from being antithetical to reason, true infallibility is the main source of rationality in history, consistently preventing humanity from losing itself totally in superstition and fanaticism. (3) The positive contribution to history of infallible sources of authority (e.g., the Manifestations of God) does not depend on general recognition of their infallibility. (4) Infallibility (freedom from error) is often confounded with omniscience, thereby undermining our understanding of the different grades of conferred infallibility. (5) Religious dogmatism and fanaticism do not result from the Prophet's claim to infallibility ("what my Prophet says is true") but rather from the exclusivist ideological claim made by the Prophet's followers ("nothing else but what my Prophet says is true").

Résumé

De tout temps, le fait d'affirmer détenir une autorité infaillible a souvent été associé au dogmatisme idéologique ou à une tentative de soutenir le pouvoir politique au nom d'un certain système de pensée. À l'époque moderne, le concept d'infaillibilité a été considéré avec suspicion, comme contraire à l'investigation rationnelle qui, de par sa nature même, reconnaît ses limites et sa relativité. Dans le présent article, l'auteur expose les thèses suivantes: 1) Le niveau de progrès social et intellectuel qui a été atteint dans l'histoire de l'humanité aurait été impossible sans l'existence de référents périodiques à une vérité extérieure (c. à d. des référents d'autorité infaillible). 2) Loin de s'opposer à la raison, la véritable infaillibilité est la principale source de rationalité dans l'histoire; sans cesse empêche-t-elle l'humanité de sombrer totalement dans la superstition et le fanatisme. 3) La contribution apportée à l'histoire par des sources infaillibles d'autorité (p. ex. les Manifestations de Dieu) ne dépend pas d'une reconnaissance généralisée de leur infaillibilité. 4) L'infaillibilité (affranchissement de toute erreur) est souvent confondue avec l'omniscience, ce qui nous empêche de bien comprendre les différents degrés d'infaillibilité conférée. 5) Le dogmatisme et le fanatisme religieux ne sont pas attribuables à la prétention du Prophète à l'infaillibilité (« ce que dit mon Prophète est vrai ») mais plutôt à une revendication idéologique exclusiviste formulée par les disciples du Prophète (« rien d'autre que ce que dit mon Prophète est vrai »).

Resumen

La afirmación histórica de poseer autoridad infalible con frecuencia se asocia con el dogmatismo ideológico, acompañado de vez en cuando de intentos de apoyar al poder político en respaldo de algún sistema particular de pensamiento. En tiempos modernos, la noción de infalibilidad se contempla con desconfianza, suponiéndose ser contraria a la investigación inteligente la cual, por su propia naturaleza, reconoce sus limitaciones y relatividad. Esta disertación adelanta las siguientes tesis: (1) El grado de progreso social e intelectual que exhibe la historia humana hubiera sido imposible sin la existencia de aquellos informadores de la verdad, externos a la humanidad, que aparecen por etapas (v.g., puntos de autoridad infalible). (2) Lejos de ser contraria a la razón, la verdadera infalibilidad es la fuente principal de la racionalidad en la historia, impidiendo con firmeza que la humanidad se pierda totalmente en la selvaticidad de la superstición y el fanatismo. (3) La contribución positiva a la historia por fuentes de autoridad infalibles (v.g., las Manifestaciones de Dios) no depende del reconocimiento generalizado de su infalibilidad. (4) La infalibilidad (condición de ser inerrable) con frecuencia se confunde con la omnisciencia, debilitando paulatinamente nuestra comprensión de los diferentes grados de infalibilidad otorgada. (5) El dogmatismo y fanatismo religioso no son resultados de la afirmación del Profeta de su infalibilidad ("lo que dice mi Profeta es la verdad") sino mas bien la afirmación ideológica exclusivista suscitada por los seguidores del Profeta ("nada más es verdad sino lo dicho por mi Profeta").

Our initial experience of reality conveys a bewildering diversity of constantly changing systems, impinging on all our senses. Our natural response to this primal experience is to look for patterns and regularities underlying the shifting stuff of the world. Such patterns, whenever we succeed in finding them, enable us to correlate countless factual details and establish principles of relationship between and among them. These relational principles are called *laws* in science and *universals* (or *universal relations*) in philosophy. Universal relations and laws are usually articulated as *propositions*, for example, as statements that make certain assertions about the way reality is configured.¹

The search for universal relations is the search for meaning—a meaning that does not and cannot inhere in mere facts. Meaning arises rather from a second-order experience, an experience of experience, in which isolated or seemingly unrelated first-order experiences of concrete reality coalesce into an intelligible whole. Whenever this happens we may say (with a certain degree of conscious oversimplification) that we have discovered a *general truth* about reality, in contrast to facts, which are *particular truths* about reality. The collection of all the propositions that we currently hold to be true, whether general or particular, articulates our *personal belief system* or *inner model* of reality.

Our personal belief system is parametered by time in that it reflects only our current understanding. We may be wrong in our initial perception that a certain relationship is truly universal (that a certain law is universally valid). Our experience of the world is always limited at best, and the facts available to test the universality of a relationship are always finite in number. A theorem of mathematical logic tells us that there are, generally speaking, an infinite number of mutually logically incompatible relationships that are consistent with any given finite set of facts. Simply put: there are always several different reasonable ways of generalizing from a given finite set of facts, and we can never be sure we have found the ultimately right generalization.²

It is important here to distinguish between belief and truth. A relationship is true (a law holds) if what the relationship asserts (if the causal relationship described by the law) is objectively accurate, i.e., accurate regardless of our subjective desires or perceptions. A relationship can be true according to this definition without our knowing it to be so. Truth is a question of the validity of the correspondence between a given inner model of reality and some portion of reality itself. Such a correspondence may well exist without our ever knowing it to exist.³

Truth is thus a relationship between propositions and reality, whereas belief is a relationship between propositions and a human subject, who either believes or disbelieves in a given proposition. If the preponderance of evidence at any given moment is clearly in support of the truth of a given proposition, we can do no better than to maintain belief in the truth of the relationship described by the proposition unless and until we encounter convincing contrary evidence.

Such is the essence of rationality: always to choose the most plausible belief in the light of known evidence (including coherence with previously verified beliefs). Thus, when we sometimes say that truth is relative, we mean not so much that universal relationships change (though that cannot be a priori ruled out) but rather that our knowledge of what is or is not true is constantly changing.

Barriers to Rationality

The above may be taken as a reasonably accurate account of the existential position of the individual, taken in isolation. However, we do not live in isolation. Though our personal belief system is our own, and no one else's, its content is certainly not just the fruit of our persistent, logical analysis of relative plausibilities and of careful choices that follow from such an analysis. Indeed, conscious rationality, even as we have broadly conceived it, is very rare. The rational pursuit of truth described above may be regarded as an ideal that is only occasionally perceived, much less approximated or attained by most human beings.⁴

One of the reasons that attaining rationality in our everyday life is so difficult is that we are needful participants in the world and not just disinterested observers of it. Reality imposes its structure on us, but we also have inner needs that we project onto reality. We want reality to be a certain way, and are rarely content with simply finding out how reality in fact is, especially when the answer goes against our wishes or desires. This process of projecting our wishes onto reality undermines rationality and distorts our inner model. Let us call these *need-generated* distortions of our inner model.

There are also *other-generated* distortions of our inner model, which result from biased or false information that we receive from other subjects like ourselves, and which we uncritically assimilate into our personal belief system.

Generally speaking, there are two ways that our inner model can be inaccurate. On one hand, there may be features of reality which have no counterpart in our inner model. In such a case, our belief system is *inadequate* in the precise sense that it under represents reality as it is. On the other hand, an individual's model may contain

elements which have no counterpart in reality. We say that such a model is *false*. We should suspect our model of inadequacy if we frequently encounter phenomena we do not expect. We should suspect falsity when we frequently expect phenomena we do not encounter.

The combination of need-generated and other-generated distortions in our belief system leads to many inadequacies and falsities. To the extent that these distortions dominate our mental and emotional life, they defeat our capacity for rationality and for the generation of an inner model based on conscious knowledge and rational choice. The mechanism of these distortions can enslave us to untruth.

Freedom is sometimes conceived as the freedom to believe whatever one wants and to do whatever one chooses. But, wherein lies the freedom in believing what is false? Our beliefs, and more particularly our actions based on our beliefs, have objective consequences. If our beliefs are false, our actions will be unrealistic and will usually lead to negative or unhappy consequences for ourselves and for others. If our beliefs are largely true, our actions will be based on knowledge instead of ignorance and will, on the whole, be more positive than negative.

The above-mentioned mechanisms of belief distortion render the individual's achievement of rationality extremely difficult even in the best of circumstances, and most certainly in unfavorable circumstances (as in early abuse, neglect, trauma). Moreover, irrationality tends to breed more irrationality—a sort of entropy law of human psychology.⁵ The exceptional individual may achieve and even sustain rationality within an unfavorable context, but the vast majority will succumb to the prevailing atmosphere of unreasoning emotionality. What, then, can or does prevent humanity from degenerating into a prerational barbarism, a state which appears inevitable if man is left to his own devices? Humankind stands in need of an external source or force capable of liberating and unleashing the innate human potential for rationality—a potential that simply cannot be actualized spontaneously by the unaided individual.

External Truth Referents

In spite of its ups and downs, highs and lows, history does show a progression toward the organization of society on ever-higher levels of unity: the family, the tribe, the city-state, the nation. This gradual complexification of society would be literally impossible without a corresponding increase in the individual's capacity to actualize her or his potential for rationality. This suggests that social progression has been driven by some external force or forces that have counteracted the natural entropic tendency of unaided humans to degenerate into irrationality. In order to increase rationality, such an external force would have to serve in some manner as a *truth referent*, that is, as a standard that enabled people generally to clear out distortions from their personal belief systems and hence attain a higher degree of rationality in their beliefs and actions. Indeed, such a truth referent would have to be a source of truth, perhaps even an incarnation of truth that would serve as an educative example of true rationality for humanity.

The fact is that human history presents us with a negentropic social evolution, which requires explanation. This much is beyond any rational doubt. However, discovering the true explanation for the upward movement of social evolution is quite another matter.

Refining Our Inner Model

A person's inner model represents reality for that person. Indeed, for the individual, his or her inner model *is* reality. We may know abstractly that our belief system is bound to contain some false propositions, but we do not know which propositions are in fact false, for as soon as we recognize the falsity of a certain proposition, we no longer believe in (hold as true) that proposition. For example, it would not be possible for me to *know* that grass is green but still *believe* it to be red, because knowledge implies belief. To believe a proposition is to perceive that proposition to be true. If our inner model of reality contains a certain feature, it is because we perceive that feature to be part of reality.

Thus, by the very nature of the role our inner model plays in our life, we have no spontaneous insight into dissonances between our model and reality. When our model changes in fact, we will simply perceive reality differently, in a new way. We will not usually say: "Oh, I see, my inner model previously incorporated certain false propositions and now, in the light of new information, I have replaced this proposition with a true one." Such a statement would represent a more sophisticated second-order knowledge about knowledge (what we might call *process knowledge*) whereas the spontaneous change in our inner model is a first-order experience of reality itself ("fact" knowledge), which may or may not be accompanied by the relevant process insight.

How, then, is it possible for us to gain insight into potential dissonances between our inner model and reality? The only way is by careful attention to the feedback information we glean from our encounters with reality. Our inner model represents to us the way we expect reality to behave. If our expectations are persistently unmet, then we should suspect that part of our inner model is faulty. We can then make guesses (hypotheses) about where the falsity may lie and devise specific encounters (experiments) that are especially directed toward testing those

propositions we regard as suspect. Such a process of observation, hypothesizing, and testing, will lead gradually to modifications in our inner model, and hopefully to refinements that render it more accurate and more comprehensive.

Thus, the refinement of our inner model proceeds (if it does proceed) by gradually replacing false elements with true ones and by adding novel true propositions to it. But each new step forward opens up new vistas of which we were previously unaware, and poses new questions we could not even have formulated at an earlier stage. In other words, it is progress in knowledge itself which makes us aware of the extent of our ignorance and which leads us to new speculations, some of which will necessarily be false.

So, no matter how successful we may be in undertaking the process of refining our inner model, at any given stage of development, our personal belief system will nonetheless contain a number of false propositions of whose falsity we will, of course, be unaware at the time. To say that our knowledge of reality is progressive means that we do not have to remain forever in doubt about the same propositions. But it does not guarantee that we will ever arrive at a point where we eliminate all falsity from our belief system.

Fallibility and Infallibility

To say that our personal belief system must, at every stage of its development, contain falsities is another way of saying that we ordinary humans are *fallible*. We do not possess in ourselves any absolute measure of truth. We are liable to error, and (most of us) are aware of that fact. We recognize ourselves as striving for truth but having continually to deal with the fact of our liability to false belief.

To be *infallible* is thus to be “not fallible,” in other words, not liable to error. A necessary condition of infallibility is that the personal belief system of an infallible individual would never contain any false propositions. An infallible person does not in fact make any mistakes in judgments about the structure of reality.

Notice that fallibility and infallibility, as we have here defined them, are properties of persons, not of propositions. A proposition is true if it is accurate and is false otherwise. In particular, it makes no sense to say that a proposition is fallible or infallible. Infallibility, if and when it ever exists—a question we defer for the moment—is the property of being free from all liability to error, and one of the signs of infallibility is that one never has, in fact, any false beliefs.

Even though the above notion of infallibility is quite straightforward, it is nonetheless frequently confused with other notions. The most frequent confusion is to consider that infallibility implies, or is equivalent to, omniscience (all knowledge). Of course, such a confusion is understandable. How else indeed could a person be entirely free from error except by having perfect or special knowledge of all things? The answer is that one can be error-free without knowing very much at all, simply by a radical restriction of one’s belief system. One remains agnostic about any controversial or nontrivial issue.

Suppose, for example, that during my whole lifetime I choose never to assert anything other than propositions that are trivially and obviously true (for example, grass is green, fire burns, water flows, good is better than evil). Then, I will never be liable to error, since I choose only to believe in propositions that are certain *because* they are obvious and trivial. This would require, of course, that I deliberately suspend judgment about a host of propositions that are probably true but not certainly known to be so. I would be infallible, but without having any knowledge useful to other people whatsoever. You may protest that this is a contrived example, but the logical point it illustrates is nonetheless significant: that the mere fact of infallibility does not, in itself, necessitate any degree of useful knowledge.

The converse, of course, is not true. If a person were indeed all-knowing, then that person would be an infallible authority, providing of course that he or she chose not to lie to others. This latter condition shows that omniscience, infallibility, and moral behavior are intricately linked.

Another logical possibility is that a person is, in fact, infallible but does not know himself to be so. He would suspend judgment concerning the question of his own infallibility but take into account the possibility of his fallibility by being so careful and cautious in his judgments that he indeed never makes mistakes. No one would recognize the infallibility of such a person. All (including the person himself) would consider his judgments as just one more potentially fallible human opinion among others. In this case, the person would be infallible in fact but regarded as fallible.

The opposite case is also possible: an individual who is in fact fallible but who sets out to convince others of his infallibility. An example would be a charming psychopath who attracts a cult of followers having absolute faith in him. This example is not so contrived and, as we all know, has appeared regularly throughout history and persists within the modern cultural milieu. For followers of such a charismatic leader, the payoff is the feeling of security they derive from the sense of absolute certitude, although the price they pay is that of abandoning totally

their own autonomous judgment. They freely regard their own judgments as fallible, except for the particular judgment that their leader is infallible.

How does a fallible human being convince others of his infallibility? Techniques vary, but usually include one or more of the following: stating trivial and obvious truths, but in a way that makes them appear deep and oracular; making ambiguous statements and prophecies which are subject to virtually any interpretation and can therefore be regarded as confirmed no matter what happens in reality; telling people what they want to hear (for example, that they can and should freely indulge their sexuality). Charismatic psychopaths develop a keen sense of who is or is not vulnerable to manipulation. They concentrate on those who are and find mechanisms for excluding from the group those who are not (e.g., persons who are insincere because they question, who threaten the unity and coherence of the group, who are an insult to the sacred leader, or who are shallow and unable to perceive the deep truths being offered by the leader).

Disregarding trivial variations, there are basically two inner models of a person's self (self-concepts) that are possible in a case of a false claimant to infallibility. Either he knows himself to be fallible, in which case he is a liar and an imposter, or else he is himself convinced of his own infallibility, in which case he is self-deluded. The former would be the case of clever psychopaths, whose success depends on awareness of their fallibility, an awareness that enables them to take measures to prevent their unmasking. The latter case would be more typical of some psychotics whose capacity for self-delusion seems virtually infinite. However, in certain cases, such individuals can be quite successful in attracting a following. One reason is that they appear so certain of their infallibility. How indeed, some will ask, could a fallible person be so sure of himself?

Considering all possible claimants for infallibility, there are thus four logical possibilities: the person is fallible and knows himself to be so (the case of most of us, but also of deceiving psychopaths who may knowingly advance false claims to infallibility); the person is infallible but does not know himself to be so (perhaps a very sincere, humble, and careful person); the person is fallible but thinks himself infallible (self-delusion); finally, the person is infallible and knows himself to be so. This last possibility would be the case of the true Prophets and Messengers of God. We have left for last the discussion of this latter case, since it is the one that interests us the most.

The Theory of Progressive Revelation

Bahá'u'lláh (1817–92), the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, has articulated a theory of history that seeks to explain rationally and scientifically the negentropic upward movement of human history. According to this theory, the motive force of human social evolution and progress has been the periodic intervention in history of an all-knowing, morally perfect, intrinsically infallible Prophet or Messenger of God. Being all-knowing, the Prophet is intrinsically infallible, and being morally perfect, he will not lie or deceive others. The Prophet thus serves as an external truth referent for the whole of humanity, a perfect pitch pipe which sounds the pure note allowing all who hear to readjust their inner models to reality. As Shoghi Effendi has said, “. . . the whole theory of Divine Revelation rests on the infallibility of the Prophet, be He Christ, Muhammad, Bahá'u'lláh, or one of the others. If They are not infallible then They are not divine, and thus lose that essential link with God which, we believe, is the bond that educates men and causes all human progress” (qtd. in Universal House of Justice, *Issues* 6).

Commenting on the inherent infallibility of the Manifestations, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, “Since the Sanctified Realities, the supreme Manifestations of God, surround the essence and qualities of the creatures, transcend and contain existing realities and understand all things, therefore, Their knowledge is divine knowledge, and not acquired—that is to say, it is a holy bounty; it is divine revelation” (*Some Answered Questions* 157–58).

Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms both the infallibility and the sinlessness of the Manifestations: “. . . the supreme Manifestations certainly possess essential infallibility, therefore whatever emanates from Them is identical with the truth, and conformable to reality. . . . Whatever They say is the word of God, and whatever They perform is an upright action” (*Some Answered Questions* 173). The “essential infallibility” spoken of here is uniquely characteristic of the Manifestation: “. . . this condition is peculiar to that Holy Being, and others have no share of this essential perfection. . . . the Manifestation arises with perfect wisdom—so that whatever the supreme Manifestations says and does is absolute wisdom, and is in accordance with reality” (*Some Answered Questions* 173).

Let us sum up the principal points contained in these passages: (1) the Manifestations of God are endowed with an essential infallibility which is unique to them; (2) essential infallibility is based on divinely endowed omniscience and on perfect virtue (sinlessness); (3) the pronouncements of the Manifestations are true in the generic sense (that we have defined above) of accurately reflecting the structure of reality. (The important point here is that there is no specially religious form of truth distinct from scientific truth or truth in general.)

Thus, according to the Bahá'í theory of progressive revelation, it is the Manifestations who have served as the external truth referents for humanity, releasing the latent capacity for rationality inherent in the human soul and thus allowing for social, intellectual, and spiritual progress throughout our history. Of course, this progress has not been anything like a constant linear progression. There have been highs and lows, fits and starts, rises and falls. But that there has been overall progress is beyond any serious doubt.

Conferred Infallibility

According to the theory of progressive revelation, the average time interval between two successive occurrences of the phenomenon of divine revelation is about one thousand years. If true, the theory of progressive revelation explains rather well the overall or general evolution of humanity. But one thousand years is a long time, and there is bound to be change and evolution within the framework of a given dispensation (the term used by Bahá'ís for the interval between the coming of one Manifestation and the next). Consequently, there is also need for external truth referents within the dispensation of a given Manifestation.

Of course, there are the texts either written directly or dictated by the Manifestation during his lifetime. However, the problem of interpretation of the texts can, and usually does, give rise to conflicting views, even leading eventually to the disintegration of the religious community. The solution to this problem lies in a second, derivative form of infallibility, called “conferred infallibility” in the Bahá'í writings. Such infallibility is not held to be inherent or essential, like that of the Manifestation, nor is it based on omniscience. Rather, conferred infallibility derives from, is conferred by, and is based upon the essential infallibility of the Manifestation.

Since essential infallibility is the conjunction of perfect knowledge and perfect virtue, and is restricted to the Manifestations, it follows logically that any form of conferred infallibility must derogate either perfect knowledge, perfect virtue, or both. Thus, in the Bahá'í dispensation, we find the following instances of conferred infallibility. First, there is Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, upon whom Bahá'u'lláh explicitly and textually confers infallibility. In commenting upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá's rank, Shoghi Effendi makes it clear that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has perfect virtue but not all knowledge (*World Order* 134 and 139).⁶ Thus, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's knowledge and understanding is not inherent in his nature, as is the case with the Manifestation, but rather is conferred upon him or guaranteed by the Manifestation (Bahá'u'lláh). Put another way, the Manifestation is “omniscient at will” (Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* 449), whereas 'Abdu'l-Bahá's knowledge was dependent not on his will but on the will of Bahá'u'lláh.

As historians of the Bahá'í Faith are aware, Bahá'u'lláh conferred infallibility upon the Universal House of Justice (*Tablets* 68). 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in his Will and Testament, confirmed this, explaining that the House of Justice and Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Faith, were “both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One” (12). In the latter case, the mantle of infallibility devolves upon the shoulders of an individual, who is held to have neither all knowledge nor perfect virtue.⁷ In the former case, infallibility is conferred upon an elected institution whose individual members are held to be fallible human beings with no special spiritual endowment either epistemological or moral. We refrain here from entering into a detailed discussion of the relationship between these two institutions and refer the interested reader to the author's companion paper, “Epistemological Implications of the Graded Claims to Divine Authority in the Bahá'í Writings.”

In his discussion of conferred infallibility in *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests that, in some instances, God will protect a person from error but without any explicit or public designation of this fact: “Thus many of the holy beings who were not dawning-points of the Most Great Infallibility [i.e., not Manifestations of God], were yet kept and preserved from error under the shadow of the protection and guardianship of God, for they were the mediators of grace between God and men. If God did not protect them from error, their error would cause believing souls to fall into error, and thus the foundation of the Religion of God would be overturned, which would not be fitting nor worthy of God” (172).

Thus, it would seem there have been other figures in religious history who were in fact protected from error, but without any public or explicit designation of infallibility. For example, it is an article of Bahá'í belief that the twelve Imams of Shi'ah Islam were indeed infallible (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 102), even though there is no record of any explicit designation of such infallibility, as witnessed by the fact that the larger Sunni Islamic community does not recognize the legitimacy of the Imamate, much less its infallibility. Be these things as they may, the main thesis of the present essay seems incontestable: that infallibility is not bizarre and exotic, but has been intricately woven into the fabric of our lives from the beginnings of history.

Notes

1. A thorough and detailed discussion of the concepts contained in and underlying this compact statement can be found in the following works by William S. Hatcher: *The Science of Religion* (1980), *Logic and Logos* (1990) *Love, Power, and Justice* (2002), and *Minimalism* (2004); and by John S. Hatcher and William S. Hatcher: *The Law of Love Enshrined: Selected Essays* (1996).

2. See William S. Hatcher, *Minimalism*, p. 77, and relevant endnotes for a more detailed exposition of these results.

3. See William S. Hatcher, *Minimalism*, for a thorough discussion of these points.

4. The Enlightenment ideal of reason was not so broadly conceived and considered pure reason as a normative (perhaps even ultimate) expression of the essential human. But pure reason by itself is capable only of analysis, not synthesis. Without synthesizing and globalizing capacities such as intuition, global gestalt (spontaneous perception of context), and mystic consciousness, reason is, to paraphrase ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, like a perfect mirror in a dark room (*Minimalism* 67): it has the potential to be “enlightened” but can realize this potential only when illuminated with inner experience. This may help to explain why the Enlightenment ideal, as narrowly defined by its exponents, has led to so much fragmentation, alienation, extreme individualism, and the competitive seeking of power. However,

‘Abdu’l-Bahá does clearly view pure reason as a useful and necessary step toward total (synthesized) knowledge: “If thou wishest the divine knowledge and recognition, purify thy heart from all beside God, be wholly attracted to the ideal, beloved One; search for and choose Him and apply thyself to rational and authoritative arguments. For arguments are a guide to the path and by this the heart will be turned unto the Sun of Truth” (*Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 68). Notice that, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the proper use of our rational faculties results in opening up the heart. Thus, Enlightenment philosophy was not so much wrong in stressing the importance of reason, but in taking one of the means to knowledge, namely reason, as an end in itself.

5. On one hand, the further we advance in the path of need-generated distortions (projecting our needs onto reality)—that is, the more elaborate the self-deception—the less willing we become to endure the pain of the readjustments we intuit will be necessary when we finally face reality. On the other hand, it often takes an uncommon amount of courage to act decisively against the prevailing social myth, even when we come to see and know that it is false.

6. At the same time, Shoghi Effendi also makes clear that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was endowed with “superhuman knowledge” (*World Order* 134).

7. See Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 150–51.

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