

Baha'u'llah and the God of Avicenna

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Bahá'u'lláh l'exposition faite par
Avicenne au sujet de
l'existence de Dieu en tant que wájib al-vu-
and the God júd ou "le Nécessairement
Existant"; que
ses déclarations confirment le récit déductif
of Avicenna d'Avicenne sur les attributs
divins; et qu'Il
confirme le propos central des arguments
d'Avicenne concernant la nature de l'acte
JOSHUA D. T. HALL créateur de Dieu, sa nature
au monde, et
la durée infinie de sa création, tant dans le
Abstract passé que dans l'avenir.

L'auteur soutient	
This article analyzes and compares the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh on the nature and existence of God with the core metaphysical positions of Avicenna, the preeminent philosopher of Islam. In three parts, it argues that Bahá'u'lláh validates the metaphysical principles underlying Avicenna's argument for the existence of God as the <i>vájib al-vujúd</i> or "the Necessarily Existent"; that His statements affirm Avicenna's deductive account of the divine attributes; and that He confirms the central content of	en outre que la philosophie porte un éclairage sique et la théologie de la mesure où son analyse à comprendre la teneur et la philosophiques, ainsi reuse des déclarations de l'existence, la nature et Dieu.
vájib al-vujúd or "the Necessarily Existent"; that His statements affirm Avicenna's deductive account of the divine attributes; and that He confirms the central content of	Resumen
compara las en-	Este artículo analiza y

Avicenna's arguments regarding the nature of God's creative act, His relation to the world, and the limitless duration, into the past and future, of His creation. It furthermore submits that Avicenna's philosophy sheds a uniquely informative light on Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysics and theology, insofar as his theological analysis helps one understand the philosophical content and significance, and rational rigor, of Bahá'u'lláh's own statements on God's existence, nature, and creative act. Résumé de Avicena relacionados a la naturaleza del actuar creativo de Dios, Su relación con L'auteur analyse les enseignements de Bahá'u'lláh sur la nature et l'existence de Dieu et les compare avec les positions métaphysiques fondamentales d'Avicenne, philosophe prééminent de l'Islam. Dans cette analyse qui se décline en trois parties, l'auteur soutient que Bahá'u'lláh valide les principes métaphysiques sous-tendant le rigor racional, de

señanzas de
za y la existencia de Dios
pales posiciones metafísicas
el preeminente filósofo del
partes, argumenta que
los principios metafísicos
el argumento de
de Dios como el vájib al
Necesario"; que Sus
los razonamientos deductivos
sobre los atributos
ma el contenido central de los
argumentos
de Avicena relacionados a la naturaleza del
actuar creativo de Dios, Su
relación con
el mundo, y la duración sin
pasado y el futuro de
sostiene que la filosofía de
manera única echa luz
metafísica y la teología
la medida en que su analisis
ayuda a uno entender
nificado filosófico y el

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las aseveraciones propias de Bahá'u'lláh
philosophers in Christian
Europe, such

sobre la existencia, la naturaleza, y el actuar creativo de Dios. as Thomas Aquinas (McGinnis 244).

ar creativo de Dios.

Given the importance of

Avicenna's

thought in the history of Islam, with-

Acknowledgements

in the cultural and religious

context

of which the Bahá'í Faith emerged,

I would like first to thank Naeem Nabiliak-

this article explores the currents of

bar for his continuing and ceaseless love,

support, counsel, and encouragement, his

Avicenna's theology that are repre-

unique insight into the Bahá'í Writings,

sented and affirmed in

Bahá'u'lláh's

and his invaluable assistance with and

writings, and, secondarily, in

the ex-

instruction in Persian and Arabic; Adib

planations of

'Abdu'l-Bahá. Though

Masumian for his unflagging interest, gen-

Bahá'u'lláh Himself

never composed

erous help, enthusiasm, and patient proof-

a work of systematized

theology

reading; Professor Rhett Diessner for his

(Schaefer xiii), His many

writings in

sound, illuminating scholarly perspective

Arabic and Persian are

nonetheless

and constructive comments; and Professor

rich in metaphysical content.

As a

Ardi Kia, for his professional engagement,

whole, they present a

consistent phil-

review, and kindness.

osophical worldview expressed

in the

substantial nomenclature of the Islamic

I intellectual tradition. Accordingly, one

may approach an understanding of

As suggested by the title, it is the

Bahá'u'lláh's theology

by considering

aim of this article to analyze and

how it treats the central

questions on

compare the core theological posi-

the nature of God dealt with

by Islamic

tions of Bahá'u'lláh and the Islam-

philosophers, among whom

Avicenna

ic philosopher Avicenna. Avicenna,

stands out as especially

prominent.

perhaps most famous in the West as

Throughout the course of this

article, I
the celebrated author of the Qánún fí
arguments.
at-Tibb or Canon of Medicine, was a
Bahá'u'lláh's
Persian Muslim born near the city of
substan-
Bukhárá in 980 A.D. Propounding a
metaphysical
rationalistic worldview and synthesis
Avicenna's ar-
of Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, and
and his
Islamic monotheism, Avicenna indeli-
God's na-
bly shaped the contents and character
act, with
of Islamic philosophy from medieval
teachings are
into modern times and became, by
Avicenna or
far, the most influential philosopher of
Second,
Islam; going well beyond the borders
metaphys-
of the Islamic world, his ideas even
Bahá'u'lláh's affirmation
informed the thought of the scholastic
arguments,
Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

will thus present two broad

First, I propose that

theological teachings are

tively affirmative of the

principles underlying

gument for God's existence

philosophical positions on

ture, attributes, and creative

no implication that His

derivative from those of

in any way reducible to them.

I suggest that Avicenna's

ics, given

of his core philosophical

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provides a framework that clarifies
explicate

and rationally elucidates the essential
argument.

content, logical coherence, and phil-
osophical integrity of Bahá'u'lláh's
the Bahá'í

teachings on the existence and nature
that

of God. Thus, examining the aspects of
Avicenna's solu-

Avicenna's theology that Bahá'u'lláh
co-eternity of

affirms, far from being a merely aca-
it was

demic exercise, will all the more reveal

insights, though he does not

in detail Avicenna's original

Juan Cole, in his monograph "The
Concept of Manifestation in

Writings," significantly states

Bahá'u'lláh "affirmed

tion to the problem of the

the universe with God," though

beyond the aims of that work to

treat the implications, conceptual depth, and likewise rational nature of Bahá'u'lláh's meta-Avicenna in a physical and theological statements. Because Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá stressing the commonality of Avicenna's so consistently affirm, as will be seen, rationalist and both Avicenna's terminology and the with philosophical substance underlying philosophical that terminology, and reject opposing views in the history of Islamic thought in favor of Avicenna's, the deep study of Avicennian thought is relevant to discerning and articulating the principles of Bahá'í theology—a scholarly Darwinism: Its endeavor requiring that we examine the Context” historical frameworks that Bahá'u'lláh Response to the and 'Abdu'l-Bahá employ or forego in Existence,” describing Their distinctive theology. This article thus aims to contribute to a discourse in scholarship on Two the Bahá'í Faith that deals with the makes relationship between Bahá'u'lláh's Avicenna's teachings and Avicenna's theological relate to philosophy. Scholars have gestured Lawh-i-Hikmat. Nader before at the philosophical common-cosmologies between Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and Avicenna's thought, even if Avicennian metaphysics has not been Bahá'í

Avicenna primarily. Ian Kluge has warmly referenced number of his outstanding essays on Bahá'í philosophy, broadly Aristotelian worldview the Bahá'í Faith's own presuppositions. Keven Brown, similarly, has discussed some of Avicenna's views, along with those of other Islamic philosophers, in his papers Bahá's Response to Historical and Philosophical and “'Abdu'l-Bahá's Doctrine of the Unity of even if Avicenna was not the primary philosopher under discussion. Vahid Rafati in “Lawh-i-Hikmat: The Agents and the Two Patients” a useful reference to how account of the four elements Bahá'u'lláh's Saiedi likewise references the ogy of Avicenna in his book Heart, as does Moojan Momen in his paper “Relativism: A Basis for

their primary subject of concern. William Hatcher, in his admirable book *Minimalism*, put forth an argument in Bahá'u'lláh's formal logic for God's existence that Andalusian consciously draws from Avicenna's

Metaphysics.” Interestingly, Momen does not mention Avicenna in his article “The God of favoring instead the Sufi thinker Ibn ‘Arabí.

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This article therefore aims to contribute to this body of Bahá'í scholarship by investigating the elements of Avicenna's thought affirmed in the Bahá'í metaphysics treated Faith, specifically engaging Avicenna's particularly and Bahá'u'lláh's theological positions studies because of and analyzing their respective thought history of in three discrete parts. Part One, accordingly, treats Avicenna's argument for which the existence of God as the *vájib al-vu-júd* or “the Necessarily Existent,” and Writings and help seeks to demonstrate that Bahá'u'lláh metaphysical content. affirms the basic metaphysical principles underlying Avicenna's argument for God's existence, validates his logical selection of ical procedure, and corroborates his epistolary works concept of God as an existentially or *alváh* ontologically independent and transcendent first cause. Part Two then as well features of Islamic thought—and Avicenna, while certainly not the only philosopher relevant to understanding the in the Bahá'í Writings, is important to Bahá'í his significant place in this philosophy and of Islamic well as the extensive degree to which his principles and arguments are presented in the Bahá'í elucidate their

These subjects will be through analysis of the primary sources. These include a Bahá'u'lláh's discrete in Arabic and Persian, called (tablets), such as his Haqíqat and Lawh-i-Hikmat,

discusses Avicenna's deductive arguments (iláhiyyát) sections for why such a first cause must be philosophical and be divine, successively treats each and important attribute Avicenna ascribes to God, and argues that Bahá'u'lláh confirms Avicenna's account of the respective divine attributes. Lastly, Part Three establishes that Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna, being in harmony with indispensable interpretation to their views on God's creative act and the eternal nature of the world, have central cosmological positions in common, and that Bahá'u'lláh's theology are vital when frequently affirms characteristically Avicennian positions on God's relation specifically to the world. The conclusion will sum up our findings, treat several possible Bahá'ís from dis-objections, and likewise explain how the Avicennian ideas demonstrated to Súriy-i-Ghusn, and Lawh-i-'Ard-i-Bá. Even indeed meaningfully characteristic of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretations of Bahá'u'lláh's theology, and must Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna as the metaphysics within two of Avicenna's compendia, the Arabic ash-Shifá the Persian occasional reference to Arabic an-Naját. Passages from writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, be analyzed in conjunction of Bahá'u'lláh as pretative aids.¹ Though

1 'Abdu'l-Bahá's of Bahá'u'lláh's analyzing Bahá'u'lláh's so far as 'Abdu'l-Bahá was appointed by Bahá'u'lláh to teachings and preserve agreement, as seen in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, i-'Ard-i-Bá. Even view, therefore, tations represent authoritative

lations of the Bahá'í Writings will be it. The atheist, conversely,

believes that
used when available, extensive atten- there is no supernatural reality,
and as-
tion will be given, either in footnotes serts that nature is simply the
whole
or the body of the text, to the precise of existence, and that any
legitimate
wording of the Arabic or Persian origi- explanation of a thing must
necessarily
nal and the exact philosophical signifi- be a natural and not supernatural
one.
cance of particular words. All passages It follows on atheism, then, that
the
from Avicenna, however, are my own existence of nature itself can have
no
renderings, though they have bene- cause, grounds, or explanation.
This is
fited from reference to the pioneering because one cannot explain the
whole
translations published by Parviz More- of nature and its existence through
wedge and Michael Marmura of the something that is itself part of
nature
Dánishnámih and ash-Shifá, respec- and a natural phenomenon,
bounded
tively. Marmura's bilingual publication by space, time, and the
limitations of
of ash-Shifá's "Metaphysics" has been matter. One can only
explain, via an-
especially useful as an edited source of tecedent physical causes,
subsequent
Avicenna's original Arabic. physical conditions, but not why
the
In what follows, we shall begin by whole of nature should exist at all or,
considering how Bahá'u'lláh and Avi- ultimately, anything
whatsoever for
cenna each argue for God's existence, which nonexistence is logically
and
a necessary point of departure before metaphysically possible. Therefore,
if
establishing the other areas of concep- nature is all there is, nature
itself must
tual convergence. be inexplicable, even if individual
phe-
nomena within it allow for proximate,
G N E but of course never ultimate, causes
and explanations.
A ' A Bahá'u'lláh and

Avicenna both ex-

N E plicitly reject such naturalism,
and

insist that there is a transcendent and

The primary difference between theism supernatural

reality—God—which

and atheism lies perhaps in differing grounds the existence of the
world.

views of nature. According to the the- Bahá'u'lláh, in the Lawh-i
Hikmat,

ist, there is a reality beyond and tran- writes on this theme:
scendent above the material universe

and its phenomena—a supernatural Those who have rejected God and
and absolute reality that ultimately firmly cling to Nature as it is
in

grounds the existence of the world, itself are, verily, bereft of
knowl-

while remaining utterly sanctified from edge and wisdom. They are truly
of them that are far astray. They

have failed to attain the lofty sum-

be considered in any thorough analysis of mit and have fallen short of the
Bahá'u'lláh's writings.

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ultimate purpose; therefore their his part, proposes an argument for
eyes were shut and their thoughts the existence of God as just this sort
differed, while the leaders among of transcendental reality in the
meta-

them have believed in God and in physics section of his comprehensive
His invincible sovereignty . . . When philosophical compendium, ash-Shifá,
the eyes of the people of the East specifically in the first chapter of
Book

were captivated by the arts and Eight of the “Metaphysics.” Some
of

wonders of the West, they roved the premises of the argument, howev-
distraught in the wilderness of ma- er, find their grounding in other
parts of

terial causes, oblivious of the One the “Metaphysics,” which will thus
be

Who is the Causer of Causes, and referenced in giving a whole account
the Sustainer thereof (Tablets of his argument.

143–44; Maj'mú'iy-i-Alváh ba'd Avicenna begins his
reasoning by

az Kitáb-i-Aqdas 85) noting that there are some concepts

which are “impressed in the soul in a

And Avicenna, for his part in ash- primary way” (ash-Shifá 22). That
is

Shifá, distinguishes between the natural and supernatural or divine orders of causality: to say, there are certain ideas which are themselves so basic and self-evident that they cannot be proven or demonstrated, insofar as they are the fundamental ideas by which all other concepts mean by the term “efficient cause” might be demonstrated or defined. An example is the idea of existence. Avicenna points out that everyone, no matter the language spoken, understands the naturalists assert. Rather, they regard the efficient cause as that in a basic way the meaning of the term which is the source of a thing’s existence and what imparts existence to it, even as God imparts existence absolutely to the world (and does not merely fashion it from pre-existing matter). (195) fail, because one would have to assume the existence of something beforehand in order to use it subsequently to define or demonstrate the idea of existence.

Both Bahá’u’lláh and Avicenna assert, Any definition or demonstration would accordingly be circular and therefore invalid. We thus understand the existence of some reality that is not contained in the natural order, and they will thus argue that in itself as a primary idea, and not as something apprehended secondarily from other things.

Avicenna then states that the natural world of nature? Avicenna, for Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna necessary, possible, and impossible

are likewise understood by the mind proceed to analyze the different modes in which things exist, as he does in chapter six of Book One in known intuitively and comprehended ash-Shifá. Conceptually, existence can be immediately. This is because any at-

divid-

tempt to define the necessary, possible, contingent

and impossible falls prey to circularity (vá-

just like trying to define existence does, impossible²

for the definition of any one of these exist,

terms is inescapably made in reference said of

to one or both of the other two. In defining what is possible, for instance, possible,

one might say that it is something that exist,

is neither necessary, such that it must does

be and cannot not be, while at the same existence is, in

time it is not something that is impossible necessary by

ble in itself, such that it could never be, through

just as a four-sided triangle could never of

be. To define what is necessary, how-itself,

ever, one must either say that "it is not exist, and

possible to suppose its nonexistence, or possible in it-

that it is impossible to suppose it being assemble

any other way than it already is" (ash-construct it,

Shifá 28).

possibly or

In this way, Avicenna shows that

nec-

the concepts of existence, necessity, possibility, and impossibility have

point

self-evident and fundamental mean-

in

ings that must be apprehended directly

ed into what is possible or

(mumkin) and what is necessary

jib). What is inherently

clearly does not and never shall

and thus existence can only be

what is either necessary or

If the existence of a thing is

it may just as well exist as not

when considered in itself.³ If it

exist, however, then its

some way, made actual or

virtue of something else, that is

a cause. To use a favored example

Avicenna, a house, considered in

might just as well exist as not

its existence is thus only

self. But if a carpenter should

the proper materials and

the house that was merely

potentially existent would become

essarily existent and actual.

Avicenna makes an important

here. The house, once it exists

by the mind, for the only definitions

2 As, for example, something that they can accommodate are mutually involves an essential contradiction or mis-referential. It is important for Avicenna to give an account of these terms at this juncture, since they will be central something

to his argument for God's existence, For exam-

and also since his very subject here is is not im-

metaphysics, which he defines as that necessary; there

branch of philosophy which studies be-given what

ing insofar as it is being. Accordingly, itself, it is

he must give an account of the basic one or not

terms he uses to describe existence. two states of

Having done so, Avicenna can then external causes are necessary.

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actuality, is still only possibly or con-trajectory of his

tingently existent in itself, insofar as it that

requires a cause for its existence. Thus, that

according to Avicenna, it is necessarily is pos-

existent through another (wájib al-vu-and which

júd bi-ghayrihi) but only possibly or contingently existent in itself (mumkin theoretical

al-vujúd). This is because the house, however. If

as a particular arrangement of matter, contingently

does not merely depend on its materi-there be

use of terms, such as an

lor or a round square.

3 That is, considering

merely in terms of what it is.

ple, the existence of a bachelor

possible, nor is it strictly

could be no bachelors. Simply

a bachelor is, considered in

equally possible for there to be

to be one. For either of these

affairs to obtain, therefore,

At this point in the

thought, Avicenna is confident

there are things that exist, and

there are things whose existence

sible or contingent in itself

may be made necessary and actual through a cause. Another

division of being remains,

there are things that are

existent in themselves, could

als having been assembled by an agent existent	something that is necessarily
at some point of time in the past; it also itself? Avi-	not through another but in
depends on the cohesion of its respec- that	cenna does not attempt to prove
tive elements in the here and now—for existent	there is something necessarily
without the cohesion of these parts, it nafsihi) until	in itself (vájib al-vujúd bi
could not exist. A water molecule may “Metaphysics” in	Book Eight of the
be presented as a contemporary exam- idea	ash-Shifá. However, because the
ple. Before any two hydrogen atoms Itself is	of the Necessarily Existent in
and single oxygen atom cohere in a co- theological vi-	central to Avicenna’s
valent bond, the existence of a certain the basic	sion, he thoroughly teases out
water molecule is merely possible, its early in	implications of such a reality
existence being contingent on the junc- Dánishnámih,	ash-Shifá and also in the
tion and cohesion of those atoms. But to	even before he formally attempts
once the bond is established, the exis- Exis-	demonstrate that the Necessarily
tence of that water molecule becomes actual and necessary—though its exis- clear that	tent does in fact exist. First, Avicenna makes it
tence remains only possible or contin- contingently	the existence of what is
gent in itself—insofar as the molecule al-vujúd), is	existent in itself, (mumkin
was originated by a cause, depends in impossible—	not in itself necessary or
the present on the covalent bond, and clear that for	it is thus possible. But it is
may well cease to exist as a water mol- actually to ex-	the contingently existent
ecule should the bond be broken. Con- rendered	ist, and for its existence to be
sequently, the inevitable and intrinsic Avicenna	necessary, it requires a cause.
features of a contingently existent being Dánishnámih,	justifies this claim in the

are, first, its being originated, and second, its continuing dependence in the present on composition of some kind. Thus the water molecule does not, in and itself, exist necessarily, but only contingently, though its existence is rendered preponderant once its causes are present. Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

chapter nineteen of the
when he writes:

As to whatever is contingent only possible, its existence, considered in itself, has no dependence over its non-existence.

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Its existence is therefore due to its necessity, the existence of its cause, and its non-existence would be due to the lack of its cause. If it logically existed of itself without a cause, insofar as its existence would be necessary in itself, it is not possible—in itself. Therefore, whatever is contingent and possible in itself requires a cause for its existence, and that cause is prior to its non-existence essentially (that is, not necessarily prior in time). (369) and non-existence are both similarly Avicenna's point here is that the existence of something possible is logically equivalent to its non-existence: in itself, it could just as well exist as not exist. If it exists in actuality, therefore,

actuality, it is clear that what is necessarily existent in itself require a cause to exist. This its existence would not be equivalent to its non-existence, as the necessarily existent in itself is not merely possible. If there is something that is truly necessary in itself, its actual existence would be essential to it and its non-existence impossible, in contrast to the contingent existent being whose non-existence is also possible. This, of course, does not show that there is such a thing as something necessarily existent in itself; it merely shows that what is necessarily existent in itself would require no cause.

its existence logically must have preceded to it from another, something the *vá-* that acts as the determinative of its existing becoming existence: a cause.⁴ theological implications: if God exists, and if He is in itself requires a cause to exist in reality on which all other beings depend—it is clear that He Himself could not require a cause for His existence. If He did, He would not be God, but simply another of inductive reasoning, and criticized on every creature, or created thing, among that ground. He is not drawing a general rule by observing that contingent things in his experience do in fact have causes, is show that there is a first cause that and then concluding that this stands for all does not itself have a cause, for such a thing would be identical to contingent beings. He is rather concluding the Necessarily Existent. His formal argument of a thing's existence is equal to the possibility of its non-existence, there must be found in several places throughout his works, but significantly in something external to that thing to account for its existence, should it actually exist: a chapters one to three of *ash-Shifá*, even as Daniel De Haan has noted, with a variation in *an-Naját*. The presence of the cause is a matter of logical necessity and is not, by any means, a sketch of the argument below thus draws from generalized observation.

ash-Shifá as well as the Dánishnámih.	the first thing has its
existence ei-	
One important point before ex-	ther in itself or from a third
thing,	
plaining Avicenna's argument for	whereas the existence of the
sec-	
the Necessarily Existent as the first	ond derives from the first.
More-	
cause, however, is to clarify the ways	over, the existence of the
second	
in which, according to him, a cause	thing, in this scenario, is
necessi-	
may be said to be prior to an effect.	tated by the first, the second
not	
A cause, of course, can be prior to an	being necessary in its essence,
in-	
effect in time, even as the father must	sofar as in itself it is only
possible.	
exist prior to his son in time. But in	Furthermore, this is allowing
that	
Avicenna's terminology, the father is	the first thing, so long as it
exists,	
not prior to his son as a cause essen-	necessitates the existence of
the	
tially, (muqaddam bi dhátihi) but only	second thing. (ash-Shifá 126)
temporally (bi zamán). This is because	
the son, whether as a child or a man,	Avicenna then clarifies this
rather tech-	
does not depend on the father for his	nical explanation through an
illustra-	
continued existence, or his subsistence.	tion. If Zayd is holding a key and
his	
The son, therefore, does not depend	hand moves, the motion of the hand
essentially on his father, for causal de-	is clearly the cause of the motion
of	
pendence on his father is not an essen-	the key, while the motion of the
key	
tial or necessary property of the son. If	is clearly not the cause of the
hand's	
the father dies, the son will continue	motion. The motion of the hand is
thus	
to exist. This is because, according to	prior to that of the key
essentially,	
Avicenna, the father is not actually the	even though the motion of each one
is	
cause of the son's subsistence, but rath-	simultaneous with the other. The
mo-	

er only of a certain aspect of the son's by, and temporal origination, "the motion of the seed" (ash-Shifá 201). Thus, for Avicenna, the activity of a true cause is always concurrent with its effect (201). A cause is essentially prior to its effect when they are concurrent, and the effect could not possibly exist without the sustaining activity of the cause. Avicenna states:

tion of the key is necessitated essentially dependent on, the of the hand, while the hand's motion is neither necessitated by nor on the key's motion. What is more, so long as the motion of the hand exists, so will that of the key. In the Dánishnámih, Avicenna explains this idea of essential causal priority through the example of a house, which I used as an illustration earlier:

When there are two things and the existence of the first does not derive from the second, then the first thing is prior in existence to the second thing. This holds true when Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

The generality of people suppose that the cause of a thing is that which brings about its existence and once it has done so, the thing

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has no need of a cause. But they and the emission of light, fire and the emanation of heat, a sequence of movers and things moved (such as a series of gears), and the force that coheres the parts of a thing and the thing

have put forth an empty proof and have been pleased with a misleading analogy. They argue that "whatever had begun to exist subsequently does not depend upon its cause, insofar as one does not essence posed. Now, in these cases, the cause or source of the effect is in its make again what is already made." independent of the effect, while the effect is essentially dependent on such a cause.

Their analogy is this: should someone make a house, it is not in need of another maker once it has been constructed. But this is their mistake: no one suggested that what point This is not merely a technical that lacks wider relevance. This understanding of what the efficient cause

is made needs to be made again. consists in is vital to Avicenna's
argu-
Rather, we say that what is made ment for a first cause that is
necessar-
requires something to support and ily existent, an argument in which the
sustain it. But their analogy of the question of time is completely irrele-
house betrays an evident error, vant. For when Avicenna then argues
for the carpenter is not the cause that there is indeed a first cause, he
will
of the existence of the house, but be speaking solely in terms of
efficient
is rather the cause of the motion causes that are concurrent with their
of the wood and clay to a certain effects, and are ordered (murattab) in
location, and that is precisely the a sequence such that the causes are
meaning of carpenter and con- essentially—not temporally—prior
to
structor. But the cause of the form their effects, and the effects are
essen-
of the house is the cohesion of its tially—not temporally—posterior to
elements, and the nature of those their causes. It is thus that he
stresses,
elements that necessitates the per- as Book Eight of the “Metaphysics”
of
sistence of the house in the form it ash-Shifá opens, that “the cause of
a
has. (370) thing's existence is concurrent with
it.”
What, then, is Avicenna's argument
If the true cause is always concurrent for a first cause, itself
independent of
with its actual effect, then, any contin- any cause and necessarily existent
in
gent being—anything that is only pos- itself? As we have seen, Avicenna
first
sibly existent in itself—depends upon establishes that everything is
either
a cause or causes in the here and now, necessary or contingent in itself,
and
and not merely upon a certain cause in shows that all contingent beings—
the past that was part of its temporal since they are merely possibly
existent
origination. Thus, examples of causes in themselves—require concurrent
that are essentially prior and effects causes to exist in actuality.
Avicenna
essentially posterior include the Sun then concludes that there must be a

necessarily existent being, since there cannot be an infinite series of con-	how many more intermediate causes are added to the sequence. If
there were	
current contingent causes; any causal	no absolute cause, the sum of
interme-	
chain must therefore terminate in a	diate causes would lack the
concurrent	
necessarily existent being, on which	cause that it, due its
contingency, re-	
the entire causal sequence depends,	quires. This absolute cause,
however,	
and which itself depends on no cause.	cannot itself be contingent; if it
were,	
He thus writes that if one “supposes an	it would itself have a cause,
and would	
effect and its cause, and for that cause	therefore be yet another
intermediate	
a cause, there cannot be for every cause	cause added to the sum, and not
the	
yet another cause ad infinitum” (ash-	absolute cause that the sum
requires.	
Shifá 258).	One consequently must conclude,
as	
Avicenna justifies this claim, in ash-	Avicenna writes, that “[t]here
cannot	
Shifá, by having the reader meditate on	be a sum of causes without there
being	
a theoretical sequence of essentially	a causeless cause, a first
cause” (ash-	
ordered causes simultaneous in time	Shifá 258). This first cause is
therefore	
(258). If, for example, a is the cause of	not contingent, but necessarily
existent	
b, and b is the cause of c, then a is the	of itself, and there thus exists a
neces-	
absolute cause of the effects b and c,	sarily existent being.
while b acts as an intermediate cause	In an-Naját, meanwhile,
Avicenna	
between the extreme cause a and the	defends the need for a necessarily
ex-	
extreme effect c. Each member in this	istent cause in slightly simpler
terms	
sequence would have a special charac-	(300). There, Avicenna points out
that	
teristic, a as absolute cause of the suc-	the causal sequence of concurrent
ceeding members of the sequence, b as	contingent causes is a composite,
and	

intermediate cause, and c as ultimate any effect. Now, no matter how many more caus- members are added between the abso- order to lute cause and the ultimate effect, the exist, characteristic of intermediacy is still a contin- feature of the causes succeeding a and therefore preceding c. Thus, if the ultimate effect in is not c but z, such that the sequence is “whatever now a, b, c, d, . . . z, the mere addition also of more causes does not exempt them, cause of as a sum, from the characteristic of in- caus- termiacy. The important point here is howev- that all intermediate contingent causes, part of the precisely because they are intermedi- own ex- ate, will essentially depend and be con- must tingent on an absolute cause, no matter external Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna	since composites are contingent, sum of concurrent contingent es itself requires a cause in exist. It depends on its parts to and those parts are themselves gently existent; the sum is contingent—an argument mirrored in ash-Shifá when he writes, is dependent on what is caused is caused” (ash-Shifá 258). The the sum of concurrent contingent es cannot itself be contingent, er. If it were, it would just be sum itself and the cause of its istence—an impossibility. There be a cause, therefore, that is
to the sum of contingent causes, and nec- which is therefore not contingent at all, but necessarily existent in itself. “Con- a tingent beings thus terminate,” so Avi- exis- cenna writes, “in a cause that is neces- sarily existent. There is not, therefore, for every contingent being a contingent cause ad infinitum” (an-Naját 301). It concurrent is this reality, then—the Necessarily	19 1. Whatever exists is either 2. Whatever is contingent has 3. Whatever is necessary exists 4. A causal sum of
	essary or contingent. concurrent cause of its tence. independent of any cause. contingent causes is

itself con-

Existent—that causes, and bestows existence on, the whole of contingent being at every moment. Importantly, if its

one were to counter that, given infinite time, an infinite sequence of contingent causes is possible, the objection neces-

would have no bearing on Avicenna's 1).

argument. This is because Avicenna is discussing concurrent causes, as we have seen, and is thus answering the causes

question of how any contingent being or the whole of contingent being can exist in the here and now, given its causes

intrinsically dependent and non-necessary reality. To this question, Avicenna answers that such contingent being exists because it is ceaselessly caused and sustained by a necessarily existent and something

independent reality. of

Though this argument, in either of the two forms, may seem complex from the foregoing pages, this is merely because Avicenna's basic premises required a thorough explanation. In summary, the argument may be pre-exis-

sented as follows with nine premises, existent

themselves supported by the arguments sum of above, leading to a final conclusion. virtue

(For brevity, "necessary" and "contingent" will be used in place of the more

appears, technical "necessary" or "contingent in

claim is itself"). found in premise two: "whatever

tingent.

5. Therefore, such a causal sum has a concurrent cause of

existence (from 2, 4).

6. The concurrent cause of such a causal sum is either

sary or contingent (from

7. If a causal sum has no necessary cause, it will have contingent concurrent

ad infinitum.

8. A causal sum cannot have contingent concurrent

ad infinitum.

9. Consequently, the causal sum does have a necessary cause (from 7, 8).

10. Therefore, there is

necessary and independent

any cause (from 3, 9).

T N E
B ' ' ' W

Avicenna thus demonstrates the

tence of something necessarily

in itself. His proposition that a

concurrent members subsists by

of those members and thus

gently is almost self-evident. It

therefore, that his strongest

contingent requires a concurrent cause mumkinát, for its existence.” We have previously ex- seen the logical problems in suppos- is ing otherwise, and as such Avicenna’s Gleanings by argument represents a remarkably ele- various- gant and powerful logical argument— mumkinát, I will proceeding from an analysis of exis- parentheses. tence itself into model categories—for beginning of something necessarily existent. I will not address here, however, all possible objections to Avicenna’s argument, in- God, sofar as my larger purpose is to show that Bahá’u’lláh affirms his concept of incomparable and the divine.⁵ universe,

The question before us now con- cerns the theological implications of Avicenna’s proof and how it relates Who, to Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings about God. from the First of all, essential to the idea of God is that He is the creator of all things, hath something metaphysically ultimate on of which the existence of all other things short depends, and who Himself depends on nothing for His existence—God is something beyond and independent of the phenomenal and contingent order of nature. The central idea of God, as to

to creation as consisting of contingent beings, only possibly istent in themselves. This tablet partially translated in Shoghi Effendi, and since he ly translated the term indicate it below with Bahá’u’lláh states in the the tablet: All praise to the unity of and all honor to Him, the sover- eign Lord, the all-glorious Ruler of the Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all things (mumkinát) . . . and rescuing His creatures abasement of remoteness and the perils of ultimate extinction, received them into His kingdom incorruptible glory. Nothing of His all-encompassing grace, His all-pervading mercy, could have possibly achieved it. How could it, otherwise, have been possible for sheer nothingness

Avicenna's analysis shows, is that He is
worthi-
something necessarily existent in Him-
self. This—as will be demonstrated
into the
through quoted passages—is precisely
what Bahá'u'lláh says regarding God.
world and
In this vein, Bahá'u'lláh explicitly
therein
terms God *vájib*, necessarily existent,
(64–65)
in a short but comprehensive Persian
tablet (*Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárákih*
identifies creation
338–42), in which He likewise refers
existent,
using precisely the same Arabic-Per-
5 For a similar, though distinct, appraisal of which of Avicenna's premises
Bahá'u'lláh lit-
are the most ontologically robust, see Mc-
that all
Ginnis, 166.
Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna
21
contingent beings (*kull-i-mumkinát*)
the Eternal
have their existence, even as it is the
and
Necessarily Existent, for Avicenna,
(Gleanings 66;
that sustains the existence of any con-
Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárákih 28).
tingent being in the here and now.
the same
Bahá'u'lláh implies here that God
the distinc-
must exist, insofar as contingent real-
necessary
ity could only derive from something
to the
that is ontologically superior to it; there
that Avi-
must be something existentially superi-
God's
or to the world of contingent beings to
have acquired by itself the
ness and capacity to emerge from
its state of non-existence
realm of being?
Having created the
all that liveth and moveth
(*kull-i-mumkinát*)
Here Bahá'u'lláh
with what is contingently
sian term—*mumkinát* or contingent
beings—as Avicenna.
erally states that it is by God
Bahá'u'lláh thus confirms
metaphysical principles,
tion between contingent and
existence, and the need to appeal
latter to explain the former,
cenna employed to demonstrate
reality as the Necessarily

Existent.
ground it and to cause its existence— This language distinguishing
be- tween the necessary and the
something that is, by implication, nec-
contin- gent in reference respectively to
essarily existent. God
For Bahá'u'lláh, it is evident that and His creation is central to
this work
contingent beings could not precede of Bahá'u'lláh, and its
centrality to
from “sheer nothingness,” and in Bahá'u'lláh's
theological vision in
themselves do not even have “the ca- general is clearly realized as
soon as
pacity to exist.” They must depend, one notes that the term *imkán*,
literally
therefore, on what is not contingent but signifying the realm of
contingent ex-
necessary. In itself, contingent being is istence, is used in reference to
creation
characterized only by “the abasement ubiquitously in
Bahá'u'lláh's writ-
of remoteness and the perils of ultimate ings, even as mention of
mumkinát—
extinction,” and accordingly must be contingent beings—is
unavoidable
“rescued” by a transcendent reality in in most any prayer, tablet,
or epistle
order to subsist at all. Here we see, im- from Him. As such, the *Lawh-i*
Hik-
plicit in Bahá'u'lláh's account, the vital mat opens with: “This
is an Epistle
distinction between what is necessarily which the All-Merciful hath sent
down
and what is only contingently existent, from the Kingdom of Utterance. It
is
for it is by the former that the latter has truly a breath of life unto those
who
its being, while the former in itself is dwell in the realm of creation
(*imkán*).
independent of all else. Accordingly Glorified be the Lord of all
worlds!”
and significantly, in this same Tablet (Tablets 137;
Majmú'iy-i-Alváh ba'd
Bahá'u'lláh soon identifies God explic- az *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 80).
Likewise, the

itly with what is necessarily existent, by using the term *vájib*, technically meaning “necessary,” just as Avicenna did. Bahá’u’lláh states that “there can be no Thee, and tie of direct intercourse to bind the one whose true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between (Prayers 22

Long Obligatory Prayer enjoined Bahá’u’lláh states: turning toward Thee, and rid attachment to anyone save clinging to Thy cord, through movement the whole creation (*mumkinát*) hath been stirred up”

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and Meditations 317; Ad’íyyiy-i-150–51; Hadrat-i-Mahbúb 65). Iqtidárát 72–73). Here, “whatsoever in These are but two examples among ex-myriad of Bahá’u’lláh’s identification translates the of creation with contingent being, with *maqám-i-mumkin*, its implied attribution of necessity station to God. We may further consider, for such a instance, Bahá’u’lláh’s statement in says, is *mahdúd*, or the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* in which He stresses *hudúdát-i-imkáníyyih*, the God’s ontological distinction from contingent *mumkinát* or contingent beings, insofar contin-as they have an intrinsic dependence Bahá’u’lláh, God upon Him: “No tie of direct intercourse limitations. As can possibly bind Him to His creatures explicates the (*mumkinát*) . . . inasmuch as by a word His of His command all that are in heav-explicit-

such limitations” (Gleanings the contingent world can either be pressed or apprehended” Persian *ánchih dar* literally “whatsoever is in the of the contingent (*mumkin*)”; thing, Bahá’u’lláh limited, by limitations pertaining to the realm, or the constraints of gency. According to alone transcends such such, Bahá’u’lláh here ontological gulf between God and creation in the Persian text by

en and on earth have come to exist, being “in
 and by His wish, which is the Primal while
 Will itself, all have stepped out of utter necessary
 nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible” (63). constraints of
 In yet another work, Bahá’u’lláh again stresses, using precise meta-physical language, that God utterly transcends contingent existence. He writings
 thus explicitly validates, beyond any repeats a
 mere coincidence of terminology, the in
 content of Avicenna’s central distinction between that which is necessarily existent in itself, being God, and contingent
 what exists within the constraint of dependency, contingent being, namely, the creature
 ation. Bahá’u’lláh thus asserts: “the requirements, there
 habitation wherein the Divine Being dwelleth is far above the reach and ken (Some
 of anyone besides Him. Whatsoever Mufávadát 4).
 in the contingent world can either be the con-
 expressed or apprehended, can never argue for
 er transgress the limits which, by its ontologically in-
 inherent nature, have been imposed vali-
 upon it. God, alone, transcendeth principles
 Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

ly characterizing creation as the station of the contingent,”
 He implicitly affirms the existence of God by saying that He alone transcends such
 contingency.
 This language of necessity and contingency with its accompanying logic continues through the
 of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who even
 kind of argument from contingency
 which reasoning similar to
 appears in the eloquent brevity of
 gle sentence: “So long as the
 world is characterized by
 and so long as this dependency is
 of its essential
 must be One Who in His own Essence is independent of all things”
 Answered Questions 6;
 That ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appeals to
 tingent nature of the world to
 God’s existence, as an
 dependent reality, shows that He
 dates the basic metaphysical

underlying Avicenna’s argument for God as “necessary” God, and that His use of a term like “contingent” is likewise no mere coincidence of terminology, but rather a substantive affirmation of the concept of creation’s inherent contingency and world-picture of God’s ontological necessity. Avicenna and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá furthermore uses the very term necessarily existent (vujúb) This fact in explicit reference to God, such as when He says that God is absolutely affirmed in one and indivisible insofar as the divine reality “admits of no division, for division and multiplicity are among the characteristics of created and hence point can contingent things, and not accidents impinging upon the Necessary Being Bahá’u’lláh (vujúb)” (Some Answered Questions creation hádith: 127; Mufávadát 27). Similarly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that such things as true God with “we affirm for creation to be among the requirements of origination we deny in transient God; for to be sanctified and exalted (qadím), the above all imperfections is one of the Absolute

beings,” of referring to “One Who in His sense is independent of the significance of such utterly lost without an of that metaphysical rationally argued for by an appreciation of its of contingency and necessity. illustrates the relevance of the Avicennian positions the Bahá’í Writings to theological teachings them. Another example of this be seen when, right next to necessary and contingent, calls God qadím and “there can be no tie of course to bind the one His creation, and no ever can exist between the (hádith) and the Eternal contingent (mumkin) and the

characteristics of the Necessary Being (vájib)” (Gleanings 66; Majmú‘iy-i-Al-váh-i-Mubárah (vujúb)” (Some Answered Questions 340). Though qadím 339; Mufávadát 204). He asserts, more-translated as is generally and rightly over, that “whatever is originated, in eternal, it alludes to those philosophi-cal points about causation respect to its existence and conditions, that we con-sidered in the first section requires the effluence of being that emanates from the Necessarily Existent” In this connection, qadím comes from the same root as muqaddam, (Khitábát 2:6, provisional translation).6 which signifies “being prior,” Clearly, Avicenna’s modal meta-whether in time or in essential independence, physics is not merely incidental to from the these passages from Bahá’u’lláh and hádith, an effect or phenomenon (trans-lated as “transient” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The significance of calling creation “the contingent world,” cordingly in the full sense of a cause’s essential priority to its of calling created things “contingent effect, as Avicenna explains, that Bahá’u’lláh here employs the term qadím in reference to 6 All provisional translations in this God and hádith with respect to created article are by the author.

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things, insofar as according to both Avicenna, but also affirms the meaning Avicenna and Bahá’u’lláh creation is underlying it. “That primal Essence,” co-eternal with God but essentially and Bahá’u’lláh assures us in the Lawh- ceaselessly dependent on Him—as will i-Tawhíd, “subsists (qá’im) by virtue of its own self” be explored in Part Three of this article. Thus, Bahá’u’lláh not only stresses Mubárah-i-Mubárah 313, provisional transla-

the necessary existence of God and the Obligation). Similarly, in the Short Obligatory prayer enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh, one reads: "I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth. There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting (al-qayyúm)" (Prayers and Meditations 314; eighty of Mufávadát or Some Answered Questions, Himself provides a detailed presentation of essential and temporal priority, as well as the dependent and distinguished nature of an effect (hudúth), between the everlasting existence of the soul, which is nonetheless contingent, temporal and thus dependent on support for the metaphysical account of a cause, and the eternal existence of God, which is necessary, absolute, unconditioned and essential to Him, and thus in need of no cause. He likewise uses the term hudúth to refer to created things' essential contingency and their fundamental insignificance when compared with God's necessary and unconditioned existence: "how utterly contemptible must every contingent (hudúth) and perishable thing appear when brought face to face with the uncreated, the unspeakable glory of the Eternal" (Gleanings 187–88; qtd. whilst the latter is independent in Dávúdí 131).

there-

Even when Bahá'u'lláh uses terms strictly

other than *vájib* in reference to the nature of God's existence, the evident Majmú'iy-

meaning remains that God is necessarily existent in Himself and essentially independent—an indication that “absolute

He not only uses the terminology of which

Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

of. Absolute existence is

confined to God, exalted be His glory. (Gleanings 157;

i-Alváh-i-Mubárah 164–65)

The term translated as

existence” is *baqáy-i-dhátí*,

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literally signifies essential existence. in being causally dependent and con-

Because God exists necessarily of Himself without need of anything external we

to Him, His existence is essential to His Bahá'u'lláh,

nature, and is accordingly absolute, as recognizes

Shoghi Effendi perceptively translated, distinction

insofar as it is not contingent on, or ex-

conditioned by, anything whatsoever. the

Since this “essential existence” is not above points

preceded by or dependent on a cause—understanding

whereas non-essential existence is—Avi-

Bahá'u'lláh is clearly distinguishing for God's

between existence which is essential of

to something and thus necessary, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's state-

existence which is incidental, derived favor

from a cause, and thus contingent to a clarifications of

thing. As such, it is this necessary exis-

ditioned (Muntakhabátí
From the above points, therefore,

may safely conclude that

along with 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

and affirms the Avicennian

between contingent and necessary

istence, and identifies God with

Necessarily Existent. The

also showcase how an

of the metaphysical principles

cenna uses in his argument

existence illuminate the meaning

Bahá'u'lláh and

ments—Their own arguments in

of God's existence and

His nature.

tence, not dependent on a cause, which the Nec-

He says is “strictly confined to God.” Avicenna propos-

In this passage, therefore, es may initially seem too conceptually Bahá’u’lláh carefully explicates the bare to be easily identified with God,

metaphysical notions of contingent and particularly the full and lively God of

necessary being, and what they entail Bahá’u’lláh. Though the concept of

for the nature of God and His creatures, God presented by Bahá’u’lláh clearly

and consequently affirms the concep- entails that He exists necessarily and

tual core of Avicenna’s argument for not merely contingently, we have yet

God and subsequent conception of the to see the full rational justification

Divine in its essential form. Similarly, for why, in Avicenna’s metaphysics,

‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes a precise distinc- something necessarily existent in itself

tion, like Avicenna, between the condi- should be recognized as divine and as

tional and hence contingent existence the single reality worthy of the term di-

of creatures and the necessary exis- vinity. The object of the following part

tence of God, when He explicitly states of this paper, therefore, is to explore

in one place that existence is “of two how a rich theological picture emerg-

kinds,” that of God and that of khalq or es from the idea of absolute necessi-

creation. While the existence of God, ty, and how the attributes of divinity

He explains, is preceded by and depen- can be logically deduced therefrom in

dent on no cause whatsoever, being ab- Avicenna’s system. We will see, mean-

solute and eternally and independent- while, an even greater convergence ly subsistent, the kind of existence between Avicenna’s arguments and

creatures possess is radically different Bahá’u’lláh’s statements, as well as

the explanations of the latter's son and contingent beings. The prime method successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. of establishing God's attributes, therefore, in both the Bahá'í Writings and T D A Avicenna's work, is the apophatic approach of negative theology, by which In the foregoing pages, we reviewed properties that are characteristic of Avicenna's argument for God as the ated and contingent beings as such are Negatively Existent, and demonstrated that in Bahá'u'lláh's view God, as is the one reality that transcends the Avicenna stresses, is indeed characterized by necessary existence. What mutable order of nature, and is thus remains to be shown, therefore, is absolute and sanctified from the multi- twofold. First, we must elucidate the plicity of attributes that are distinctive rationale behind Avicenna's assertion of contingent beings. By this method that the Negatively Existent is indeed of negation, a fuller understanding God by explaining how he deduces emerges of what necessary existence further divine attributes from the idea logically entails, and what it must pre- of necessary existence. We will do this clude, with the result that one comes by considering the divine attributes to know God by virtue of what He is of simplicity, singleness, immutability, not, such as when one asserts that He ity, eternality, perfection, goodness, is eternal (not in time), necessary (not intellect, will, and infinitude, each of contingent), one (not multiple), and so which is significant in Bahá'u'lláh's on. revelation and Avicenna's thought. A related principle to bear in mind—one whose justification will Second, we must ascertain whether Bahá'u'lláh accepts Avicenna's concept of become evident once the count of the divine attributes, in order simplicity has been discussed—is to determine further how Bahá'u'lláh that for Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna the divine attributes treated in this affirms Avicennian principles and how

part understanding those Avicennian principles illuminates the nature, and rational character, of Bahá'u'lláh's own teaching on the nature of God. Such, then, is the object of the second part of this paper. the Necessarily Existent has no cause.

In order to contextualize the discussion of divine attributes that follows, we can note at the outset that a conceptual analysis of the Necessarily Existent shows the stark disparity and categorical distinction between it and Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

are not discrete and separate ties that characterize God. Each rather, is a different necessary existence. We saw, for instance, in this article's first part that the Necessarily Existent has no cause. If it needed a cause to exist, it not be necessarily existent in itself. Insofar as we conclude that there is a first causeless cause, we can determine that it is identical to the Necessarily Existent, for it would require

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a cause if it were merely possible in itself. And yet, although being necessarily existent and being independent of any cause are distinct propositions, the reality they point to is the same, as each predication is fully identical to, or convertible into, the other. Similarly, each of the attributes spoken of will not constitute a discrete entity in God, and, but will serve as a way of deducing Bahá'u'lláh. In the logical consequences of necessary

S

The above point—that in God is no multiplicity—is especially parent from an understanding of attribute of simplicity. It is first because it is arguably the most vital to comprehend in order for one to understand the God of Avicenna likewise, the God of Bahá'u'lláh. In sum, simplicity means that the

existence. This is by way of negating and from the Necessarily Existent the attributes peculiar to contingent beings, stands as described above, rather than affirming of it a plurality of discrete properties, as Avicenna stresses: ontological disjunctions and various internal as- God has attributes whose meaning But, is negative, such that when we say that God is “one,” for example, we mean that His reality is such that He has no peer, or that He is not composed of parts. Similarly, when we say He is eternal, we mean that His existence has no beginning, but these two attributes—oneness and eternity—do not bring about any multiplicity in His essence. (Dánishnámih 381) It is in this light that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, as seen earlier, that such things as “we affirm for creation to be among the requirements of origination we deny in God; for to be sanctified and exalted above all imperfections is one of the

essarily Existent is incomposite absolutely one in its essence—it has no component parts. Simplicity in contrast to complexity, which tails the composition of multiple as well as a variety of real pects cohering within an entity. as Avicenna explains (Dánishnámih 368–69 and 374–75), the Existent must be simple because it has no cause for its existence, nor for being the way that it is. For if the essarily Existent were composed of different parts, then it would on those parts, and on some by which they would cohere, in to exist. In such a case, its would be contingent and not necessary—contingent, that is, on a range of parts and on something to them to come together so as to the subsistence of the complexity. If this were so, then it would be possibly existent in itself and necessary. It would not be

characteristics of the Necessary Being anything (vujúb)” (Some Answered Questions defi- 339; Mufáavadát 204). terminus of causal explanation, insofar as it 28 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 31.3 2021

depends on ontologically more funda- Existent can- mental elements. entail Another way to reason out the sim- there plicity of the Necessarily Existent is parts in this: if the Necessarily Existent did it could have parts, would those parts be nec- three essarily existent in themselves? If they however, were not necessarily existent in them- ways in selves, then what they would compose compos- clearly could not be necessarily exis- simple entity. tent, for “what is dependent on what is compos- caused is also caused” (ash-Shifá 258). potentiality, matter But if we did conceive these parts each existence. We as necessarily existent, there would the sig- still have to be a cause or principle by pairs in Avi- means of which they would join to- gether and form the Necessarily Exis- actuality and tent being whose existence we initially Aristot- deduced. But such a complex being articulated would not be necessarily existent, for metaphysically ultimate, for that depends on composition is nitionally not the absolute Thus, the Necessarily not have any parts, nor can it any composition. Consequently, could be no discrete physical the Necessarily Existent, and not be something extended in dimensions. For Avicenna, there are deeper, metaphysical which something could be a ite in contrast to being a Namely, something could be a ite of actuality and and form, essence and will thus successively explore nificance of each of these cenna’s thought. First, with regard to potentiality, Avicenna accepts le’s fundamental postulate, in Book Nine of his

Metaphysics, that
it would still be dependent for its ex-
potential,
istence on the composition of separate
origi-
elements as well as some external prin-
actualization of a
ciple to unite those elements; it thus
assimilates
would not be fundamental and neces-
his divi-
sary in itself. Consequently, something
modalities of
cannot be composed of necessary enti-
Avicen-
ties and remain necessarily existent in
must
itself.⁸ be said to exist in some way or
other,
whether in actuality or in potentiality,
7 This same logic, as we discussed
even as he expresses in the Dánish-
earlier, showed us that composition is a
for some-
feature strictly confined to contingent be-
does not exist,
ings. Composition entails the existence of
the possibility of its
existence while it
is nonexistent is called
something prior to the composed thing,
(363). When a possibly existent
something more basic which supports,
comes into existence, it passes
thing
from
causes, and sustains its existence. The
potentiality into actuality.
Necessarily Existent, then, must be entire-
However,
ly void of such composition. such a thing does not have
actuality in
8 Avicenna's demonstration that
in principle there could only be one nec-
essarily existent reality is discussed in the section "Singleness."
Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 29

itself but must be actualized by a cause; a cause to become actually
existent.
insofar, then, as a contingent being can If that potential in it were
actualized

change or revert to nonexistence, it is by a cause, then the being of the
Nec-
not pure, self-subsistent actuality, but essarily Existent would not be
fully
rather is partly actual (as actualized by necessary in itself but
necessitated by
its cause or causes) and partly potential a cause. This, of course, is a
contra-
due to its inherent contingency. diction. Alternatively, if one
part of its
Consequently, things that are caused existence were actual in itself, and
an-
or mutable are composites of actuality other part potential, the former
would
and potentiality, actual and potential have no need of the latter to
exist. That
existence. That is, a contingent being, former would then be the true
Neces-
say a tree, is actually one way and sarily Existent, in which case it
could
potentially another. Part of a tree's not be subject to an external
cause to
contingency entails that it has poten- join it to something only
potentially
tiality—it can potentially exist or not existent, nor would it make
sense to
exist; it can potentially be fertile green say that what is necessary in
itself de-
or withered brown; it can potentially pends on a part that is only
possibly
grow or diminish. Conversely, it actu- existent in itself.⁹
ally is one way or another at any par- Hence, the Necessarily
Existent is
ticular time, and that current actuality no composite of actuality and
poten-
is made actual, or necessary, by some tiality, but fully actual and
necessarily
cause or other. The tree, accordingly, is so—not upon the condition of
anything
not purely actual or necessary in itself, else; it is thus wholly
unconditioned,
but is subject to causes and has poten- absolute, and free of any
metaphysical
tials that may or may not become ac- composition. The simplicity of its
ex-
tualized. Metaphysically, therefore, the istence inevitably entails that it
is one

tree is a composite of actual and potential existence: existence as necessitated by its causes and existence as merely possible in itself. it is pure act with no potency. But Avicenna writes in *ash-Shifá*, “Whatever is necessarily existent by its own essence is necessarily existent in every aspect” (30). This is because if the Necessarily Existent had any potentiality, if any part of its existence were not already fully actual and necessary but potential and contingent, it would not be necessarily existent in itself. In itself, that part would only be possibly existent and would require basic elements.

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There cannot be any multiplicity actualized in the Necessarily Existent, such that its existence becomes actualized due to a multiplicity of things, even as the body of man is. Nor can things be divisions within it, each part subsisting in its own right, like the wood and clay of a house. Nor can there be divisions within it that are conceptually separated though not in essence, even as wax receives the impression of the seal. Lastly, the final cause by it, as wax receives the impression of the seal. Lastly, the final cause purpose of a thing, or its end, the state that it is directed towards by its particular nature, the realization of which constitutes its good.¹⁰ The Necessarily Existent, in not depending upon causes, clearly does not have an existence that is by virtue of any one of these four

as matter and form are conceptually separate in natural bodies, for- in that case the essence of the Necessarily Existent would be a composite and admit of association with causes, as has been shown. would (Dánishnámih 374) possibly, existent. Accordingly, even as it is not a The full significance of the Necessarily Existent's not being a composite potentiality, the Necessarily Existent of matter and form similarly depends on some understanding of Aristotelian metaphysics and its view of causation, immaterial, for, the basic structure of which Avicenna adopts and defends. In brief, the Aristotelian account presents four kinds of cause: the efficient, the formal, the material, and the final. The efficient cause is already familiar from the discussions in Part One; it is the agent, the source of a change in a thing (such as when a stove imparts heat to water) or the existence of a thing (as when the motion of the hand creates the motion impossi-	es. As such, the Necessarily could have neither a material nor mal cause: it could not be comprised matter, some basic stuff with the tiality of being actualized in a lar form. If this were the case, it not be necessarily, but only composite of discernible discrete or of actuality and ecessarily Existent cannot be a of matter and form. It follows ly, then, that it must be otherwise, it would be a entity composed of two parts: matter and form. Matter represent its potentiality, form ality, and it, as a being whose has been realized, would be on those causes, the material and the formal cause, as well as agent, the efficient cause, to the substrate of matter into some crete form. This, of course, is
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of the key being held). The formal cause, however, is the essential form whatsoever. and nature or functional organization of a thing, which makes it actually the 'Abdu'l-Bahá thing that it is. Conversely, the material Aristotelian theory of the four causes; see chapter eighty of Mufávadát. Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

ble for the Necessarily Existent, is dependent on no cause

10 Significantly, likewise validates the

31

Given, therefore, that the Necessarily Existent is immaterial, it cannot even be conceived as a uniform and homogeneous substance existing in three-dimensional space; rather, it is something that altogether transcends Water space and the material world. Consequently, it is void of all the incidental attributes particular to material entities, which include subsisting in space; being situated in three dimensions; exhibiting weight, mass, position, and locomotion; and so forth. Immaterial-Avicennianity is thus a logical consequence both of necessary existence and simplicity. There remains, however, yet another and even more fundamental level at which the Necessarily Existent is

attributes peculiar to water: its nature. Water, as H₂O, has that neither of its elements, and oxygen, has alone, and its attributes are not a mere sum of and oxygen's discrete properties. Water has a unique set of properties, being capable of existing in gas, and solid states in a narrow range of temperatures. Water is thus ly or intrinsically different from elements. The important point is that na recognizes that, for any being, whether it exists must be a tinct consideration from what definitionally constitutes what it is. because there is nothing entailed

by properly understood as absolutely simple. This involves Avicenna's famous distinction between essence and existence. For Avicenna, contingent beings are composed of essence and existence, at least and their essence is conceptually and metaphysically distinct from their existence. In other words, for Avicenna, clear that the fact that something is distinct from human what something is. The essence of a thing is its quiddity, its *máhiyyat*, the whatness that defines it. An essence is that what makes an entity the thing it is and not some other thing. For example, the essence of a triangle—triangularity—investigating determines that any triangle has three sides and three sides only, internal angles whose sum is 180 degrees, and so forth. A triangle is not a square; the two shapes are essentially different. To use a more concrete example, the essence of water could be construed as that reality by which it manifests the

the essence of any contingent being that will demonstrate to someone it exists in actuality. The essence of a human being, for example, may be defined, as it was classically at since Aristotle, as a rational animal. If the essence of the human being, is to be a rational animal, it is this remains a fact even if all beings become extinct. Likewise, if humans had never emerged, that would not have changed the fact that the human essence is to be a rational animal. One cannot know whether any human exists simply by what constitutes the human essence; instead, one must empirically mine whether humans exist in the present, or deduce their existence directly from their effects, their existence is not logically necessary but contingent and incidental to their essence.

Avicenna, in addition, has a briefer proof of the distinction between essence and existence in *ash-Shifá*. His

proof rests on the idea that, if essence and existence were not distinct, then even some of the simplest propositions would revert to bare tautologies. He explains: "The distinction between essence and existence, a contingent being cannot derive existence from its own essence; it therefore does not have existence in and of itself, that is, from its own nature and essence. Likewise, it is clear that the reality particular to each thing is distinct from its existence. This is because it is intelligible to say that the reality of something does exist in a concrete way, or as apprehended in the mind, or absolutely as common to both. But it is vain and useless to say that the reality of something is the reality of something, or that the reality of something is a reality. (24) As a particular triangle. Because contingent beings evince, in this way, a distinction between essence and existence, they are only possibly and not necessarily existent, insofar as they do not exist simply given what they are. Accordingly, every existent more about the subject, to say "the essence of man is the essence of man" or immediately

“the essence of man is an essence” is dependent, a mere restatement. The predicate, in the that case, reveals nothing more about existence. the subject. This shows, for Avicenna, that there is a distinction between essence and existence. Otherwise, to say relies that a particular essence exists would not convey anything more about that Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna	points to the conditional, and derivative nature of its being: composition of essence and A composite of essence and existence is not metaphysically fundamental and self-sufficient, but rather on something else for its being and origination.
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It then follows that, unlike each predicate member of the totality of contingently for any existent beings, the Necessarily Existent could not be such a composite of recall, essence and existence. As Avicenna Bahá’u’lláh deftly argues in the Dánishnámih: Avicennian “Whatever has an essence other than its “essential own existence is not necessarily existent. For if the essence of a thing is not existence its own existence, its existence would beings, have the characteristic of being an incidental, and not essential, feature to it. Avicenna Any incidental feature, moreover, has a necessarily ex- cause” (377). The Necessarily Existent essence except is thus nothing other than necessary is not necessary existence, nothing other than absolute existence, being. Therefore, it has no essence (Dánish-	here is simply identical to the in a way that would not hold contingent being. In this connection, one may as discussed earlier, how implicitly confirms this proposition by restricting existence” to God; because sence is His existence, His is essential to Him. Contingent in contrast, have a merely or incidental existence, as explains: “Whatever is istent of itself has no existence, and . . . whatever essarily existent of itself has therefore, only incidentally”
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distinct from its existence, and in this in validasense one may say that the Necessarily that “[t] Existent has no essence, insofar as it contingent does not have an essence distinct from accident among its act of existence. In this connection realities of Avicenna writes: “The Necessarily Answered Ques- Existent has no essence; it is rather 203). In this from Him that existence emanates onto associated with those things that have essences. It is contingent with pure being from which all privation refers to that and description is negated” (ash-Shifá essential 276). Yet Avicenna also writes that, contingent in another sense, the Necessarily Ex- them- istent’s essence is its existence: “The their existence Necessarily Existent has no essence incidental to them, apart from its existence” (ash-Shifá Avicenna both 274). In the Necessarily Existent, then, there is no distinction between what it Necessar- is and the fact that it is; what it is is its incomposite existence. It is therefore absolute and could not unconditioned Being. Thus, to say “the attributes. Necessarily Existent exists” is equiv- such as alent to saying “the Necessarily Exis- composite tent is necessarily existent”; the subject of rationality

námih 409). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, tion of this point, thus states his common existence (of beings) . . . is only one others that enter upon the created things” (Some tions 337–38; Mufávadát sense, the essential is the necessary, and the the accidental, which here which is incidental, and not or inherent, to a thing. Such beings do not have existence of selves or essentially, is “accidental” or as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and explain. Since the essence of the ily Existent is its very existence, it follows that it have a plurality of essential Contrary to contingent things a human being—which is a of the essential attributes

and animality by virtue of the intellect can be nothing in it that is actualized by any external cause.

and the body, respectively—the essence of the Necessarily Existent could The essential simplicity of the Necessarily Existent thus entails not be a composite of different metaphysical parts or attributes, for then is nothing else than the absolute act that essence would be something other of being. In it there is no junction of physical parts, no admixture of than the single and incomposite reality actuality and potentiality, no combination of discrete attributes, no explains (Dánishnámih 374), if the Necessarily Existent did have multiple form and matter, no union of essence and existence. It is instead discrete attributes, its essence would be something absolutely one and indivisible, actualized by virtue of those attributes, simple and uncomposed. Accordingly, there is and that essence would thus be dependent on those parts, and a cause to unite nothing more fundamental, more basic, more ultimate to reality than the those parts. And this, as we have seen, simple reality that the Necessarily Existent is impossible for the Necessarily Existent is. It is categorically and essentially unnon-compositely necessary existence, like any contingent being by virtue of its inherent necessity, and whatever attribute is properly ascribed to it is in fact identical to that absolute oneness, and it is due to its utterly simple essence that it is necessary existence and does not indicate an actual multiplicity within it. thing truly ultimate.

Consequently, the Necessarily Existent is not just one

It follows, then, that in the Necessarily Existent there is no distinction or being among beings, for in that

case it
composition of essence and attributes. would merely be a limited and
contin-
Its attributes are either identical to gent instantiation of existence,
superior
its essence, or it transcends attributes only in relative degree to other
beings.
altogether, at least in the sense that Rather, its simplicity entails
that the
contingent beings have attributes. Con- Necessarily Existent is not
something
sequently, given that the Necessarily that has or instantiates existence
as be-
Existent is “necessary in all aspects,” it ings do, but instead is Being
itself, sub-
likewise cannot admit of any incidental sisting of itself, dependent on no
other.
or non-essential attributes or features. It is thus wholly unlike all other
things
As Avicenna asserts, any incidental and unique—an attribute that
will have
feature would require that an external its full discussion under the
coming
cause had actualized something contin- subsection, “Singleness.”
gent in the Necessarily Existent, since This, then, is how Avicenna
deduces
no incidental feature is essential to the the simplicity of the Necessarily
Exis-
being of its possessor. But we have tent, and hence of God. But how
does
seen that it is “necessary in every as- Bahá’u’lláh affirm God’s
simplicity in
pect” and fully actual, and thus there addition to His necessity? There
are,
Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna 35
indeed, many instances in His writings insofar as His existence, as seen
above,
and those of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which di- is essential to Him.
Bahá’u’lláh fur-
vine simplicity is either implicitly—as thermore suggests, in affirming
that
mentioned above—or explicitly con- God is “one in his works”
(váhídan fí
firmed. In one of His tablets, for exam- af’álihi) that God does not
engage in
ple, Bahá’u’lláh firmly asserts that God a multiplicity of actions or

works, as
 “in truth, hath, throughout eternity, contingent beings do, and thus
 does not
 been one in His Essence, one in His at- admit of the multiplicity of
 potentially
 tributes, one in His works” (Gleanings enacting one thing and then
 actually
 193; Muntakhabátí 77). More tellingly, enacting it, of potentially being
 one
 Bahá’u’lláh writes the following in the way and actually another.
 This in ac-
 Lawh-i-Madáníy-i-Tawhíd or the Tablet cord with Avicenna’s
 position that God
 of the City of Divine Unity: “Thou art enacts, and is identical to, His
 single
 then witness that God is one in His at- and absolute act of existence, and
 that
 tributes, and that [multiple] attributes He is thus exempt from a
 multiplicity
 are debarred from entry into the court of contingent actions, which would
 in-
 of His sanctity . . . Recognize, more- volve the actualization of
 potentiality
 over, that the multiplicity of various in Him.¹¹ Bahá’u’lláh
 therefore clearly
 designations and attributes shall never affirms that God does not have
 various
 be joined unto His essence, for His at- parts or composition, discrete
 proper-
 tributes are verily His essence itself” ties or separate qualities, and
 confirms
 (Má’idiy-i-Ásmání 4: 329–13, provi- that He is one absolutely
 and categor-
 sional translation). ically. In this way,
 Bahá’u’lláh affirms
 In these passages, Bahá’u’lláh as- the notion of God’s simplicity
 in addi-
 serts that God is one and does not have tion to His necessity.
 plurality of attributes, for whatever Furthermore, if each of God’s
 attri-
 attribute may be properly ascribed to butes is identical with His
 essence, as
 Him is identical to His single essence. Bahá’u’lláh states, then
 logically each
 Consequently, it seems His intent in one of them is identical with, or
 con-
 these passages is not merely to stress vertible to, any of the others. It

follows,
 that there is only one God. As we saw then, that for Bahá'u'lláh
 God has no
 with Avicenna, the intent behind em- attributes distinct from His
 essential
 phatically stating that God is one in es- and utterly indivisible being, just
 as
 sence, attributes, and acts seems rather for Avicenna. Moreover,
 Bahá'u'lláh's
 to disallow any notion that there is any statement that God is "one in His
 acts"
 multiplicity in God at all. His essence is fully intelligible from the
 notion of
 is one; His attributes are one; His acts
 are one. Therefore, in God there are not 11 The section "Creation
 and Cos-
 multiple attributes and discrete proper- mology" will explore the question
 of how
 ties; there is only His essential being, the Necessarily Existent performs
 the
 which for Bahá'u'lláh is His existence, creative act according to
 Bahá'u'lláh and
 Avicenna.

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God's being complete actuality, sheer both He and Avicenna are in
 perfect
 necessary being without any addition concord, as shall be shown.
 of potentiality or contingency or any The context of this Tablet
 indicates
 composition therewith. God is, in other that Bahá'u'lláh was asked
 about
 words, pure act insofar as He is neces- the meaning of the following
 saying,
 sary existence, the very act of absolute originating with Plotinus in the
 En-
 being. If God is truly one, His essence neads (5.2.1): "The Simple
 Reality is
 could be no more distinct from His ex- all things," which was affirmed
 by the
 istence than His action could be distinct prominent early modern Persian phi-
 from either His essence or existence. losopher Mullá Sadrá. That the
 Simple
 He is at once necessary existence and Reality (Basít al-Haqíqat) is
 clearly
 the act of being, insofar as His reali- understood to refer to God is
 assumed

ty as the Necessarily Existent means Bahá'u'lláh, throughout the Tablet, and that His essence is to be. Bahá'u'lláh's incidentally, even refers to God quite explicitly as the Necessarily statements are therefore manifest ex- Existence in this work. Bahá'u'lláh's pressions of the idea of divine sim- plicity, as is clear after considering an is to explicate Plotinus' original state- ment and Mullá Sadrá's account of Avicenna's explanations views in a way that precludes any pantheistic for why the Necessarily Existent must be simple. Understanding Avicenna's In His interpretation, Bahá'u'lláh ex- plicitly affirms God's simplicity logical analysis of necessary existence and denies that He has any parts or and simplicity thus illuminates the partic- ipates in the multiplicity of philosophical context and content of contingent things. Rather, God is the Bahá'u'lláh's own statements. existence itself with all its fullness of from Whom the existence of His Even if the logical consequenc- tures proceeds, while He perfection, mains one and undivided among es of these passages failed to prove from Thou hast written that an crea- tures proceeds, while He definitively that Bahá'u'lláh affirms Thou hast written that an Himself re- mains one and undivided among God's simplicity, His remarks on this things or in Himself. other states: theme in His Lawh-i-Basít al-Haqíqat Thou hast written that an Bahá'u'lláh thus states: or Tablet on the Simple Reality would Thou hast written that an be sufficient to show that He in fact so Thou hast written that an strongly supports the doctrine of di- Thou hast written that an inquirer hath asked for an explanation of vine simplicity as to take it as a given. the statement of the Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh stresses in that "the Simple Reality is all philosophers, Say: Know that the meaning of Tablet that divine simplicity should not "things" in this connection be construed as entailing any kind of nothing else but existence and pantheism or monism, a view in which is the distinction between the necessary

and the contingent collapses, and God becomes identical with the creation that proceeds from Him. In this too, thereof. This Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

the perfections of existence qua existence, while the meaning of “all” is the possessor

37

“all” admits of no division and of Insightful eyes no parts. Thus, the Simple Reality, signs of because it is simple in all aspects, the is the possessor and totality of all limitless perfections, as it hath been said, “there is no limit to His from handiwork.”

vision of the seer.

behold, in all things, the

the One, for in all things are

divine names manifest, while God Himself hath ever been, and shall forever be, sanctified

ascent, descent, and

limitation, as

well as connection and association [with any other thing]. All

In the Persian tongue,¹² it may be said that the intent of the philosopher in the above passage in the

things, in contrast, abide in

regard to “things” is the perfect-limitations.

sphere of their specific

tions of existence insofar as it is 7:140–41, pro-

(Má'idíy-i-Ásmání

existence, and his intent as to “all” is a possessor, that is, the One who is the possessor and totality of interpretation, “the

visional translation)

In Bahá'u'lláh's

all limitless perfections in a simple manner. They have put forth posses-

Simple Reality is all things”

similar statements on the themes perfections in-

God, the Simple Reality, is the

of divine simplicity and on the indepen-

sor of existence and its

“potency” and “intensity” of existential attributes

sofar as it is absolute existence

istence.¹³ Here, the philosopher's contingent

dent of any of the

intent was not that the Necessarily position, quan-

of being found diversely in

Existent hath permeated or is di-

entities (such as place,

etc.). For

tity, temperature, texture,

vided among limitless entities. Ex-
non-com-
alted is He above that! Rather, it
God

is as the philosophers have stated:
which other

“The Simple Reality is all things,
His reali-

and not any single one of them,”
substratum to,

and in another place, “The splen-
would require

dors of the Simple Reality can
inter-

be perceived in all things.” This
complexity, and

perception is conditioned by the
material

and composite which could take part in

12 Here, Bahá’u’lláh switches from
world. This

Arabic to Persian, and largely reiterates the
absolute

same point.

existence and

13 This is a reference to Mullá Sadrá, thus His simplicity, for we
have seen

for his philosophy made use of the ideas of how the Necessarily Existent
must be

the relative intensity (tashdíd), as well as wholly actual being with no
potentials

the differentiation (tashkík), of existence as and no aspects receptive to
being or be-

beings proceed from the absolute existence coming contingent on external
causes.

of God.

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Indeed, for Bahá’u’lláh and Avi- to God as the Necessarily
Existent.

cenna, God is something fully one and
complete in His necessary being, abso-
attribute

lutely simple and non-composite, from of God, it is the most fundamental
of

Whom the existence of other things the attributes that we shall
discuss, for

Bahá’u’lláh, the simple and

posite nature of God is absolute;

is not the basic stuff out of

things are literally made, and

ty is never a part of, or a

the contingent order. This

that God’s simplicity become

mixed with limitless

that He be something basically

the material and composite

would certainly contradict the

reality of God’s necessary

thus His simplicity, for we

how the Necessarily Existent

wholly actual being with no

and no aspects receptive to

coming contingent on external

to God as the Necessarily

However much simplicity may
seem to be a rather abstract

of God, it is the most fundamental

the attributes that we shall

proceeds, while He Himself remains enables absolute, simple, and indivisible. And so Avicenna writes in this connection: ab-
“Everything is from Him, and He is there is not like anything which proceeds from funda-
Him. He is the source of everything, there and is not any one of the things that are theoretically—
posterior to Him” (ash-Shifá 283). Because
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, too, elucidates there is no distinction whatsoever be-
Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings on the simplic- tween His essence and His
attributes, or His essence and His
ity of God. Reiterating Bahá’u’lláh’s existence, we
assertion that in God there is no plu- have no need to ask why He is one
rality of attributes, and that each of way and not another, or whether He
His attributes is consequently identical could exist or not exist, insofar
as He is necessarily existent in
with His essence, He writes that “the Himself. The
essential names and attributes of God second reason to devote so much
atten- tion to simplicity is that it
are identical with His Essence, and His enables one
Essence is sanctified above all under- to deduce additional attributes of
God, and also to understand that these
standing” (Some Answered Questions seem-
168; Mufávadát 105). Elsewhere, ingly additional attributes are
not sep- arate properties but merely
as we saw earlier, He asserts that the represent
different ways of considering
Godhead “admits of no division, for what the
division and multiplicity are among same reality, termed the
Necessarily Existent, logically entails.
the characteristics of created and hence
Simplicity, then, enables one to understand how
contingent things, and not accidents God’s attributes could be
impinging upon the Necessary Be-

identical
ing” (Some Answered Questions 127;
another, as
Mufávadát 27). The Bahá’í Writings,
Avicenna state, and
therefore, confirm Avicenna’s notion
proper-
of the simplicity of God. Logically,
what is necessarily existent of itself
cannot have parts of any kind, physi-
to say
cal or metaphysical, and Bahá’u’lláh
singleness, it
and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá accordingly affirm
are some
God’s essential and absolute oneness,
God’s
in addition to Their explicit references
explicitly
Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna
39
mentioned by Bahá’u’lláh or ‘Abdu’l-
Bahá’í Writings.
Bahá. These include Avicenna’s deduc-
Clearly,
tion that in God there can be no dis-
within the
tinction between His essence and His
been
existence—that He just is His being.
one thing
What Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
necessarily existent of it-
do state unequivocally is that God is
question
the Necessarily Existent and absolutely
one and simple, there being in Him no
to the at-
multiplicity and division, and that His
now
attributes are one with His essence. The
potential absence of an explicit state-
ment on such matters as the identity of
God’s essence with His existence does
not imply, however, that They do not
Exis-
uphold its truth, for it follows logically

to His essence and to one
Bahá’u’lláh and
are not a collection of distinct
ties in actuality.
But before we proceed to what
Bahá’u’lláh and Avicenna have
about God’s attribute of
should be noted that there
statements from Avicenna on
simplicity that may not be
39
throughout the
But a question remains.
there can be no multiplicity
Necessarily Existent, but has it
shown there is one thing, and
only, that is
self? This, of course, is a vital
for the monotheism of Avicenna and
Bahá’u’lláh, and it is hence
tribute of singleness that we must
turn.
S
The singleness of the Necessarily
tent means that there is not, and

cannot
from what Bahá'u'lláh says of God's
necessarily existent
necessity, essential existence, and sim-
com-
plicity, His oneness in essence and at-
Avicenna's
tributes. As discussed above, to be nec-
essarily existent logically implies being
follows
incomposite and simple at the deepest
We
level, that of having a complete unity
Existent
of essence and existence. It is thus that
neces-
Bahá'u'lláh uses the term "essential
parts, various
permanence or existence" (baqáy-i-
features,
dhátí) with reference to God. In sum,
then
if this existence is essential to God and
Avi-
thus an essential attribute, and if God's
twenty-two of
attributes are identical to His simple
"Metaphysics" that
essence, it follows that Bahá'u'lláh
being with
upholds Avicenna's position that God
existence—
is the Necessarily Existent whose
essence is His existence. If God's es-
characteris-
sence were not His existence, His ex-
There
istence would not be essential to Him
dis-
and would therefore proceed from an
they
external cause—making Him a con-
instanti-
tingent being. Avicenna's argument,
otherwise,
therefore, illuminates the importance
example,

be, more than one
being, and that it is unique and
pletely without like or peer.
demonstration that the Necessarily
Existent is single in this sense
from its necessity and simplicity.
have seen that the Necessarily
is nothing other than its own
sary existence, without
discrete attributes, incidental
or potentiality of any kind. How
could there be more than one? For
cenna reasons in chapter
the Dánishnámih's
if there were more than one
the attribute of necessary
say two—then each one would have
to have some additional
tic that the other did not have.
would have to be something that
tinguished one from the other, so
could be considered multiple
ations of the same nature;
they would be identical. For

from each other by virtue of the fact the Necessarily Existent, and the Nec-
that each one is capable of evincing essarily Existent would thus have
to be
a plurality of attributes, qualities, and a composite of actual and
potential ex-
cidental features. One is standing in istence—existence as it is in
itself and
position a, the other in position b; one existence as caused by another. In
this
is six feet tall, the other is five feet; case, it would be a composite
being,
and so on. Although each person has and any composite being is only
con-
the same human nature, each one rep- tingly existent, in being
dependent
resents a separate and distinct instanti- on parts, as has been shown. Thus,
as
ation of that nature. Existence, in other Avicenna points out in chapter
sev-
words, is imparted to the same human en of Book One in *ash-Shifá*,
there is
essence in two discrete instances. simply nothing by virtue of which
one
But because the Necessarily Exis- necessarily existent being could be
dif-
tent is absolutely simple and necessary ferent from another—each, being
only
in all aspects, one necessarily existent simple existence, would be
perfectly
being would be identical to another in indistinguishable and thus
identical.
every respect; one would have no es- Therefore, it is simply incoherent
to
sential attribute the other did not itself say there could be more than one
nec-
possess. Each would be immaterial, as essarily existent entity.
was shown in the previous section, so Moreover, since the essence of
the
neither could occupy a different posi- Necessarily Existent just is its
exis-
tion in space. Both would be wholly tence, it follows that same
essence
actual, so one could not have a poten- could not have more than one

instantia-
 tial feature the other did not have. And
 essence of a
 since no necessarily existent being can
 existence, it
 be a composite of multiple attributes,
 one
 neither could possess an attribute be-
 human
 sides necessary existence the other did
 and
 not possess. As a result, there can be
 Existent
 only one necessarily existent being.
 from
 And since, as shown in the previous
 es-
 section, the Necessarily Existent is
 existence,
 necessary in every aspect and is sheer
 existence. On
 actuality with no potentials, it is im-
 reasons,
 possible for it to have any incidental
 ex-
 or contingent attribute (such as place,
 position, quantity, quality, or time) by
 speaks of
 which it could be distinguished from
 needing
 another necessarily existent being. For
 cause,
 such an incidental attribute, in order to
 there
 arise, would require a cause external to
 number
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

of necessarily existent beings sustain-
 ing the contingent world. There is but
 peer
 one absolute reality, then, which con-
 eter-
 currently sustains the entire contingent
 all
 structure of being, and which imparts
 existence to it absolutely and inex-

tion of existence. Since the
 contingent being is not its
 can be made existent in more than
 instance, just as there are many
 beings, water molecules, trees,
 so forth. But the Necessarily
 does not have an essence distinct
 its own existence, and so the single
 sence could only have one
 for it is identical to that
 account of these and other
 there can only be one necessarily
 istent being.
 Therefore, when Avicenna
 the sum of contingent causes
 an external, necessarily existent
 it could not be objected that
 could, even in principle, be a
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 He is, and hath from everlasting
 been, one and alone, without
 or equal, eternal in the past,
 nal in the future, detached from
 things, ever-abiding, unchange-
 able, and self-subsisting. He

hath

haustibly. It is as though there is but one spring from which all the waters counselor

of being flow, or but one root by which all the branches of existence are sustained. The oneness and singleness of universe

the Necessarily Existent is accordingly the a logical consequence of its necessity, they

its simplicity and the identity of its essence and its existence. There is nothing like it, for all other things are contingently existent and have being only in-

derivatively, and thus are much more like one another than they could ever resemble that absolute source of all being. Avicenna, through this means, is able not only to infer the existence of that divine reality transcendent above nature, but also to affirm that such an subject ultimate reality must be absolutely one forgotten

and single, unique and matchless. The central claim of all monotheistic faiths are is thus rigorously upheld by the rational philosophy of Avicenna—that there revelations

is only one God, incomparable, single, 192–93; and peerless.

This claim, too, is central to the

Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. There is hardly declares in the

any work by Him that does not stress, Avicen-

with the unshakable conviction of of the

certitude, the oneness of God and the incomparable, the transcendent nature

assigned no associate unto Himself in His Kingdom, no

to counsel Him, none to compare unto Him, none to rival His

To this every atom of the

beareth witness, and beyond it

inmates of the realms on high,

that occupy the most exalted

and whose names are remembered before the Throne of Glory.

Bear thou witness in thine

most heart unto this testimony which God hath Himself and for Himself pronounced, that there

is none other God but Him, that all else besides Him have been created by His behest, have been fashioned by His leave, are

to His law, are as a thing

when compared to the glorious evidences of His oneness, and

as nothing when brought face to face with the mighty

of His unity. (Gleanings

Muntakhabátí 75–76)

And what Bahá'u'lláh

poetic strains of the prophet,

na reiterates in the sober tones

philosopher:

of His being. Bahá'u'lláh thus affirms, It has thus been established for
in a representative instance, the single- you that there is something nec-
ness of God as a natural concomitant of essarily existent. Likewise, it
has

His divine nature: been shown that the Necessarily

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Existent is one. He is thus sin- the Necessarily Existent is simply nec-
gle; nothing shares with Him His essary existence and actual being, with
station, and nothing else is nec- no other part existing contingently or
essarily existent. He alone, there- potentially, or in any way involving
fore, is the principle by which contingency or potentiality, and since
the existence of all other things any change involves the actualization
is necessitated, whether directly of a potential or the realization of a
or through an intermediary cause. contingency through some agent, it
And since the existence of all oth- follows that there could be no change
er things proceeds from Him, He in the Necessarily Existent. Any such
is the First. By "first" we do not change would require an external
mean an attribute additional to His cause conditioning some potential as-
necessity, such that the necessity pect or part of the Necessarily
Existent.

of His existence becomes multi- Its complete necessity and simplicity,
ple. Rather, we mean that He is the however, make this strictly impossible.
First in the sense of how all other Avicenna writes:
things stand in relation to Him.

(ash-Shifá 274) Whatever admits of change must
also admit of having a cause, of

I being in one condition by virtue
of a certain cause, or lacking that

The simplicity and singleness of the condition by virtue of another
Necessarily Existent distinguishes it as cause. The being of such a thing
utterly unlike any contingent being and is not clear of association with
transcendent above the entire order of those two causes, and its being
the contingent realm. And among the would therefore make up a com-
attributes and inherent conditions of posite conditioned by causes. But
contingent beings is change and al- we have previously shown that
teration, becoming and perishing. But the Necessarily Existent is not a
since the Necessarily Existent has no composite being of any kind in as-
likeness to contingent beings and con- sociation with causes. Therefore,
tingent attributes, it cannot admit of it is not capable of any change.
any alteration, or be receptive to any (Dánishnámih 376)
change.

Avicenna's proof for the immutabil- That is, in order for the Necessarily
Ex-
ity of the Necessarily Existent in the istent to change, there would have
to

Dánishnámih is remarkably brief, but be some aspect or part of its reality that since he has previously established its was not necessary in itself but rather necessity and simplicity, its immutability need only be shown to be logically contingent upon being actualized by some external cause. Such a being, entailed by those two notions. Since however, would not be the Necessarily Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 43

Existent, which is absolutely simple and that God whom He has affirmed to not a composite of actual and potential be necessarily existent.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá existence. The Necessarily Existent is thus validates the logical method un- therefore immutable and unchanging. derlying Avicenna’s own conclusion.

The immutability of the Necessarily Existent, and hence of God, is Avicenna’s method, in turn, elucidates Bahá’í likewise affirmed by Bahá’u’lláh and the rational structure of the theological claim—a trend observed

‘Abdu’l-Bahá. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states explicitly and decisively: throughout this paper. Of course, to say that the Necessarily

sarily Existent is unchanging is not to For the essence of the Godhead imply that it is stagnant, lacking need-

there is no ascent or descent, no ed activity or dynamism. Rather, it is entrance or egress. It is sanctified itself the sheer act of being, and thus of

from time and place. It is ever in unbounded vitality and life. For there the apex of sanctity, for change to be any alteration in the Necessarily

and alteration are impossible Existent, therefore, would mean for it for the reality of the Godhead. to quit its station as the ultimate reality,

Change and alteration and motion the ground for all dynamism in the con-

from one condition to another are tingent realm. And it is only because it

incidents particular to contingent is the unchanging and absolute ground and originated phenomena. (Kh- of being that it can sustain the chang-

itábát-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá 2:131–32, ing realm of contingent becoming. The

provisional translation) Necessarily Existent is not stagnant, then, but rather constant, and in that
 Indeed, change is a fundamental feature of the contingent world, the realm of becoming, and thus is far removed from the Necessarily Existent, which is absolute being without any aspect of becoming. Any change, moreover, proclaims:
 is dependent on what already is, and that therefore only absolute, immutable being could be the ultimate ground and support of the changing realm of contingent beings. The vital point here is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá not only asserts the immutable nature of God; He argues forever, for God’s immutability by noting that mutability is foreign to God precisely because it is characteristic of contingent beings and thus impossible for
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 subsists dependent on no other, being, the immutability, the constancy of what is truly God. As such, eternal is one of the various senses of the word E qadím that Avicenna applies to the Necessarily Existent. In the Dánish-Námih he explains that the Necessarily Existent alone has the full possession of qidam, eternity; for anything

that
this is asserted by Bahá'u'lláh without power
reservation. Indeed, when we consider it
the Necessarily Existent, we see that this
eternality is entailed in the very conception of necessary existence. For what-
Accordingly, the
ever exists necessarily of itself, and no
is immutable, must also exist without
sixth-centu-
beginning or end, and is not subject
to the passage of time, being beyond
possession
any measure of motion and change.
at a
The Necessarily Existent never began
to exist, and it can never fail to exist.
repeatedly
Moreover, there can be no change in
one
the condition of its existence, and time
indivisible,
thus has no hold or power over its
sta-
unchangeable reality. There is no mo-
tion for the Necessarily Existent, and
provisional
so within it there can be no difference
Necessar-
between the past, the present, and the
place, it
future. No alteration or finality awaits
extended
it, just as no origination or beginning
would
precedes it.
likewise
In it there is rather an everlasting
present of the fullness of its existence.
here
The present that belongs to it is one

exists through the sustaining
of something beyond itself, even if
had always contingently existed in
manner, is in the realm of
of hudúth (382–83).
Necessarily Existent, dependent on
other, alone has what the
ry philosopher Boethius eloquently
defined eternity as: “the
of endless life whole and perfect
single moment” (Book 5, ch. 6).
As to Bahá'u'lláh, He
affirms the eternity of God, in
place writing: “One and
He hath ever subsisted within His
tion sanctified from all time and
(Má'idíy-i-Ásmání 7:8,
translation). To say that the
ily Existent is sanctified from
being immaterial and thus not
in three dimensions (since that
require it to be composite),
affirms one of Avicenna’s theological
arguments, but what is important
is Bahá'u'lláh’s

affirmation that God is
of constancy, permanence, unceasing
is
actuality, and absolute being; it is a
the
present that consists in a timeless and
immutable act of existence, a present
Bahá'u'lláh's
that has no likeness to the temporal
are too
order of the contingent realm. Eter-
we
nality, then, in a word sums up the
that
necessary existence, the transcendent
intercourse
Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

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to bind the one true God with His cre-
Avicenna's
ation, and no resemblance whatever
“for
can exist between the transient (hádith)
“among the
and the Eternal (qadím), the contingent
defi-
(mumkin) and the Absolute (vájib)”
283). That
(Gleanings 66; Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-
requisite for
Mubárákih 340).

the complete flourishing of a
human
being that exist only potentially and
P not actually or necessarily, and
their
actualization not only requires some-
In the foregoing pages, we have seen
also may
that the Necessarily Existent must be
case he
simple, single, immutable, and eter-
imperfection
nal. By logical extension, then, it is
sound-
ultimate, incomparable, absolute, un-
education,
changeable, everlasting, and the source

sanctified from zamán, or time. He
thus eternal, entirely unbound by
temporal-spatial conditions of con-
tingent beings. Though
references to God's eternality
numerous to quote adequately here,
may again consider His statement
“there can be no tie of direct
A human being, to use
example, admits of imperfection,
many things,” he writes,
perfections of his existence are
cient in him” (ash-Shifá
is, there are many things
thing outside that person but
simply fail to occur, in which
or she would suffer sheer
and deficiency. Such things as
ness of health, prosperity,
virtue, and love are needed for

human
of all other reality. Such attributes alone life and existence to be
complete, or
and in themselves distinguish it above perfect in the relevant sense.
But a hu-
all other things. Through an under- man being depends on external
causes
standing of what necessary existence for these things or may
altogether fail
logically entails, therefore, we see that to achieve them, and furthermore
may
divinity may well be rightly ascribed to lose them in time. No human
being,
the Necessarily Existent. But its divine nor any other contingent being,
can be
character will be much more evident perfect in any essential sense,
for in
once its subsequent attributes, starting and of themselves human beings do
not
with perfection, are established. even have existence, this having
been
Avicenna states, in chapter six of acquired through external causes,
and
Book Eight of ash-Shifá's "Metaphys- thus they are deficient and
imperfect in
ics," that the Necessarily Existent is themselves.
perfect, and that perfection follows But the Necessarily Existent,
being
from its necessary being. Not only is in itself pure existence and
fully actual
it perfect; its perfection transcends the without any potential remaining
to be
kind achievable by any contingent be- actualized, is *támm al-vujúd*,
"com-
ing. For Avicenna, perfection (*kamál* plete and perfect in its
existence." It
or *tamám*) refers to completeness and needs nothing and depends on
nothing
actuality, as opposed to deficiency and in order to enjoy that fullness
of being,
unrealized potentiality. For something and there is no higher state of
actuali-
to be perfect, then, means that it is ty which it might attain.
Therefore, in
complete and free from deficiency in it there can be no lack or
deficiency,
respect to what it is and what is proper no unrealized potential or

possibility,
to its existence.
is

for that would assume that there

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something proper to it and needed by
recall, in
it that it does not already have by itself
Bahá'u'lláh's state-
and necessarily of itself. Such cannot
al-Haqqat,
be said of the Necessarily Existent,
section on
which is itself independent, subsistent
Bahá'u'lláh
being, single and without parts. But
phrases, such
not only is it perfect in itself; it is, in a
being," when the
certain sense, fawq at-tamám, "above
Necessarily Ex-
perfection." "For not only does He pos-
perfect in His
sess His own being," writes Avicenna,
nothing deficient
"but the existence of every being itself
being and the
flows from the abundance of His being,
Bahá'u'lláh
belongs to Him, and emanates from
Him" (ash-Shifá 283).
The Necessarily Existent, therefore,
has a transcendental perfection, for by
explanation
it is the being of all other things created
philoso-
and sustained, and their own contingent
is all
perfection realized and made manifest.
mean-
There can be no limit or deficiency to
connection
its being, and thus it is perfect and the
and
source of all perfections in the realm of
qua
contingent existence. In addition, inso-

and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We may
this connection,
ments in the Lawh-i-Basít
which was discussed in the
"Simplicity." In that work,
mirrors Avicenna's own
as "the perfections of
latter writes that the
istent is "complete and
existence, for there is
in Him in respect to His
perfections of His being."
states:
Thou hast written that an inquir-
er hath asked for an
of the statement of the
phers, "the Simple Reality
things." Say: Know that the
ing of 'things' in this
is nothing else but existence
the perfections of existence
existence, while the meaning

of	
far as it is immutable, the Necessarily	‘all’ is the possessor
thereof. This	
Existent could never become some-	‘all’ admits of no
division and of	
thing less than it is, and could thus	no parts. Thus, the Simple
Reality,	
never suffer, even theoretically, any	because it is simple in all
aspects,	
deficiency or lack. Its perfection, there-	is the possessor and totality
of all	
fore, is inviolable, supreme, and truly	limitless perfections, as it
hath	
necessary, while that of a contingent	been said, “there is no
limit to His	
being is quite naturally only possibly	handiwork.”
(Má’idiy-i-Ásmání	
existent, corruptible, and conditioned.	7:140)
Perfection in the full sense of the word,	
then, not only applies to the Necessar-	Here we see how
Bahá’u’lláh uses the	
ily Existent but is also more truly said	phrase “perfections of
being,” as Avi-	
of it than anything else, for it is, in a	cenna himself does. This shared
usage	
meaningful sense, perfection itself.	points to the fact that both
Bahá’u’lláh	
Such, at least, is the basic sense in	and Avicenna are explaining a
congru-	
which Avicenna regards the Necessari-	ent concept of God, a God of
absolute	
ly Existent as perfect, and this concept	and necessary being, who is
transcen-	
is explicitly affirmed by Bahá’u’lláh	dental perfection, and
the indivisible	
Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna	47
source of all perfections in His cre-	with the theology of
Bahá’u’lláh, is	
ation. His perfection is His being, and	not possible here. Nonetheless,
we can	
His being His perfection.	analyze the basic reasoning
behind	
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, too, affirms the per-	Avicenna’s ascription of
goodness to	
fection of God and even God’s identity	the Necessarily Existent, and
consider	

with his perfection. In chapter twenty-seven of Mufávadát or Some Answered Questions, He states definitively that “God is pure perfection and the creation is absolute imperfection,” God postulates (such being, in other words, kamál-i-mahd or absolute perfection, and the contingent world nuqsán-i-sirf or sheer deficiency. Moreover, He remarks there that Avicenna- “the contingent world is the source of deficiencies and God is the source of perfection. The very deficiencies of the contingent world testify to God’s things, and perfections.”

From these passages, it is evident that the Bahá’í Writings affirm the good, and so rational basis of Avicenna’s insistence of each that God, since He is unconditioned of a being, must also be absolute perfection. The Necessarily Existent is perfect, and it is, in a sense, perfection itself by virtue of its absolute and incorruptible being. How- that are desirable in themselves, and G oth-

how this further aligns his vision with that of the Since Avicenna works within Aristotelian philosophical and accepts its basic as the role of actuality and ity, form and matter, the four etc.), Aristotle’s account indispensable in illuminating na’s own position. In the Ethics, Aristotle, after having the Platonic account, considers the good is said of many that it thus does not have a single, or univocal, meaning. A man is good, a horse is good, a meal is on, but the respective goodness is not identical in meaning, but different character. Nonetheless, is an analogous relationship among these respective goods. The good, every case, is what is sought. ever, among goods there are those those sought rather as a means to

er things. So the goodness of a meal	
Goodness is no less a divine attribute	is as a means to nourishment and
also	
than perfection, however, and so we	by virtue of the pleasure it
affords. But	
must consider whether the Necessarily	Aristotle singles out
eudaimonia—	
Existent is good, insofar as the good is	happiness, flourishing, or living
well—	
linked with the monotheistic concep-	as that which is desirable in
itself for	
tion of God. Yet since the good is such	human beings; it is sought as an
end	
an equivocal term, applied in different	and not as a means to other
goods, and	
ways to different things, an exhaustive	is thus the highest good of
human life.	
treatment of the good in Avicenna's	From this point, Aristotle
proceeds to	
philosophy, and its correspondence	analyze what constitutes
eudaimonia,	
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and settles on a life lived in accord	being. Thus, being, in fact, is
what	
with reason that evinces fundamental	is sought. Being, therefore, is
pure	
virtues. The human good, therefore, is	good and absolute perfection.
To	
a manner of life that actualizes or per-	wit, the good, in general, is
that	
fects the inherent potentials of human	which everything seeks within
its	
existence.	own limit, and that by which
its	
This is not the place to explicate Ar-	existence is made complete. Evil,
istotle's ethical theory. What is vital for	conversely, has no definite
es-	
our purposes is his notion that some-	sence. It is rather the
privation of	
thing that is sought may be termed	a substance, or the privation
of a	
good, especially that which is sought	substance's wholeness and
integri-	
for its own sake, for every living thing	ty. Being, accordingly, is
goodness,	
has its fundamental end in the flourish-	and the perfection of being is

the	
ing condition of its own being. In addi-	goodness of being. And that
Being	
tion to this notion, in Avicenna's writ-	which is untouched by
privation,	
ing we find affirmed the Neoplatonic	neither the privation of
substance	
idea that evil does not in itself have any	nor that of something belonging
to	
positive existence but, rather, it is lack	substance, but which is rather
per-	
and deficiency—the privation of being	petually in actuality—that
Being	
and of its perfections, even as blindness	is pure good. A contingent
being	
is a privation in the eye, as Plotinus ex-	in its essence is not pure
good, be-	
plains in the Enneads (1.8.9). The good	cause its essence, simply by
virtue	
is thus the eminent presence of some-	of itself, does not have
existence.	
thing, of being and perfection, insofar	Its essence, therefore, is
subject to	
as the latter are desired for their own	privation, and that which is
sub-	
sake. With these two notions in mind,	ject to privation in a certain
sense	
we can consider what Avicenna writes	is not clear in every aspect
from	
in ash-Shifá regarding the goodness of	evil and deficiency.
Therefore, ab-	
the Necessarily Existent:	solute good is nothing other
than	
the Necessarily Existent in its es-	
The Necessarily Existent, in its es-	sence. (283–84)
sence, is pure good. For the good,	
in general, is that which all things	Thus, for Avicenna, the Necessarily
desire, and that which all things	Existent is pure good in itself,
insofar	
desire is being, or that perfection	as it is pure being and absolute
perfec-	
of being which accords with the	tion, which is precisely what is
sought	
manner of a thing's existence.	as the good by every being,
insofar as	
Nothing desires privation as such,	every being seeks its own
flourishing,	

but only insofar as the nonexistence of a certain thing is conducive to being and the perfection of

Necessarily Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

and for its potentials of life to be actualized in ever greater stages of perfection. Furthermore, the

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Existent is pure good insofar as in it that there is no privation or deficiency, and being thus in it there can be no evil, which is existence, and the privation of the good.

the privation of being and imperfection. But the Necessarily Existent is also good in the sense that all other good proceeds from it. It is good, therefore, Avicennian not only when considered in itself, but

also in its effects. Avicenna writes: describe, in sum, how Avicenna affirms the goodness of Good is also said of that which with

bestows the perfections of things and their virtues. Now, it is evident that the Necessarily Existent hence

must be, by its very essence, that demonstrating which bestows existence onto all other things, and that by which the perfection of anything is realized. It is not is good, therefore, in this aspect as inevitable, even as within it there is no

deficiency or lack. (ash-Shifá 284)

an inevitable feature of anything exists contingently, for such a does not, in itself, have thus is necessarily subject to

tion of being and imperfection.¹⁴ Regrettably, it is outside the

of this essay to give the full

answer to the so-called problem

evil. It is sufficient to

God: first, by identifying the good

being and perfection; second, by

ing that the Necessarily Existent

solute being and perfection, and

pure good; and third, by

that it is the cause and source of

er being and perfection, and hence

the cause of good, insofar as evil

a created thing but merely the

ble privation of existence inherent

any contingently existent being.

Significantly, these notions of the good are readily affirmed in Avicenna's view, if good is properly said of being and its perfection, then Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In Mufávadát (184) or Some the Necessarily Existent is supremely Answered Questions (304), good insofar as it, in its essence, is pure 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives His full support to the being and sheer perfection. Further- Neoplatonic account of evil as privation and, after giving a summation and defense of that any other thing has existence, and its central premise, concludes: it is by it that the existence of any thing is made complete, such as when an acorn grows into an oak tree, or an infant into an adult. In it there is no evil, no deficiency, no lack, no imperfection. Whatsoever God has created, He Evil, similarly, does not proceed from 14 In this connection, moral as op- posed to natural evil may be it. Evil, instead, is something without analyzed as a corruption or imperfection of the any positive existence or essence. It trary to the objective good and will con- of human nature. Though there are operates as the privation of being and flourishing actions, they spring from imperfection in a thing, such as when evil of human nature. Though there are decomposition results in the death of corruptions or im- actions, they spring from an organic being. But this evil is merely perfections of human nature and result from

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merely in non-existence. For example, death is the absence of life: In any case, it is implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's presentation of God that God is wholly good. The goodness When man is no longer sustained by the power of life, he dies. Dark- of God, consisting in His perfect and ness is the absence of light: When inexhaustible being, is expressed in light is no more, darkness reigns. personal terms, even as Bahá'u'lláh re-

Light is a positively existing thing,	peatedly emphasizes the utter
transcendence of God. On this latter	
but darkness has no positive existence of God. On this latter	
theme, He	
existence; it is merely its absence.	writes:
Likewise, wealth is a positively	
existing thing but poverty is mere-	In truth, no praise or mention
of	
ly its absence.	God—how exalted is His
majesty,	
It is thus evident that all evil is	how universal is His grace—can
mere non-existence. Good has a	ever benefit Him. For the way is
positive existence; evil is merely	barred that leadeth to His
unapproachable	
its absence.	proachable sanctuary; the path
is	
obstructed that endeth in that in-	
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, here and in the sur-	accessible Secret, that
Mystery of	
rounding context of the passage, affirms	mysteries. What is the
concourse of	
the Avicennian account of goodness as	the visible set against the
sanctum	
convertible with being and perfection,	of that invisible Essence?
What	
and agrees that evil consists merely in	way can reach Him or road
attain	
its privation. Since evil is an ‘adam, an	to Him? If ever the
infinitesimal	
absence or privation of good, it has no	ant could make mention of Him
positive ontological reality in itself; it	who is the Aim and Desire of
all	
consequently is present in the world	things, perhaps then the pen
could	
only as an instance of non-being, de-	mark down some word relating
of	
ficiency, imperfection, corruption, or	the Eternal. And if ever the
mote	
decline. It follows, then, that God as	of dust could impart any
notion of	
the ultimate positive ontological reality	the blinding splendor of the
Sun, if	
and as perfect being is pure good, from	ever the meanest drop could
even	
Whom only good proceeds: “Whatso-	suggest the full immensity
of the	
ever God has created, He has created	ocean, perhaps then human

tongue

good.”¹⁵

could advance some praise

of the

Best Beloved of the worlds . . .

15 Incidentally, neither Avicenna’s but thou knowest full well

that the

nor ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements on evil invisible Essence is

sanctified of,

entail that there is “no such thing” as evil. transcendent above, and

removed

Although metaphysically evil is non-be-

ing and imperfection, it is a feature in the

world in the same sense that there are such on. Though these things are not

substances,

things as blindness, darkness, death, as so they can be meaningfully

referred to.

Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

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from all in the realm of the visible. mindless principle, devoid of con-

(qtd. in Dávudí 85, provisional sciousness. Avicenna, like

Bahá’u’lláh,

translation) describes the Necessarily Existent

as having munificence and supreme

But even as God, according to generosity; for Avicenna, He is

indeed

Bahá’u’lláh, ultimately transcends the javvád, all-bountiful and

munificent.

knowledge and descriptions of His This characterizes the goodness of

the

creation, He nonetheless is the “Aim Necessarily Existent, which

consists

and Desire of all things” and the “Best in how it bestows existence

onto all

Beloved of the worlds,” and thus the things, as an intelligent and

voluntary

ultimate object of desire and love— act, done not for the sake of

itself but

the highest good. For as pure being for the good of created things. It

is, fur-

itself, He is Himself that paradigm of thermore, difficult to conceive

some-

perfection for which all things long, thing as God that itself is devoid

of any

and as the source of all existence, He knowledge. Therefore, if the

Necessar-

is that inexhaustible wellspring from ily Existent is to be regarded as

divine,

which all conceivable good proceeds. it must have intellect and
 volition,
 Since God is the source of all being and a goodness consonant therewith.
 and therefore of all good, Bahá'u'lláh We will thus consider how
 Avicenna
 stresses His loving kindness, His mer- deduces the intellectual nature of
 the
 cy, and His providence, and it is in Necessarily Existent, and further
 cor-
 these personal terms that He expresses relate his views with the teachings
 of
 the supreme goodness that is God. He Bahá'u'lláh.
 writes, as quoted earlier, that God “res- I
 cuing” all things “from the abasement Though the attribute of simplicity
 of remoteness and the perils of ultimate
 extinction . . . hath received them into was
 His kingdom of incorruptible glory. paramount in showing the ultimate
 Nothing short of His all-encompassing and incomparable nature of the God
 of
 grace, His all-pervading mercy, could Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna, it
 is in the
 have possibly achieved it. How could attribute of intellect and
 knowledge
 it, otherwise, have been possible for that the fullness of His divine
 nature is
 sheer nothingness to have acquired by revealed. For without such a thing
 as in-
 itself the worthiness and capacity to tellect, the Necessarily Existent,
 how-
 emerge from its state of non-existence ever supreme, would seem to amount
 into the realm of being?” (Gleanings to some kind of force requisite
 for the
 64; Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárákih existence of all things, but
 which itself
 338). could not be meaningfully regarded
 as
 But if God's goodness is spoken of God. If Avicenna's God were such as
 in terms of generosity, munificence, this, however, it could not be
 identical
 mercy and love, then He cannot be a to the omniscient God of
 Bahá'u'lláh.
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 To consider Avicenna's Necessarily Necessarily Existent, however,
 is rath-
 Existent as void of consciousness, er the transcendent cause of all

physi-	
however, would be a grave mistake.	cal systems and contingent
entities and	
The attributes of necessity, simplicity,	thus cannot be construed as
something	
singleness, immutability, eternality,	existent within such systems or as
de-	
perfection, and goodness all together	scriptive of them.
point to a reality that is not unknow-	The Necessarily Existent,
therefore,	
ing and uncomprehending, but which	is not a body or any corporeal
reality;	
in its very nature is all-knowing and	it has no mass or dimension,
location	
all-encompassing in its comprehen-	or position, shape or
delimitation, nor	
sion, which is itself pure consciousness	is it the activity and operation
of things	
and intellect, and which consequently	exhibiting such attributes. Its
being al-	
is eminently worthy of the term divine.	together transcends material
realities,	
Avicenna's demonstration of the	while being their ultimate cause.
If,	
intellective nature of the Necessarily	then, the Necessarily Existent is
not	
Existent is brief, but he bases his argu-	matter, could it be mind?
According	
ment from prior principles in his theory	to Avicenna, simply by virtue of
tran-	
of the faculties of the mind. In chapter	scending matter and all material
attri-	
six of Book Eight of ash-Shifá's "Meta-	butes, it could be nothing
else except	
physics," he points out that the Neces-	'aql-i-mahd, pure
intellect. Although	
sarily Existent is wholly immaterial,	this might not seem immediately
intu-	
and that its existence is disassociated	itive, to recognize the
Necessarily Ex-	
istent's nature as intellect is	
from matter in every respect. We saw	
inevitable	
the reasons for this in the discussion	once its radical immateriality is
con-	
of the earlier attributes, especially sim-	sidered in juxtaposition with its
other	
plicity, for if the Necessarily Existent	essential attributes.

Incidentally, that were a corporeal entity, it would be a immaterial substance extended in three dimensions. It consequently would be composed of matter and some form to actualize the potentiality of that matter into a realized kind and arrangement. This especially would characterize it as a contingent entity, however, which is impossible for the Necessarily Existent. A modern person, moreover, could not construe the Necessarily Existent as energy of some kind, for the concept of energy simply refers to the work or activity exhibited in and by physical systems, essence which are contingent entities. The distinct Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

the Necessarily Existent is in itself has profound one's worldview, for if the Existent does exist, then is false; if materialism is false, explanations of reality, and mind, need not, and should not, be fined to what exists in matter. If, then, the Necessarily is immaterial, how should it be scribed? Among immaterial things, there are indeed concepts and tions that the human mind after considering the universal of a thing, such as humanity, as

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from its instantiation in particular horse physical manifestations, such as individual human beings. Such concepts, actuality for Avicenna, would constitute form cannot that is not joined with matter, form must, which exists not concretely as a particular but in an intellect as a universal. material But the Necessarily Existent cannot be a mere intelligible form conceived recall

house; the intelligible form of a cannot win a race. The Necessarily istent, however, is a cause in and supremely so. It, therefore, be some inert, immaterial idea. It then, be pure intellect, unbounded by the realm of contingent, existence.¹⁶ In addition, the reader may

by a contingent mind, for then it could not be the ultimate cause of all existence. What is more, Avicenna rejects the Platonist notion that abstractions, such as “the Beautiful,” “the True,” and “the Equal,” exist independently of concrete reality or any intellects to conceive of them, and any such thing, consequently, could not be the Necessarily Existent. It follows for Avicenna, then, that the Necessarily Existent, in being wholly immaterial, must be pure intellect. This follows because it could not be a mere *ma‘qúl*, an intelligible reality, dependent on or subsisting within an intellect. The Necessarily Existent, therefore, must be a fully independent *‘áqil* or agent of intellection of all and knowledge. It is, in the perfection of its immaterial being, a comprehending reality rather than a comprehended object. Avicenna’s conclusion may be further defended by pointing out that immaterial realities could conceivably include either intelligible forms—uni-

from the section on the Necessarily Existent is not from its act of being; it is pure act. Therefore, this act of the Necessarily Existent is one of What, then, is the actuality, action, the mode of existence a wholly immaterial reality? The immaterial action conceivable is intellection, knowing and understanding as opposed to sensing and perceiving. If intellection is the act proper to something immaterial, the Necessarily Existent must be intellect, insofar as there is material in its being. Furthermore, the Necessarily Existent is the creator and source of things, which possesses all the “perfections of being” unitedly in a way. The infinite creative power originates and sustains all existence cannot be reduced to any one immaterial form that does not possess, in a higher way of pure unity, all the perfections present in

the existentials and abstract objects—or minds and intellects. But things within the former category of immaterial reality seem causally inert: the number 100 does not put a hundred dollars in one's pocket; the idea of blue cannot paint a contemporary theistic philosophers; see Craig.

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immaterially, through an act of perfect intellection, and thus be the source of their realization in the contingent order of existence. The Necessarily Existent, therefore, could not be an immaterial reality, like a mathematical abstraction, which in itself is bereft of knowledge and consciousness, but must be pure intellect enacting perfect knowledge resulting being and comprehension. Thus, by virtue of its absolute immateriality, Avicenna regards the Necessarily Existent as 'aql-i-mahd, pure intellect. At this stage, the justification for Avicenna's characterizing the Necessarily Existent as divine, as truly God, stands ever more revealed. For

tence of the fathomlessly vast cosmos. But Divine Intellect conceivably comprehend all the perfections of 16 A point familiar to some God immediately knows Himself, is thus conscious of Himself in ness of His being. As Avicenna in chapter twenty-nine of the námih's "Metaphysics," something intelligible, as sensible, is that it be matter and its concomitants. When form actualizes matter, the ing exists materially and is by the senses; it is extended in mensions, and can be seen, felt, smelled, and heard. But thing is apprehended by the the form is considered separate material instantiation, and thus ligible, but not sensible. The

what, other than God, could the Necessarily Existent be—that supreme intellect which is the self-subsistent cause In order, and creator of all things, that source by which is absolutely one, incomparable, from unique, eternal, immutable, perfect, abstracted and wholly good? One may question being the actual existence of this reality, but matter is one cannot question that it deserves the there name God. For the Necessarily Existent, in being pure intellect, cannot be self-apprehension. a mere what, but is properly a who in the fullest significance of that word. As the object, such, for the sake of brevity, the Necessarily Existent will henceforth be called so God interchangeably and referred to as known He. Being immaterial, God, of course, aspect of is not a body and thus free of sex and is gender; nonetheless, in being intellect, in-God cannot properly be referred to as to the an it, for that would imply He is void Furthermore, of mind. since God has no parts, His essential But if God is pure intellect, what does act He intellect? According to Avicenna, very

say, of food is not sensible; it thought of as an abstract it cannot be smelled or tasted. then, for something to be grasped by the intellect, it must be removed from matter and considered as an form. An intellect, therefore, in immaterial and removed from immediately known to itself, for is no impediment, no matter, that obstruct direct

Hence, God knows Himself. He is at once knower, ‘āqil, and object of His knowledge, ma‘qúl. course, God is absolutely simple, God as the knower and as the is identical; there is not one Him that knows and another that known. In knowing Himself, the intellect that knows is identical intellect that is known.

being cannot be distinct from His of knowledge, so He is also the

act of self-apprehending intellection;
it

He is knower, known, and knowing all
at once and in perfect unity—intellect,
intellection.

intellection, and intelligible. So God,
as pure and absolutely simple intellect,
universal

is His knowledge just as much as He is
His necessary existence, His simplic-
ity, His singleness, His immutability,
His perfection, and so forth.
regard

The nature of God's knowledge is
explored to great depth in chapter six
of ash-Shifá's "Metaphysics," in which
of ev-

Avicenna analyzes the implications of
God's knowledge. Since in God there
is perfect unity, He must be identical
to His act of intellection; He is His
knowledge. His knowledge, therefore,
by

must be as absolute, as necessary, as
uncaused, and as immutable as He is
in Himself. God, then, cannot come
of

to know something, for that would
necessitate a change in His essence,
which is impossible. Nor could God
contemplate a number of separate
things in changing sequence, as human
beings do, for that would degrade His
im-

simplicity. His knowledge, therefore,
cannot be like human knowledge inso-
effect.

far as it utterly transcends contingen-
cy, mutability, and multiplicity. How,
then, could God know anything other
than Himself? In one sense, God only
knows Himself, but in knowing Him-
self He knows Himself as the cause of
in-

all things, and He thus knows them in

to attribute imperfection to Him,

is likewise improper to ascribe to
Him multiple acts of

Rather, the Necessarily Existent
intellects all things in a

fashion. And yet no particular es-
capes Him: "Not even the weight
of an atom, in the heavens or on
earth, escapes him"¹⁷ . . . In

to how this can be, when He ap-
prehends His essence and appre-
hends Himself as the source

ery existent thing, He apprehends
the principles of all beings and
what proceeds from them; nothing
whatsoever exists except insofar
as its existence is necessitated

Him through a cause—as we have
shown. The confluence of these
causes results in the origination

particular things. The First knows
these causes and their interrela-
tions; He thus knows the necessi-
ty of what results from them, the
intervals of time between events,
and their recurrences. For it is

possible that He should know the
cause and not the necessary

He thus comprehends particular
things insofar as they are univer-
sal. (ash-Shifá 288)

Thus, God knows things not by sense
perception, but through His perfect

tellectual knowledge of Himself as

the
an eternal, universal way. In describing ultimate cause of all particular
things
God's knowledge and omniscience, and their necessary interactions,
in be-
Avicenna writes: ing the eternal source of their
existence.
His knowledge of all things, then, is
Even as affirming a plurality of
acts to the Necessarily Existent is
17 A reference to the Qur'án, 34:3.
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universal and eternal, identical to His God's attributes are identical
to one an-
unchanging knowledge of Himself other and to His essence—that He
is ab-
as the source of all things. He knows solute unity. Among the attributes
that
things by virtue of being their creator, Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly
affirms of God,
even if through secondary causes, in a of course, is His unbounded and
all-en-
manner very roughly analogous to how compassing knowledge, His complete
a novelist knows, in a universal way, and universal wisdom. He writes of
all the particulars of her novel, the ac- God in the
Lawh-i-Madíniy-i-Tawhíd,
tions of the characters, and the neces- saying: "He is the Ever-Abiding
who
sary effects of those actions in the plot, perisheth not, from Whose
knowledge
by virtue of being the ultimate creator nothing can escape, Whose grace
en-
of the novel. It is in this way that Avi- compasseth all contingent being,
Who
cenna affirms the omniscience of God. knoweth all the secrets of
men's hearts
This is not the place, however, to and everything that proceeds from
explore the many implications of Avi- them" (Má'idíy-i-Ásmání
4:314, provi-
cenna's account of divine knowledge sional translation). If
knowledge is an
and omniscience, especially as God's attribute of God, and if God's
attributes
knowledge relates to particular things. are, as we have seen, identical to
His
My purpose is rather to show that Avi- Essence, then His essence is not

onto-
 cenna demonstrates that the Necessar- logically distinct from His
 knowledge
 ily Existent is God in the full sense of or intellection any more than it
 is dif-
 divinity, by establishing that the Nec- ferent from His perfection,
 goodness,
 ecessarily Existent is pure intellect and or immutability. Therefore, if God
 es-
 omniscient intelligence. Had Avicenna sentially is His knowledge, it
 follows
 rejected God's personal¹⁸ and omni- under Bahá'u'lláh's
 teachings that He
 scient nature, the Necessarily Existent is immaterial intellect, who alone
 fully
 of his philosophy would not correlate comprehends His own being.
 with the God of Bahá'u'lláh. That Avi- On this theme
 Bahá'u'lláh states in
 cenna instead affirms this personal and the same Tablet:
 omniscient nature of God yet again
 indicates the theological harmony that He is the Eternal from Whom
 exists between Avicenna's thought and nothing can depart, unto Whom
 Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. nothing can be joined,
 Who is, in
 We saw earlier that Bahá'u'lláh val- truth, the Exalted, the
 Omnipotent,
 idates the Avicennian position that God the Supreme. Nothing but His own
 is simple and non-composite. As such, Essence can acknowledge His
 Bahá'u'lláh explicitly affirms that oneness, and nothing but
 His own
 Being can in truth recognize Him.
¹⁸ In the sense of having conscious- All that hath been originated and
 ness, knowledge, and intellect, not in the called into existence in this
 world
 sense of being like a contingent human hath been created only at the
 word
 person.
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 57
 of His behest. None other God is within Him, His essential attribute
 of
 there but Him, the Almighty, the knowledge, would be contingent on,
 Munificent. (Má'idíy-i-Ásmání and in need of, other things,
 which is
 4:314, provisional translation) impossible. But if God knows, as
 Avi-
 cenna argues, not through a contingent

If, according to Bahá'u'lláh, God knows, is known to Himself, and is self-apprehending identical to that attribute of knowledge in perfect oneness and simplicity, it follows that Avicenna's analysis of God is correct, namely, that God is intellect, intelligible, and act of intellection, in absolute unity. Here we see that Bahá'u'lláh not only confirms the theological necessity of Avicenna's view; Avicenna's analysis provides a framework by which one can understand the philosophical significance of Bahá'u'lláh's attribute of own statements, insofar as Bahá'u'lláh explicitly states that God's attributes are one and identical to His essence. This proposition from Bahá'u'lláh is intelligible if one accepts Avicenna's argument that to be necessarily existent is to be immaterial, that to be immaterial is to be intellect, and that to be intellect is to have knowledge. God thus remains one, His attributes being identical to His essence and to one another. Insofar,	perception of any rather through a direct vision of Himself as absolute and as the universal cause and of any kind of contingent being soever, who encompasses within self and in utter unity all then 'Abdu'l-Bahá's only intelligible but necessary, given on the independent and ture of God. Reflecting back on the goodness examined in the section, we now see how one can deed construe God's goodness in sonal terms, as cenna both do. This is because unchanging and absolute creation things, His bestowal of existence all things, is effected by Him He is intellect and consciousness—and thus in and not unwitting compulsion.
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Furthermore, Avicenna's account of God's knowledge is in accord with, good and and even makes philosophical sense of, He is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation in chapter described eighty-two of Some Answered Questions that God's knowledge is not dependent on objects of knowledge. That in- is, 'Abdu'l-Bahá insists that, although limitations of God has knowledge, He is not dependent on anything external to Himself in order to have that knowledge. If He were thus dependent, then something

then, as God is pure good and sheer perfection, the source of all all perfections—and insofar as intellect—He may well be as all-bountiful and munificent. terms, of course, can only be to Him by analogy, for His bounty finitely transcends the human generosity. A further of this point, however, leads us sarily to the attribute of will.

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W not to will; and yet it is not incidental, for it is necessitated by its essential nature. Throughout Bahá'u'lláh's writings, these occur and indeed in each of the Abrahamic strict religions, there is much mention of chance God's will. It is indeed by virtue of causes God's having will that His creative act persons are can be construed as generous, and it is by virtue of will that personal terms their of devotion can be applied to Him. How, then, does Avicenna deduce the attribute of will, of volition, from the nature of the Necessarily Existent? In this connection, it must first be noted and that for neither Bahá'u'lláh nor Avicenna, then, as God is pure good and sheer perfection, the source of all all perfections—and insofar as intellect—He may well be as all-bountiful and munificent. terms, of course, can only be to Him by analogy, for His bounty finitely transcends the human generosity. A further of this point, however, leads us sarily to the attribute of will.

ture. As to incidental acts, when there is neither intent, nor necessity, but some element of or an incidental confluence of and potentialities, or when compelled to act by an external power or agent, and not according to own nature or will.

When one acts knowingly, however—when one acts with an understanding of the act and oneself as author of that act, non-accidentally without compulsion—then such

an act,
 cenna can God's will be an attribute will."
 actually distinct from the others, on willful
 account of His simplicity. Therefore, or voluntary actions into those done
 even as God's necessity is His simplic- due to reason and knowledge, those
 ity, which is His immateriality, which done due to supposition (gumán),
 and
 is His intellect and knowledge, so is those due to imagination
 (takhayyul),
 God's will, for Avicenna, identical to and it is the first that he will
 ascribe to
 His knowledge. God. A voluntary act done in accord
 To understand this, one may con- with knowledge, Avicenna states, is
 sider how Avicenna makes clear in like that of the physician or
 geometri-
 the Dánishnámih, specifically chapter cian, who applies a treatment or
 draws
 thirty-three of its "Metaphysics," that a figure according to what they
 know
 will concerns the manner by which intellectually.
 an agent acts. Avicenna immediate- In regard to God, His act cannot
 be
 ly distinguishes between acts that are incidental to Him, for He has no
 inci-
 due to nature, due to will, or due to dental attributes, as we saw in the
 sec-
 "accident," i.e. incidentally. Regarding tions "Simplicity" and
 "Singleness."
 acts due merely to nature, one could He is purely His own essential
 being,
 present the example of the Sun, which and cannot be affected by anything
 illumines the earth by the necessity of whatsoever, for what He is is
 necessary
 its inherent nature; we may well pre- and immutable. Therefore, His act
 can-
 sume that the Sun does not choose to not be incidental to Him or
 compelled
 do so, nor does it understand what it or conditioned by another.
 Similarly,
 is doing, nor does it understand itself His act cannot mechanically be mere-
 as the agent of that effect. The Sun's ly due to His nature, for that
 would
 action is therefore due to nature, and imply that His act could be separate
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

or independent from His knowledge, whatso-
 which is impossible because of His simplicity. The act of God as the Necessarily Existent, therefore, must be done in knowledge, for He is Himself pure intellect and comprehends Himself perfection,
 self in the fullness of His being. He it is
 thus knows that He creates all other realities, and that He ultimately causes and sustains their existence. Likewise, that
 He knows His creative act, and Himself (Dánishnámih
 as the author of that act, and moreover acts without external compulsion. He therefore acts willfully and voluntarily and
 ly. Consequently, since God perfectly He
 knows and fully wills what Avicenna goal or
 calls the “order of the good” (nizám-terms—which He de-
 i-khayr) that proceeds from Him, the creative
 profound and fundamentally unmerited equiva-
 share of existence that all things receive imply that
 of Him, He is the author of a voluntary could
 action of boundless generosity and purpose
 bounty. Since He understands this, the bestowal of being from God is a manifestation of His goodness, His bounty, and His providence. To state the matter again, God, in the supremacy of His being, is not compelled by anything outside of Him. The creation of the all
 world, therefore, proceeds according to His volition from the superabundance good,

hand, has no needs or desires
 ever. Avicenna writes:
 We find that the Necessarily Existent, Who is perfect being, or Who rather transcends
 has no goal in His action, and
 likewise unbefitting of Him that He should know something as being of utility to Him, such
 He should desire it.
 394)
 In other words, God is complete
 perfect self-sufficient existence.
 thus desires nothing, and has no
 aim—in human
 sires to be realized through the
 act. His will, therefore, is not
 lent to desire, for that would
 there is something in God that
 be actuated by a final cause, a
 external to Him.
 Avicenna further writes in the Dánishnámih:
 The Divine will is nothing other than God’s knowledge of how the order of the existence of
 things must be, and His knowledge that their existence is

of His self-subsistent existence. rather Nonetheless, Avicenna is explicit in His affirmation that God's will should existence of not be likened to human volition. Hu- the man beings have needs and entertain His ends because they are not complete and perfect in their existence. They will something because they desire that thing, and the realization of an end is for their own sake. God, on the other 60	though not for His sake, but for themselves, for the meaning of "goodness" is the everything as it must be, and providence of God consists in knowledge of how things must be, such as the best ordering of the limbs of man and the motion of the heavens. (394–95)
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The purpose of this passage is to state account that, while in human beings intellect is with something distinct from their will for to divine the things they desire, in God there is a show complete unity of attributes. Thus, His really nature as pure intellect is identical with God's His being a voluntary agent of His ac- intellectual tion, which is nothing else but the per- es- fect knowledge He has in His essence Con- of the eternal procession of existence attributes from Him according to the "order of also be the good." His will is His knowledge, will a and His knowing act is necessarily vol- particu- untary, even as there is nothing outside changing of Him that could compel Him, just Avicenna as He has no desire or end He needs	His works; that is, Avicenna's of God's will is in accordance Bahá'u'lláh's commitment simplicity. Avicenna is able to how God's attribute of will is identical to His knowledge, how knowledge consists in His being, which in turn is His very sence as the Necessarily Existent. sequently, God is one in His and essence. But if God must "one in His acts," He cannot number of particular things at lar times, as conditioned by circumstances. Therefore, as says, He wills one primary act
---	--

eter-
to realize that could somehow influ- nally—the very act of His
self-sub-
ence His action. His will, therefore, is sistent and necessary
existence—and
as absolute and unconditioned as His from this voluntary and
intellective
knowledge and essential being. act there proceeds, in a universal
way
Avicenna’s account of Divine will— as governed by His providence, a
sin-
while persuasive, coherent, and consis- gle effect: the cascading sequence
of
tent with his account of God’s other beings in the contingent
world.¹⁹ This
attributes, especially His simplicity—is universal and eternal creative
act is
subtle, even abstruse, and no doubt de- thus one, and is identical to
God’s will
serves a more comprehensive treatment and His knowledge. We see once
again,
of its own. The brief discussion above, therefore, how Avicenna’s
analysis il-
however, should suffice to ground an lumines the rational basis and
philo-
exploration of the theological harmony sophical content of
Bahá’u’lláh’s own
between Bahá’u’lláh’s and Avicenna’s statements.
accounts of divine will. Third, Bahá’u’lláh
moreover affirms
First, both Avicenna and Bahá’u’lláh Avicenna’s notion that God
has no need
posit that it is proper to speak of God or desire for things outside
Himself,
as having will, as demonstrated by and thus He does not create the
world
Bahá’u’lláh’s oft-repeated statement for His own sake, out of
desire. He cre-
regarding God, “yaf‘alu má yashá’” ates for the good of the
creature, and
(He doeth whatsoever He willeth). Sec-
ond, Avicenna’s account conforms to 19 How the multiple
entities of the
Bahá’u’lláh’s statement, discussed in world proceed from the
simple being and
the section on “Simplicity,” that God is unitary act of God shall be
examined in the

one in His essence, His attributes, and
“Creation
and Cosmology.”

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out of His knowledge of the order of the
Bahá'u'lláh's and

good in the contingent realm. For God,
is to

as we have seen, is in Himself perfect
paper.

being, and thus stands in need of noth-
divine

ing whatsoever. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,
complete

Bahá'u'lláh appeals to this fact when
attributes.

He says that people ought to accept the
religion of God for their own benefit,
and not because He has any need of
worship. “This is the changeless Faith
by defi-

of God,” Bahá'u'lláh says in reference
no limitations.

to His own revelation, “eternal in the
conception

past, eternal in the future. Let him that
infinity, His

seeketh, attain it; and as to him that
on

hath refused to seek it—verily, God is
power,

Self-Sufficient, above any need of His
each of

creatures” (85–86, 173). Similarly, in
omni-

the Kitáb-i-Íqán Bahá'u'lláh states:
omnipresence,

“that ideal King hath, throughout eter-
nity, been in His Essence independent
proper

of the comprehension of all beings, and
Exis-

will continue, forever, in His own Be-
positions,

ing to be exalted above the adoration of
Bahá'u'lláh

third and last part of this paper,

ment, however, of

Avicenna's account of creation

be found in the final part of this

Until then, we must consider the

attribute that will close and

our discussion of God's

I

That which is infinite must be,

nition, not finite; it has

The classical monotheistic

of God often stresses His

lack of any limit, whether imposed

His being, His knowledge, His

or His goodness. The idea of

the omni- attributes, whether

science, omnipotence,

or omnibenevolence, thus follows
from divine infinity. It is thus

to speak of how the Necessarily

tent, according to Avicenna's

must be infinite, and how

every soul” (52–53, 34).
infinitude.

likewise supports God’s

Thus for Bahá’u’lláh, as for Avicen-
how

But here we should also consider

na, God could not have willed the exis-
identical

the infinite is, by extension,

tence of the world through any need on

His part, or any desire for something

to know and love God. Does this contradict

that would have made His existence

Bahá’u’lláh’s other statements and imply

more sound or complete. God already

that God wanted or needed recognition

is perfection, or even above perfection,
lies

or worship? That the human purpose

fawq at-tamám. God’s creating is thus
recognition of God

in the knowledge and

done not for Himself but for the sake

does not entail, in fact, that

this recognition

of His creation and His knowledge of

benefits Him in any way

whatsoever. Rath-

the order of the good that creation con-
solely

er, the duty of recognizing God is

stitutes; hence, He is all-bountiful and

for the good of the human being.

Since a

supremely generous.²⁰ A fuller treat-
the high-

human being is a rational animal,

est good of the intellect is to recognize God

²⁰ A reader may here wonder about
goodness

as the source of all being and as

those instances in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings,
above worship, the

itself. Though God is

such as the Short Obligatory Prayer, in

knowledge of Him is the highest

good of

which He says that humanity was created

the beings that He created to be

rational.

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with the supremely transcendent, for

and dimension.²¹

Bahá’u’lláh routinely emphasizes

By the same argument, we

realize

the incomprehensible transcendence

there is no limit to God’s power,

for all

of God, how He surpasses every cat-

power proceeds from Him, and He de-

egory of contingent existence, and

rives His power from no other.

Indeed,

eludes any direct apprehension of His

a thing has power, or the ability to

act
essence. in a certain way, by virtue first of
ex-
First, we should reflect on the in-isting and then of existing as the kind
evitable conclusion that God, as the of thing it is. Both these facts,
how-
Necessarily Existent, submits to no ever, are contingent upon the
creative
physical limit. This is because He is act of God, His ceaseless bestowal
of
not material and has no extension in existence. God therefore has a power
three dimensions. As such, God can- in Himself that knows no limitation,
not have any spatial delimitation. He whereas the power of contingent be-
cannot have a certain form, shape, or ings is limited by their essential
con-
figure, imposing on Him the limitation tingency and ontological poverty. We
of being materially present in a partic- should not understand omnipotence,
ular location in space. Nor could God, however, as meaning “the ability
to do
as discussed earlier, be physically ex- anything whatsoever,” for that,
taken
tended throughout all material reality, literally, is not an attribute that
could
enveloping and penetrating discrete be ascribed to the Necessarily
Existent.
objects. This would imply taking on He cannot, for instance, cease to
exist
the accidental qualities and limita- or choose to do so, since He just is
tions of mutable, contingent realities, necessary being, nor could He in any
changing with them and taking on way descend into the conditions of
their multiplicity. As the immaterial, the created order; as
Bahá’u’lláh says,
simple, single, and necessarily exis- “the Unseen can in no wise
incarnate
tent cause of all contingent realities, His Essence and reveal it unto
men”
God cannot be conceived of in this (Gleanings 49; Muntakhabátí 19).
Nor
way. God accordingly is omnipresent
only if “presence” does not signify 21 I must here admit that
Avicenna,
occupying or filling a point in space as far as I can tell, does not
specifically
as a body does. Rather, since what- treat the idea of God’s
omnipresence in
ever exists has its being from God, ash-Shifá or the Dánishnámih. But
as it

there is no place where the supremely infinite creative, ceaselessly sustaining, and one of boundless ontological power of God's is not evident and intimately operative. He thus is everywhere in this sense, but not in the manner of occupying material space and having mass. Necessarily Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

was illustrative of the idea of and immateriality, I here adapted Thomas Aquinas' arguments for omnipresence found in the *Summa logica* (1:8:1–2), an argument that compatible with (perhaps even by) Avicenna's account of the

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should we expect that God can bring forth. logical impossibilities into being, for rather an impossibility, in its proper sense, is merely semantic incoherence. As such, contingent God cannot create four-sided triangles or married bachelors. Impossible in things simply cannot exist; power is that set over the possible, not the impossible, as Avicenna himself notes (McGinnis 187). God, therefore, is infinite in power, when power is understood functionally. He is thus omnipotent, as Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly proclaims. essence, are God likewise is infinite in His knowledge. He knows all things by virtue of being their eternal and universal limited

omnipotent, omniscient, and so The Necessarily Existent has, or is, the superabundance of perfect being. This is because, unlike beings, He has no essence distinct from His existence. A contingent being, contrast, has a particular essence, which makes it what it is—that necessarily defines, distinguishes, limits it. For example, the powers and functions of a rose bush, stemming from the irreducible fact of its necessarily limited—they are not of a dog, a dolphin, or a human being. The rose bush's existence is

sal cause as pure intellect; His knowl- due to the kind of thing it is; it
 can only
 edge is therefore perfect and complete. exist according to the limitations,
 and
 There consequently is no limit to His inherent potentials, of what it is.
 It can
 knowledge, and He may well be called only act in conformity with the
 limita-
 omniscient. Nor is there any limit to tions of what it is. Consequently,
 its ex-
 His goodness. For if evil is privation istence as a rose bush cannot
 transcend
 of being, He is absolute good in that the limitation of its “rose”
 essence. And
 He is absolute being. And insofar as since a rose’s essence is
 distinct from
 all possible good proceeds from Him, its existence, it is astoundingly
 limited
 and insofar as creation is a supremely in its being, for it has no
 existence of
 bountiful act on His part, there is no itself; its essence requires an
 external
 limit to His goodness, and He is thus bestowal of existence, and even
 when
 omnibenevolent. that essence is made existent, it
 is in-
 But God’s infinity can be expressed herently limited in the operations it
 can
 on an even deeper level, beyond omni- perform.
 presence, omnipotence, omniscience, But God has no essence distinct
 and omnibenevolence; it can be ex- from His necessary existence.
 Hence,
 pressed at the level of being itself. A there is in Him no essence that
 only
 little reflection will show that there contingently exists; He therefore,
 as
 can be no limitation to the being of we have seen, exists of Himself.
 But
 the Necessarily Existent. Perhaps we more profoundly, His being is not
 lim-
 then should resurrect an admittedly ob- ited, is not circumscribed or
 delimited,
 scure word, and term Him omniëssent, by any essence distinct from His
 exis-
 “all-being” or “all-existing,” under the tence. His being then has
 no limit, no
 same paradigm by which one calls Him limitation, no condition, no

restriction.

Whereas every contingent being is a transcends kind and type entirely. Avicenna accordingly writes: “It finite being, the Necessarily Existent has thus been made clear that the First is Himself infinite being. As infinite has no genus, no quiddity, no quality, being, He naturally can act as the infinite, no spatial or temporal no quantifiable, the all-bountiful source of location, no the existence of all that is brought forth equal, no partner, and no contrary—exalted and glorified is He—nor into being, and all that is sustained in does He being. have any definition”

(ash-Shifá 282).

By virtue of the identity of God’s That is, the Necessarily Existent has no essence distinct from His essence with His existence, He transcends all categories to which contingent beings belong. This follows of God’s This is yet another indication because a contingent being, in having infinitude—His being cannot be contained by kind and species, an essence that can be considered in genus and differentia, nor can it be isolated from its existence, has an essence that can be defined by the logical terms of genus and differentia—that intellect comprehends a thing by considering its essence abstracted from a particular instance—the concept, say, of is, what general category something belongs to and what distinguishes it in contrast to any seen or particular animal—ticular animal—the within that category. For instance, a triangle belongs to the genus of “plane figure,” and has the differentia of having three closed sides; a triangle is hends a thing by separating that

thing
 thus defined as a closed plane figure
 particular
 having three sides. The existence of
 intellect com-
 any particular triangle is limited to and
 it; by
 circumscribed by that definition. Being
 general
 itself, however, does not have a logi-
 recognizing it
 cal genus-differentia definition.²² Now,
 genus by
 even if only one triangle existed in all
 no es-
 concrete reality, it could still be defined
 particular exis-
 as belonging to a general kind, and as
 belong
 distinguished by a specific differentia.
 differentia,
 But since God has no essence distinct
 reasoning
 from His existence, He has no limit in
 the
 the sense of a standard definition. He
 com-
 is not even “one of a kind,” but rather
 Significantly, this
 is a central aspect of Bahá’u’lláh’s the-
 ology—that God transcends all other
 22 Avicenna’s idea that existence is
 being,
 an irreducible or basic concept is discussed
 and
 in the first section of this article.

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intellective apprehension. One can
 come to the recognition of God’s exis-
 finite
 tence only indirectly, and not through
 writes
 actual perception or comprehension of
 is
 His essence. This is well expressed by
 exis-

conceptually from its own
 existence. Likewise, the
 prehends an essence by defining
 regarding it as belonging to a
 type, a genus; and by
 as distinguished within that
 a differentia. But since God has
 sence distinct from His
 tence, and accordingly does not
 to any genus or have any
 it follows from Avicenna’s
 that He must uniquely transcend
 power of the human intellect to
 prehend His reality.

God defies comprehension because
 He transcends the limitations of
 reality. In this spirit, Avicenna
 that “when you recognize Him, He
 described, after His individual

‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He writes in His address to Auguste Forel: one can form a conception of God, not Now concerning the Essence of Divinity: in truth it is on no account determined by anything by apart from its own nature, and of can in no wise be comprehended. recognizing For whatsoever can be conceived are by man is a reality that hath limitations and is not unlimited; it is circumscribed, not all-embracing. It can be comprehended by man, and is controlled by him . . . How then can the contingent conceive intimate, the Reality of the absolute? . . . Thus man cannot grasp the Essence of Divinity, but can, by his reasoning power, by observation, by his intuitive faculties and the revealing power of his faith, believe in God, discover the bounties of His Grace. He becometh certain that though the Divine Essence is unseen of the eye, and the logical (mantiqíyyih) principles.” This existence of the Deity is intangible, yet conclusive spiritual proofs chapter two assert the existence of that unseen Reality. (Tablet 15–16; Min Makátib Hadrat ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Avicenna’s. Rational 259)23

tence, by the negation of Him” (ash-Shifá 283). That is by direct comprehension of His transcendent essence, but by affirming essence in its transcendent nature, negating from it all the attributes contingent things, and by that positive assertions about God on the order of analogy. On this ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that no soul has ever fathomed the reality of the Essence of the Divinity so as to be able to describe, praise, or glorify it . . . Yet we ascribe certain names and attributes to the reality of Divinity and praise Him for His sight, His hearing, His power, His life and knowledge. We affirm these names and attributes not to affirm the perfections of statement indicates port, as likewise evidenced by of Mufávadát or Some Answered for philosophical arguments for tence of God, such as recognition of God is, however,

fully com-

plimentary with an experiential and inward

23 Here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in Per- apprehension of the presence of the Di-

sian that one can believe in God through vine, as indicated by

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s men-

qavá‘id-i-‘aqlíyyih va nazaráyyih va tion here of “intuitive faculties” (tulú‘át-i-

mantiqíyyih, literally through “rational fikríyyih) and the “revealing power of his

(‘aqlíyyih), theoretical (nazaráyyih), and faith”

(inkisháfát-i-vijdáníyyih).

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God, but to deny that He has any single is to deny Him multiplicity; to imperfections. say He is immutable is to negate from

When we observe the contin- Him any change or motion; to say He

gent world, we see that ignorance is eternal is to assert that He does not

is imperfection and knowledge is exist in time and is not subject to alter-

perfection, and thus we say that ation or decay; to say He is good is to

the sanctified Essence of the Di- understand that in Him there can be no vinity is all-knowing. Weakness privation of being such as contingent is imperfection and power is per- entities undergo; to say He is pure in-

fection, and thus we say that that tellect is to clarify the implications of

sanctified and divine Essence is His immaterial being; lastly, to say He

all-powerful. It is not that we can is infinite is the logical conclusion of

understand His knowledge, His negating from Him the deficiencies of sight, His hearing, His power, or contingent being, for whatever exists His life as they are in themselves: contingently is limited and finite—God

This is assuredly beyond our must therefore be infinite. Even when comprehension, for the essential one ascribes necessity to Him, one names and attributes of God are comes to this through the recognition identical with His Essence, and that there must be a reality that is not

His Essence is sanctified above all contingent.

understanding. (Some Answered Expressing this theme,

Bahá’u’lláh

Questions 168; Mufávadát 105) Himself writes in the

Lawh-i-Basít al-

Haqíqat, with respect to God: “Exalted
We see here that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is do-
above

ing precisely what Avicenna has de-
scribed: employing the via negativa
of apophatic theology—recognizing
God through negating of Him what He
is not, denying that He is at all simi-
lar to contingent reality. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
provisional

first recognizes implicitly that God, as
absolute being, is necessarily existent
God’s

and not contingent and dependent.
From that premise, He deduces divine
attributes through a two-fold process
transcen-

of negation and analogy. He specifical-
explains in

ly negates from Him those deficiencies
is

of contingent reality, and thus asserts
things.

God’s perfection. Accordingly, to say
revealeth

God is simple is to assert that He is
non-composite; to say He is one and
Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

these signs are reflected and can be
Bahá’u’lláh,

seen in the book of existence, and the
His beau-

scrolls that depict the shape and pattern
contained and

of the universe are indeed a most great
glory—

book” (Tablets 60; Ishráqát 116). And
Lambden

in this connection Bahá’u’lláh fur-
“radiant

ther relates, again in the Lawh-i-Basít
‘light’, ‘brillian-

al-Haqíqat: “God Himself hath ever
‘excellence’, ‘goodli-

been, and shall forever be, sanctified
(13).

is He, and again exalted is He,

being incarnate in anything whatso-
ever, or bound by any limitation, or
joined to anything in creation! He
hath ever been sanctified from, and
transcendent above, all else besides
Himself” (Iqtidárát 108,

translation). No human conception,
therefore, could be identical to

infinite being, however much all
things, in having received existence
from Him, are signs of that

dent reality, as Bahá’u’lláh

the Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih: “God

immeasurably exalted above all

Every created being however

His signs which are but emanations
from Him and not His Own Self. All

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All-Glorious. Thus, for

God’s majesty, His jalál, and

ty, His jamál, are at once

exemplified precisely in God’s

His bahá—which Stephen

has perceptively glossed as

‘glory’, ‘splendour’,

cy’, ‘beauty’,

ness’, ‘divine majesty’”

from ascent, descent, and limitation, On God's majesty,
 Bahá'u'lláh ex-
 as well as connection and association claims in a supplication: "Thou
 art
 [with any other thing]. All other things, He to Whose power and to Whose
 in contrast, abide in the sphere of their dominion every tongue hath
 testified,
 specific limitations" (Iqtidárát 106, and Whose majesty and Whose
 sov-
 provisional translation). ereignty every understanding heart
 In both Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna, hath acknowledged." And as to
 God's
 consequently, there is a wonder and an beauty, He implores: "Let the
 object of
 awe expressed before the impenetrable mine ardent quest be Thy most
 resplen-
 being of the Divine, the unfathom- dent, Thine adorable, and
 ever-blessed
 able infinitude of God, who is at once Beauty." But it is alone God's
 glory,
 recognized as the illimitable source His bahá, from which the very
 title
 of all things, and as the ultimate, the Bahá'u'lláh—the Glory of
 God—pro-
 unconditioned and transcendent reali- ceeds, and the name of the
 Bahá'í Faith
 ty. This wonder and awe experienced originates. "Lauded be Thy
 name" thus
 before the Infinite is further expressed proclaims Bahá'u'lláh, "O
 my God and
 in what could be termed the epithets the God of all things, my Glory and
 the
 of praise, those titles that particular- Glory of all things" (Prayers and
 Med-
 ly extol God's exaltation above all itations 248; 178; 59; Munáját
 166;
 praise, His sublimity, His majesty, and 121; 45).
 His glory, as well as His all-arresting Even here, in the epithets of
 splendor and all-entrancing beauty. praise, Avicenna is in harmony with
 And here too is light often the chosen Bahá'u'lláh, as the
 clear-eyed philos-
 metaphor for expressing the fullness of opher takes up the pen to compose
 an
 God's perfect being, as set against the almost hymn-like conclusion to
 his
 darkness of privation and deficiency. analysis of the Divine. The heart
 is as

For Bahá'u'lláh, God's sublime maj- moved, it seems, as the
 mind is awed, when it contemplates the
 esty on the one hand—as the supreme
 Infinite. “There can be,” he says,
 reality—and His splendorous beauty
 “no higher beauty or glory (bahá) than
 on the other—as the object of all de-
 this, that the Divine Essence is sheer
 sire and perfect goodness and boun-
 intellectual being, absolute good, free from
 ty—combine in His name al-Abhá, the
 every

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manner of deficiency, and one in every T A A
 aspect. Beauty and absolute glory be- C
 long to the Necessarily Existent, who
 is the source of the beauty of all things To understand Avicenna's view on
 and their glory. And His glory consists God's creative act we must first
 re-
 in this, that He is precisely as He ought call the substance of his argument
 for
 to be” (ash-Shifá 297). God's existence in Part One of
 this
 article. Nowhere in his reasoning did
 C C Avicenna claim that there had to be a
 definite point in the past at which the
 In the preceding parts, we have seen the universe came into being and that,
 significant extent to which Bahá'u'lláh consequently, God's
 existence must be
 affirms Avicenna's theological posi- invoked as a first cause in a
 temporal
 tions, and likewise how much Avi- sense. Rather, in Avicenna's
 view, for
 cenna's account of divine attributes anything whatsoever to exist,
 even in
 accords with the explicit and implicit this moment, requires that
 existence
 content of Bahá'u'lláh's statements. emanate or proceed to it
 from the Nec-
 For Avicenna as well as Bahá'u'lláh, essarily Existent. In other
 words, any
 God is the Necessarily Existent, ab- contingent being, in the here and
 now,
 solutely one in His attributes and es- is in need of an ultimate cause for
 its
 sence, transcendent and metaphysical- existence, and thus in need of the

Nec-

ly ultimate. In this part, we will treat necessarily Existent, because the totality of any causal structure, yet another aspect of Avicenna's philosophy visualized as a chain, depends on a first philosophical theology that Bahá'u'lláh cause, but in a purely atemporal sense. affirms—namely, Avicenna's account Even as the first gear of a series of gears of how God creates the universe, and parts motion simultaneously with his assertion that God's creation has the movement of the subsequent gears, no temporal beginning and is thus, in or even as light proceeds a sense, co-eternal with Him. We will simultaneously with the inherent incandescence of therefore proceed by first considering the Sun, so does God impart being to Avicenna's notion of a creation that the entire contingent order of reality. eternally emanates from God. Then, in God thus creates everything, that is, the following section, we will explore existence to all things, as gives now as He ever did in the how the writings of both Bahá'u'lláh continue to do in the future. profoundly and 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirm the core Accordingly, for Avicenna, at past or will moment in the contingent world, God metaphysical elements of Avicenna's is imparting existence to it. position, and how Avicennian thought, in being pure existence, any in turn, helps one understand the philosophical content of Bahá'u'lláh and is alone pos- sessed of that infinite creative creative act. power Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna

to bestow existence. This universe, in rays exist simultaneously with the Sun, though they are dependent on it. contrast, is only contingently existent Simply stated, if God at one and depends on God to have any existence point were not creating, and then His

cre-
 fore, God's creative act does not refer
 Him-
 exclusively, or even primarily, to any
 past state of the universe. He creates
 then,
 all things and sustains their being, as
 an ultimate cause, even in the present.
 pro-
 The question that remains, therefore,
 states
 is whether the universe has a begin-
 at
 ning—whether, in other words, God's
 even now
 creation had a beginning, or if it, like
 Avicenna
 Him, is everlasting into the past and fu-
 could
 ture. Avicenna's position, as mentioned
 which
 several times before, is that there can
 there
 be no beginning to God's creative act.
 The core to one of Avicenna's sever-
 writes
 al arguments on this theme, as found in
 Book Nine, chapter one of ash-Shifá's
 "Metaphysics," is that God himself
 not
 is unchanging and eternal. Since He
 Himself is immutable, and since His
 creative act cannot be conditioned by
 any external stimuli, it follows that
 God would neither change His will to
 so.
 create nor could something affect His
 it,
 will. Here we may recall that God's
 will and creative act are no different
 had
 from His knowledge or intellection;
 His intellection of things from eternity
 is the cause of their origination, even
 disposition,
 as the knowledge and apprehension
 like,

active act had a beginning, He

 self would have undergone a change,
 which is impossible. It follows,

 that He has always created and that
 the existence of things has always

 ceeded from Him. Avicenna thus

 that, since God is immutable, if He

 one point were not creating,

 there would be no creation.

 concludes, therefore, that there

 not have been any point during

 God was not creating, nor could

 be a moment when He commenced
 creation. Accordingly, Avicenna

 in ash-Shifá:

 A sound intellect, which has

 been prejudiced, will admit that
 if the Divine essence has never
 changed in any respect, then even
 now nothing would proceed from
 it, if formally nothing had done

 If nothing was proceeding from

 and subsequently something were
 to do so, then there would have

 to have been some new occurrence
 in the Divine essence, whether an
 intention, a volition, a

 an ability, a potency, or the

of a book in the author's mind is its (303) cause. But since God knows and wills immutably and eternally, it follows, for Avicenna's Avicenna, that God likewise creates any the world immutably and eternally. Consequently, His creative act has no beginning, and the world is accordingly co-eternal with him, even as the must

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issue forth a concurrent effect. If, then, Sim- the cause is present without that effect, this pa- but then later does produce that effect, against there would have to be some change vital either in the cause itself or something logic in external to it which affected its op- in eration. Since, regarding God, there validated is nothing internal to Him that could 'Abdu'l-Bahá's change, nor is there some external incident which could affect Him, Avicenna aspect concludes that God's creation can have in ad- no beginning—nor, we may add, can the it have an end. In other words, given the fact of God's eternal, unchanging first will, such an eternally existent cause will necessarily result in an eternally paper present, concurrent effect that proceeds from it. The term that Avicenna uses fundamentally

which had not existed before.

Naturally, it is precisely point that no new occurrence, of kind whatsoever, is possible within God. He thus has always created. Avicenna argues further that the presence of the cause, there does abstruse discussions of time. ilarly, it is beyond the aim of per to defend Avicenna's view any possible objections. What is here is that Avicenna's basic the argument above, as we will see the next section, is routinely in Bahá'u'lláh's and writings. In the meantime, then, we will consider another important of Avicenna's views on creation dressing the question of just how world emanates from God. To frame this question, we may consider something of a dilemma. It has been stressed throughout this that God, as understood by Avicenna and Bahá'u'lláh, is

for this kind of creation, which entails the absolute imparting of existence, is fayadán or emanation, insofar as he is immutable, immaterial, single, and simple, the world is contingent, mutable, material, and is, furthermore, subject both to multiplicity and to composition. How, then, do the many created things proceed from the absolute oneness of God? Avicenna's answer to this question, as a development of a core idea in Neoplatonic philosophy, is that "from the one, insofar as it is one, only one can proceed" (ash-Shifá 330). That Avicenna's reasoning behind his belief is to say, since God is one and simple, in the eternity of God's creation and, multiple things cannot directly emanate from Him. Avicenna argues that if several distinctly premised arguments in defense of the eternity of the cosmos are different things, such as form and matter, and they are explained in detail by McGinnis (182–202). It is not the object of this article, however, to provide a detailed analysis of all of Avicenna's arguments on this theme, involving as it unity Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna and simplicity. It thus follows that only one thing can directly proceed from whatever is necessarily of itself has no essence except

Him, a single effect of the absolute whatever is not act of His existence, something that is itself has not a physical composite of form and inci- matter (ash-Shifá 328). For Avicenna, existence therefore, what immediately proceeds there from God is only one being, a fayd, this an effluence or emanation which is such that immaterial like Him and accordingly existent an intellect, for the same reasons out- necessar- lined in the earlier section on this very its cause, subject. This intellect, then, is the first that being or created entity to emanate from contin- God, first not in the sense of time but existence of ontological rank. Given that it is an Existent, it intellect and the first created entity, it is has exis- naturally known as the First Intellect, thing or ‘aql-i-avval in Persian. if this thing Though the First Intellect is one possesses and immaterial, it is nonetheless not knows God absolute unity, as God is Himself. As aspect Avicenna explains in the thirty-eighth (Dánish- chapter of the “Metaphysics” in the Dánishnámih, the First Intellect has two aspects. In one aspect, it under- can com- stands itself as a contingent entity, in-	existence, and . . . necessarily existent of existence, therefore, only dentally. But since this is incidental to something, must be an essence to which existence is incidental, an entity is contingently in respect to its essence, ily existent in respect to and unable to exist without cause. Therefore, since the gently existent receives from the Necessarily is one thing insofar as it tence from its cause, another in respect to itself . . . should be an intellect, it one aspect insofar as it as the First Cause, another insofar as it knows itself. námih 409–10) In other words, an intellect prehend its own essence and
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therefore
sofar as, in itself, it need not exist and its contingency, but it can
also contem-
is thus only contingently existent. In plate its existence and thus
its deriva-
another aspect, however, it is neces- tive or conferred necessity as
caused
sarily existent insofar as it is directly by another. Such an intellect,
therefore,
caused by or emanated from God. As has some multiplicity; even
though it is
a result, there is a kind of multiplicity not a composite of matter and
form, it is
in the First Intellect, for it is admittedly a composite of essence and
existence.
a composite of essence and existence, As Avicenna explains in the
rest of the
which God, as the Necessarily Existent chapter, it is true that only
one thing
in Himself, is not, as we saw in the proceeds from God, who is
absolute
section on “Simplicity.” On this theme, oneness: the First
Intellect. It is subse-
and of the concomitant distinction be- quently from the First
Intellect, howev-
tween essence and existence, Avicenna er, that the rest of creation
proceeds, in
writes: increasing orders of
contingency and

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multiplicity, insofar as the contingen- eternal creation: God, Himself pure
cy and multiplicity begins in the one unity and absolute being, enjoys
such
entity of the First Intellect, and then a superfluity of existence that it
ema-
compounds in the beings that emanate nates or “overflows” from Him as
an
consecutively therefrom. eternal, constant act of creative
grace
The multiplicity of the contingent and providence; this fayd or emana-
world, in this case, does not emanate tion then proceeds through the First
directly from the unity and simplicity Intellect ultimately to create the
lower
of God. Instead, Avicenna envisions a realms in their multiplicity,
diversity,
hierarchy of being, in which different and materiality.²⁴

levels of being are established as the procession of existence descends from God. Consequently, material creation, note that which is subject to multiplicity, emanates from God only through a series of intermediaries, of which the First Intellect is the prime member. God is thus the ultimate ontological cause of the world but not its proximate, or immediate, efficient cause. Finally terminating in the material world, the levels of existence that descend further from the First Intellect become progressively more contingent, deficient, and imperfect, insofar as they have more privation of existence and being, while those closer in existential rank to the First Intellect and thus to God are more perfect and enduring, even immaterial. In this connection, one could suggest an analogy in which God Himself is thought of as a pure white, single, immutable light source, while the First Intellect is the emanated light that proceeds from Him; the lower levels of existence with all their multiplicity, meanwhile, are the refracted polychromatic rays produced by the “prism” of increasing contingency and procession

Before we consider the harmonies between his cosmology and that of Bahá’u’lláh, however, I will Avicenna’s view, in its aspects, should be of interest for theist, insofar as he elegantly ciles the dilemma of how a realm of temporal existence and multiplicity could ever be created by or proceed from an ultimate reality that is nal and absolutely one: through an intermediary principle that reflects something of the nature of both ties. Nevertheless, Avicenna did relate the considerations above with since-outdated theories on the of the physical universe. Namely, Avicenna, not having the benefit of modern telescope technology, upheld the geocentric theory of Aristotle, who thought that the Sun, Moon, and ets revolved around the earth, each

24 Accordingly, the single God, which is identical to Him, is of self-subsistent existence, as the section “Simplicity.” this same act of existence there emanates a voluntary effect: the

privation. Such, then, is the essence of the First Intellect and then, through it, of Avicenna's emanative scheme of the sequence of beings in the contingent realm.

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its own "sphere" (falak in Persian and Arabic), while an outermost sphere compassed the cosmic frame. Accordingly, Avicenna thought that nine additional intellects proceeded after the First Intellect, each one producing a particular sphere, until the emanation of the last, sublunar sphere. The intellect associated with this lowest sphere, the 'Aql-i-Fá'il or Active Intellect, then would produce all the multiplicity of the earthly realm and, most importantly, would actualize the many forms or essences of things in Bahá'u'lláh's the potentiality of matter (McGinnis 205). of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. First, with regard to Given the explicit rejection of Bahá'u'lláh geocentrism in the Bahá'í Writings, ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, 28; Mufávadát 18–19) in God's cre-agreement with modern astronomy, as eternity, well as Bahá'u'lláh's affirmation that exist forever. "every fixed star hath its own planets" begin- (Gleanings 163; Muntakhabátí 65), it end.

B ' ' ' A C

The two essential elements of na's view on creation, as seen are first that God's creative act is eternal and that therefore the world is co-eternal with Him while being lessly dependent upon Him, and second that God creates via an of existence in a hierarchy of being through some intermediary principle. Both of these propositions find it support not only in writings but also repeatedly in

explains: Know assuredly that ation hath existed from and will continue to Its beginning hath had no ning, and its end knoweth no

is of course apparent that the astronomical content of Avicenna's position is not confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh. involve the

Nonetheless, the purely metaphysical content of Avicenna's view remains attributed

pertinent—namely, the core proposition as,

tion that God creates the contingent there

world through an eternal emanation of existence from Himself through no

the intermediary of the First Intellect. of

Accordingly, we will consider in the clear

last and final section of this paper the time

Avicennian principles confirmed in Bahá'u'lláh's own cosmology.

words

which He hath revealed: "God was alone; there was none else besides Him. He will always remain what

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He hath ever been." Every discern-extremity. Given

ing eye will readily perceive that immediate-

the Lord is now manifest, yet there dura-

is none to recognize His glory. By fu-

this is meant that the habitation wherein the Divine Being dwelleth temporal

is far above the reach and ken of generation,

anyone besides Him. Whatsoever its

in the contingent world can either it

be expressed or apprehended, can

His name, the Creator, presupposeth a creation, even as His

the Lord of Men, must

existence of a servant.

As to those sayings,

to the Prophets of old, such

"In the beginning was God;

was no creature to know Him,"

and "The Lord was alone; with

one to adore Him," the meaning

these and similar sayings is

and evident, and should at no

be misapprehended. To this same truth bear witness these

of its ákhir, its end or

that Bahá'u'lláh states this

ly after confirming the limitless

tion of the world into the past and

ture, this sentence may be understood as asserting that there is no

beginning to the world's

just as there is no temporal end to

progression or continuation. Hence,

is possible to render that sentence

as never transgress the limits which, follows: “There is neither a beginning by its inherent nature, have been to the world’s generation nor any end imposed upon it (hudúdát-i-im-káníyyih). God, alone, transcends such limitations. (Gleanings 150–51; Iqtidárát 72–73) absolutely dependent on God, who remains its concurrent cause; God is prior to the graph, Bahá’u’lláh unequivocally asserts the perpetual duration of God’s terms of ontological rank, even if not creation, and subsequently connects in time (recall the discussion in the God’s nature as Lord and Creator with first two sections of how a cause can be concurrent with its effect, and thus beginningless creation is a necessary effect of His own unchanging will and Bahá’u’lláh “prior” to it in essence, time). In this connection, causal status; this logic is unmistakably similar in character to Avicenna’s world on God, and thus its atemporal posteriority to Him, when He states arguments for the eternity of the world from the immutability of God. in another place that “there can be no doubt whatever that if for one moment the tide of His mercy and grace (fayd) were to be withheld from the cosmos have a beginningless beginning or an endless end? The apparent world, it would completely perish” (Gleanings 68; Majmú‘iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárákih 342). Here, it is the ambiguity of Bahá’u’lláh’s statement may be resolved if we consider the pre-significant

cise wording of the original Persian, as that Bahá'u'lláh uses the term fayd, or literally emanation—as we saw well as the implications of the preceding sentence. The Persian text literally Avicenna—such that He states that states that there is no bidáyat or be- without the emanation (of grace or ex- istence) from God, the world ginning to creation's avval, its start or would at firstness, and no niháyat or termination once be rendered ma'dúm, nonexistent.

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With an appreciation of this point— creates the physical world. First, as to the unceasing dependence of the creat- the world's co-eternity, Bahá'u'lláh is careful to note that, though the ed world on God—we can understand world Bahá'u'lláh's statement in the large may be without beginning or end in time, it nonetheless is excerpt quoted above that while God the causal power of God. He “preceded” by As regards thine assertions is existent now, His creation is void the beginning of creation, this explains: matter on which of existence or mafqúd. Bahá'u'lláh by reason of the divergences in immediately qualifies this statement men's thoughts and opinions. about the beginning of creation, this by clarifying that God transcends all matter on which is a matter on which the hudúdát-i-imkáníyyih, literally all by reason of the divergences in conceptions vary men's thoughts and opinions. the limitations of contingency. Since thou to assert that it hath ever the world exists only contingently and isted and shall continue to Wert it would be true; or wert thou dependently, in relation to God, who affirm the same concept as is ex- tioned in the sacred Scriptures, exists necessarily and independently, it doubt would there be about exist, His being and existence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá it, for

reiterates this position when He con- the firms that “although the contingent was, world exists, in relation to the existence existed of God it is non-existence and nothing- ness” (Some Answered Questions 324; beginning, Mufávadát 196). preceded by a From the above points, we may conclude that Bahá’u’lláh affirms (Tablets 140; Avicenna’s metaphysical position that az Kitáb- the created world is beginningless and perpetual, but that it is always depen- dent, for its existence, on God, Who Bahá’u’lláh’s is its ultimate, unchanging and eternal in the cause. How, then, does Bahá’u’lláh that the world additionally confirm the idea of cre- endorses the ation as emanation? In this regard, be- the Lawh-i-Hikmat is relevant, for underlying truth in that work Bahá’u’lláh not only af- the world is firms the co-eternity of the world with in God, Who ceaselessly sustains it, but bounds He also establishes the Word of God necessarily or Logos as an intermediary reality for it that emanates from the Godhead and could	it hath been revealed by God, Lord of the worlds . . . God and His creation had ever beneath His shelter from the be- ginning that hath no apart from its being Firstness which cannot be regard- ed as firstness . . . Majmú’iy-i-Alváh ba’d i-Aqdas 82) Given the context of other statements, it is clear that above passage He affirms is eternal; He nonetheless creation account in the scriptures cause He supports the they uphold, namely, that created by God and is not eternal the sense of transcending the of mutability and being existent in itself and immutable, is fundamentally contingent and
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not exist, even for a moment, without the sustaining providence of God, as Nabíl-i-Ak-	immediate audience, in this case the erudite Bahá’í philosopher
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Avicenna likewise states. Accordingly, Bahá'u'lláh, one can support the eternity of creation while also affirming the central content of the Biblical and Qur'anic accounts. With this understanding, the previously quoted statement from Bahá'u'lláh is altogether intelligible: "God was, and His creation had ever existed beneath His shelter from the beginning that hath no beginning, apart from its being preceded by a Firstness which cannot be regarded as firstness . . .". Creation has ever resided "beneath His shelter"—that is, it is has always depended on God—"from the beginning that hath no beginning," which is to say forever into the past. The world, however, is preceded by the essential priority or "firstness" of God as its concurrent cause. This essential priority or firstness thus is not recognized as a temporal priority or firstness. In other words, Bahá'u'lláh here affirms Avicenna's view that God precedes His creation as its cause but not in terms of being prior in a sequence of time, as

bar, who would have been well familiar with Avicenna's thought. Shortly after this point in the Lawh-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh describes the Word of God as the instrumental cause of the entire creation. He states that this all-compelling "Word of God" is "the cause of the entire creation," while all else besides it is a created thing and an effect. The Word or "Command of God," He states furthermore, has never been severed or munqati' from the world, which recalls His statement, quoted above, that all created things would perish were the emanation of God's grace to be withheld for even one moment. The Word of God may thus be identified as that emanation, or as the chief medium of the gracious emanation of being from God. Significantly, Bahá'u'lláh confirms this reading in the Lawh-i-Hikmat when He says this Word is al-fayd al-a'zam, literally the supreme emanation, and the fuyúdát, the cause of the emanations. Bahá'u'lláh then concludes this

though there was some definite point in that this section of the tablet by stating the past “before” which there was no Word is “the Cause which hath pre-creation proceeding from God. Accord- ceded the contingent world—a world ingly, Bahá’u’lláh may be understood which is adorned with the splendors of the Ancient of Days, yet is as saying that the world is “preceded being renewed and regenerated at all times” by [an essential] firstness which cannot be regarded as [a temporal] firstness.” (Tablets 141; Majmú‘iy-i-Alváh ba’d az Avicenna’s metaphysical analysis of statement Kitáb-i-Aqdas 83). This last concurrent causation and essential is particularly pertinent. The world is priority, as discussed in the first sec- literally described as being adorned tion, thus helps make intelligible what or muzayyan with at-tiráz al-qadím, Bahá’u’lláh was here expressing to His the vesture of eternity, and yet it is at Bahá’u’lláh and the God of Avicenna

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all times regenerated (tajaddud) and when Bahá’u’lláh describes the Primal Will as the instrumental or originated or created (hudúth). This is cause of the creation of the mediating world in the world in being its concurrent cause, the Lawh-i-Kullu’t-Ta’ám, a function that belongs to the Word of God and it is thus that which continuously sustains and generates it, thus allowing Lawh-i-Hikmat, for in the former He states that it is by means of it to be beginningless and perpetual. the Primal Will that God created the heavens and earth. Similarly, Word as having emanated from God; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses the Word and the Holy Spirit as it is “the supreme emanation,” and it in chapter thirty-eight of synonyms is moreover the cause of subsequent Mufávadát or Some Answered Questions. “emanations,” which can be read as

the levels of contingent reality that Bahá'u'lláh's compose the rest of creation. It is thus intermediary apparent that Bahá'u'lláh is describing co-eternity of a creation, even as Avicenna did, that the philosophy eternally emanates from God through Avicenna—an intermediary principle, which He clarified in the Word. The Word, then, is stunningly similar to the First Intellect described by Avicenna and, in any case, it is identical in function and operation but as the first emanation from God which the Word in turn emanates the subsequent levels of existence.

Let it be noted here that there is a general consensus among Bahá'í scholars that the intermediary principle which Bahá'u'lláh calls the Word of God in the Lawh-i-Hikmat is the same reality expressed by various terms throughout the Bahá'í writings, including the "Holy Spirit" (Rúhu'l-Qudus) and the "Primal Will" (Mashíyyat-i-Avvalíyyih), as well as the "Realm of Revelation" or of "Divine Command"

In this connection, account of emanation, the intermediary principle, and the creation—affirming as it does philosophical arguments of its own—is itself reaffirmed and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings statements. In one instance, Bahá not only speaks of the emanation of the world from God, but also explicitly identifies the Word of God or Primal Will with the

Intellect, while perhaps even to Avicenna himself.

thus asserts: "The process of creation from God is a direct emanation. That which emanates from God" (Some Questions 234; Mufávadát qíyám can signify existence, such that it is dependent upon God by being His emanation of existence.

Bahá continues by

stating:

(‘Álam-i-Amr).²⁵ This is apparent

It follows that all things have

25 Keven Brown, “Brief Discussion emanated from God; that is,
it is

of the Primal Will in the Bahá’í Writ-
ings”; Riaz Ghadimi, 662; and ‘Ali-Mu-

rad Dávúdí, Ulúhíyyat va Mazharíyyat, “Station of Unity.”

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through God that all things have one defined in reference to time;
there

been realized, and through Him has always been an originated
creation

that the contingent world has come and contingent world. The world,
then,

to exist. The first thing to emanate is contingent upon the ceaseless
ema-

from God is that universal reality nation of existence from God
through

which the ancient philosophers the First Intellect or Primal Will.

Just

termed the “First Intellect” and as Avicenna recognizes that the
First

which the people of Bahá call the Intellect is in itself a
contingent being

“Primal Will.” (Some Answered and not equal to the
Necessarily Exis-

Questions 235; Mufávadát 144) tent, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
likewise clarifies

that, in itself, the First Intellect does not share the absolute

‘Abdu’l-Bahá then stresses the eter- not share the absolute
ontological pri-

mal Will, as well as the concomitant “Though the First Intellect is
without

co-eternity, and ceaseless dependence, beginning, this does not mean
that

of the creation upon that intermediary it shares in the pre-existence of
God

principle, and ultimately God. (qidam), for in relation to the

existence of God the existence of that uni-

This emanation, with respect to versal Reality is mere
nothingness”

its action in the world of God, is (Some Answered Questions 235–36;

not limited by either time or place
refer-
and has neither beginning nor end,
God is
for in relation to God the begin-
two
ning and the end are one and the
ontolog-
same. The pre-existence of God is
relation to a
both essential and temporal, while
bestows
the origination of the contingent
Intellect
world is essential but not tempo-
dependent on
ral. (Some Answered Questions
from
235; Mufávadát 145)
subordinate to
it.
When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that the orig-
explicit identifica-
ination of the world is not temporal
feature
but essential, He evidently means to
cosmology,
confirm that the world is created by
mentioned and
and dependent on God; its dependence
me to
and contingency are essential to its na-
prin-
ture. It is therefore, in its very essence,
Bahá’u’lláh
originated and not self-subsistent; in
the
other words, it is a contingent entity.
(Kalimiy-i-‘Ulyá),
Nevertheless, this origination is not
essence
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identical to Avicenna’s First Intellect.
succession, the
Consequently, Bahá’u’lláh affirms the
‘Aql-i-Fá’il or Ac-

Mufávadát 145). Here, the word
ring to the “pre-existence” of
qidam, which, as explored in the
opening sections, refers to the
ical priority of a cause in
concurrent effect to which it
existence. Although the First
is eternal, it is eternally
the immediate effusion of being
the Godhead, and thus
‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s
tion of the Primal Will, a core
of Bahá’í theology and
with the First Intellect
argued for by Avicenna, seems to
demonstrate that the intermediary
ciple of creation, which
variously calls the Word of God,
Most Exalted Word
and the Primal Will, is in
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intellects emanate in
last of which, the

core metaphysical content of Avicenna's cosmology, which we can break down into the following seven propositions that they share: (1) God, in being immutable, eternal, and absolute, eternally creates the world; (2) the world, Primal accordingly, has no beginning or end in time; (3) the world nonetheless is ceaselessly dependent on God for its existence, insofar as it is a contingent entity; (4) God creates through the emanation of existence from Himself; (5) the physical world is not an immediate emanation from God; (6) an intermediary reality, whether called the Word, the Realm of the Primal Will, or the First Intellect, is the first entity to emanate from the Godhead, first in the atemporal sense of perfect, ontological precedence (as the motion of the hand precedes the motion of the key it holds, not in time but in its causal operation); and (7) the First Intellect, which is the immediate emanation from the Godhead, in turn emanates the existence of all other things. That	tive Intellect, generates and the existence of the material the Bahá'í system, there is no of such subsequent intellects. Bahá'u'lláh and state that the First Intellect or Will is in fact responsible for ation of the physical world. It low, then, that for Intellect additionally assumes the erations performed by the Active lect under Avicenna's view. In nection, Bahá'u'lláh and have a cosmology that divides into three realms. The first is of God or 'Álam-i-Haqq, which level of reality strictly confined Necessarily Existent, who is immutable, and absolute. There is the Realm of Command or the Realm of the Kingdom, 'Álam-i-Amr and 'Álam-i-Malakút respectively, the station of the First Will, or Holy Spirit. Lastly, Realm of Creation or
--	--

‘Álam-i-Khalq, Bahá’u’lláh and Avicenna should share which is the sum of contingent reality the seven propositions listed above is created and sustained by God through the intermediary of the First Intellect. Bahá’u’lláh largely validates the central tenets of Avicennian metaphysical theology, and that Avicennian thought helps elucidate the philosophical context of the Bahá’í Writings. This being established, there remains only one additional point to address before we first conclude this section. emanation is the outpouring grace of the Kingdom, which has emanated from God and has appeared in the realities of all things, even

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as the rays emanating from the sun are reflected in all things. aspects of Avicenna’s theory of psychology and abstraction, it is sufficient to note that, for Avicenna, a prophet is one who is naturally disposed, by the particular constitution and character of his soul, to receive more fully than others people the intellectual illumination of the Active Intellect, and who with the celestial spheres with which they are associated, while the Earth, able to understand the nature of things which is the realm beneath the last, in a flash of inspired intuition, and not

lunar sphere, is the physical world.	merely through unaided sense
percep-	
Since Bahá'u'lláh rejects any geocen-	tion and induction (McGinnis
147–48).	
tric astronomy, He naturally does not	Similarly, in the Bahá'í
system, a	
affirm the idea that there are multiple	prophet or Manifestation of God
is one	
intellects emanating in succession as	whose human soul is uniquely asso-
associated with the heavenly spheres.	ciated with the First Intellect,
Primal	
I suggest, therefore, that the Realm	Will, or Holy Spirit so as to
“manifest”	
of the Kingdom, ‘Álam-i-Malakút or	the attributes of Divinity,
including	
‘Álam-i-Amr, in the Bahá'í system,	inherent knowledge of the
natures and	
may well be reduced to one univer-	realities of things, in the
earthly realm.	
sal reality, as ‘Abdu'l-Bahá calls it,	Although Avicenna's
objective is to	
the First Intellect and Primal Will. In	provide a rational explanation of
Is-	
sum, for Bahá'u'lláh the First Intellect	lamic prophethood consonant
with his	
fulfills the direct creative activity that	metaphysics and theology, his
approach	
the Active Intellect performs in Avi-	has resonances with the Bahá'í
concept	
cenna's cosmology. Aside from this	of the Manifestation of God,
insofar	
minor point of difference, however, the	as he stresses the natural
superiority	
metaphysical or theological content of	of the prophet to other human
beings,	
Bahá'u'lláh's and Avicenna's cosmolo-	and his resulting
special association	
gies are markedly similar, as is evident	with the Active Intellect; this
replaces	
in the seven shared propositions listed	a more conventional idea of
popular	
above.	faith, contrary to Bahá'í
thought, that	
This commonality is even more ap-	the prophet is no different than
other	
parent when we consider Avicenna's	men, aside from a rather
arbitrary im-	

account of prophethood. For Avicenna, position of God's directives into his consciousness. This is yet another the Active Intellect not only manifests ev- idence, therefore, that for the forms or essences of things in the Bahá'u'lláh the First Intellect in fact material world, but it also actualizes encompasses the range of activity Avicenna universal concepts in human intellects. divided Though it is beyond the scope of this among the First Intellect or Emanation, Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 81

subsequent intellects, and the Active and wide-ranging, and indicates a Intellect. It remains for later scholar- shared interpretation of reality as a ship to correlate as well as differentiate whole in its basic features. further the more abstruse and minute The sole purpose of this article has correlations of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings been to highlight this harmony, insofar as it enriches the academic study and Avicenna's philosophy. of what Bahá'u'lláh means by God, but C also because an understanding of Avi- cenna's work and intellectual contribu- tion provides a framework by which In the foregoing sections, we have seen how the theology of Bahá'u'lláh val- one might better comprehend the metaphysical significance of many idates core features of the metaphysi- Bahá'u'lláh's theological cal philosophy of Avicenna—that God statements, exists as the one ultimate and uncon- such as His affirmation that God is nec- ditioned reality, necessarily existent, essary or simple, that His creatures are simple, single, immutable, eternal, contingent beings, or that His creation perfect, and wholly good; omniscient has neither beginning nor end. Howev- er, as expressed in the in intellect and free in will; unlimited introduction— in His being and thus truly infinite and and I stress this unequivocally—the objective has decidedly not been transcendent, as contrasted with the

either
 constrained nature of contingently exist- to state or to imply that
 Bahá'u'lláh's
 tent beings. Bahá'u'lláh affirms, more- positions are, in any way,
 merely de-
 over, as Avicenna argues, that these rivative from Avicenna, or at all
 reduc-
 attributes are each indistinguishable ible to his influence as the
 preeminent
 in reality from the indivisible essence philosopher in the Islamic
 tradition.
 of God, which is necessary existence, Likewise, I have not intended to
 imply
 insofar as to be necessarily existent that Bahá'u'lláh's
 theological teach-
 just is to be simple, indivisible, im- ings are, by any means, restricted
 to
 mutable, perfect, wholly good, and in- those themes in Avicenna's
 philosophy
 finite. We have seen, furthermore, that which He affirms and validates,
 how-
 Bahá'u'lláh confirms Avicenna's view ever much one may esteem
 the impor-
 that the world is eternal, though cease- tance of such metaphysical
 principles
 lessly dependent on God, from whom as necessary and contingent
 existence,
 the existence of all things emanates concurrent causation, or emanation.
 through the intermediary of the First Nonetheless, I have endeavored
 to
 Intellect or Primal Will. The metaphys- show—through citation and
 analysis
 ical harmony between Bahá'u'lláh and of a diverse selection of
 Bahá'u'lláh's
 Avicenna is consequently not restricted and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's
 works—that af-
 to certain superficial or incidental fea- firmations of Avicenna's
 theological
 tures of their thought. The agreement ideas in the Bahá'í Writings
 are not due
 between them is in fact fundamental merely to an incidental convergence
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 of terminology, to the degree that Consequently, why should the
 Bahá'í
 Bahá'u'lláh lived in the Islamic world scholar study Avicenna
 himself, and

and inherited a certain intellectual and literary culture, but to demonstrate that Bahá'u'lláh's clearly stated views on God constitute a vindication of the metaphysical principles underlying Avicenna's argument for God's existence, and His nature, attributes, and creative act, in actual content and concept. Indeed, the Bahá'í Writings' affirmation of the content of Avicennian philosophical-theological philosophy is incredibly rich in implication; it indicates that they validate the principles of rationality that underlie Avicenna's arguments, and that the content of Bahá'í metaphysics can be further understood through the study of the Islamic philosophical tradition, to discern areas of affirmation, as in the case of Avicenna, or difference, in the case of other Islamic thinkers.

However, the real situation is much more complex. After Avicenna, philosophy or falsafih did indeed become especially associated with his ideas in the Islamic world, and more generally with the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic

take Bahá'u'lláh's theology ularly vindicative of his philosophy? Even if this were largely correct—though I it slightly misses the mark—it still be fruitful to consider logical arguments and doctrines at source, so to speak, and to consider the rational basis, as Avicenna, of those logical doctrines that 'Abdu'l-Bahá so consistently in order to demonstrate, and to have a firmer understanding of, their ence, rigorous logic, and depth. Indeed, if Avicenna's ideas were so powerful as to have become mainstream, the need to understand na himself would be commensurately intensified.

to resolve possible misunderstandings as to what the arguments of this article actually entail regarding Avicenna's not relation to the Bahá'í Faith. One could wonder, for example, if it is warranted against to associate the relevant metaphysical principles that Bahá'u'lláh affirms with Avicenna especially, instead of seeing this affirmation as one pertaining to ideas that, by Bahá'u'lláh's time, had become mainstream in Islam itself due to the prevalence of Avicenna's thought over a millennium. Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna tradition Avicenna himself inherited, refined, and profoundly shaped. Nonetheless, subsequent thinkers only adopted and developed his ideas, but also challenged and argued against them. In the succeeding generation, for example, the widely thinker Ghazálí composed a famous polemic against twenty implied by or related to thought, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and he especially took issue with

Avicenna's ostensibly heretical notions opposed to such as the eternity of the world; his metaphysical characterization of the nature of God's knowledge; and his doubt, suggested in several places, as to the bodily presence resurrection, insofar as he defends a purely spiritual view of the afterlife affirmation of in his metaphysical works—in agreement with the Bahá'í perspective.²⁶ Ghazálí, in addition, argued for occasionalism—which holds that there are no necessary causal relations in nature, ex-

theologians were generally some of those relevant ideas Avicenna and the affirm, such as the distinction essence and existence, the of necessary causal connections the world, and a robust divine simplicity.²⁷ Moreover, phy itself, in succeeding often looked at askance in the world, or even thought jurisprudence became the chief

but only direct actions of God's arbitrary will—against the Avicennian notion that natural entities have causative essences and necessary relations in their own right, even though they ceaselessly depend on God for their existence. the two—

It is the Avicennian notion, however, milieu that the Bahá'í Writings affirm, as evidenced by the passages on causation were of- considered throughout this paper, and the following statement from 'Abdu'l-philosophical Bahá: "By nature is meant those inherently beautiful properties and necessary relations large derived from the realities of things" Islamic (Tablet 13). world," as expressed by the historian

Furthermore, the generally fideistic school of Ash'arite theology, from degree which Ghazálí more or less operated, 'Abdu'l-became far more mainstream in Sunni vali-Islam, the dominant branch of the faith, conclusions, than Avicenna's rationalist philosophy. And indeed, Ash'arite-influenced "For the

26 Fazlur Rahman expresses this . . . but more starkly, when he writes that "in gen-

pression of religion among scholars. Indeed, although phy—whether of Avicenna's tially Aristotelian approach, Platonist "Illuminationist" (Ishráqí), or a synthesis of was indeed practiced in the Shia of Early Modern Iran by of Isfahan, its practitioners ten persecuted or condemned by 'ulamá, even while the tradition itself, so ied by Avicenna, was "by and abandoned in the rest of the Abbas Amanat (114). Accordingly, it not reasonable to diminish the to which Bahá'u'lláh and Bahá actually vindicate and date the arguments and

27 As Marmura notes:

co-eternal with the divine essence are not identical with it.

They are attributes

eral” Avicenna “taught that the resurrection ‘additional’ (za’ida) to the divine essence.

of the body was an imaginative myth with This point is quite basic, particularly for understanding al-Ghazálí’s which the minds of the Prophets were in- rejection and condemned in order to influence the moral char- philosophical doc- acter of the unthinking masses” (119). trine of an eternal world” (141).

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characteristic of Avicenna himself and forms by Avicenna, such as the dis- not Islamic theologians considered tinction between essence and existence generally, regarding causation, con- and contingent and necessary being, tingent and necessary existence, the they are doing so as influenced directly distinction between essence and exis- or indirectly by him, and arguably none tence, and God’s nature, attributes, and of them enjoys the degree of eminence,

creative act. influence, historical relevance, and Another objection, however, may synthetic genius Avicenna is general- contend that this article has exagger- ly recognized as possessing, with the

ated the Avicennian character of the possible exception, outside Islam, of principles discussed, insofar as certain Thomas Aquinas among medieval phi- Islamic philosophers and thinkers after losophers. Therefore, not to recognize

Avicenna—such as Ibn ‘Arabí, Mullá the Avicennian character of the princi- Sadrá, Mír Dámád, Sabzivárí, and ples here discussed is no more reason- able than to deny that the even Shaykh Ahmad Ahsá’í—have doctrine of

variously and to differing degrees the four causes,²⁸ for example, is Aris- discussed some of the ideas treated in totelian, despite the fact that countless

this paper. It should be kept in mind, subsequent philosophers, including however, that this article does not Avicenna, have adopted, defended, and

make any exclusive claim in demon- clarified the concept. strating Bahá’u’lláh’s affirmation of Moreover, certain other

philoso-
 Avicenna's ideas, as though Avicenna phers in Islam, such as
 Suhravardí,
 is the only philosopher who has argu- are notable for starkly rejecting
 the
 ments validated in the Bahá'í Faith, Aristotelian heart of
 Avicenna's
 nor does it suggest that the whole of thought, even while the Bahá'í
 Faith,
 Avicenna's philosophy, beyond the as convincingly argued by Ian
 Kluge
 matters explicitly treated here, has the in "The Aristotelian Substratum of
 the
 imprimatur of Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, Bahá'í Writings,"
 reaffirms the basic
 Ian Kluge has done impressive work metaphysics of Aristotle's
 thought,
 demonstrating the Aristotelian and especially, I would add, as
 developed
 Neoplatonic principles affirmed by by Avicenna. In addition, in
 certain
 Bahá'u'lláh, and this article is fully respects it is the
 particularly Avicen-
 complementary to and supportive of nian stance that the Bahá'í
 Writings
 such scholarship, insofar as Avicenna affirm, in contrast to those of
 later
 himself inherited and further refined thinkers: the Avicennian distinction
 those traditions, and works within clas- between essence and existence, for
 sical theism more broadly, as shall be example, came to be undermined
 either
 discussed below. by an emphasis solely on essence (as
 Nonetheless, when later philoso-
 phers in Islam argue for or develop
 ideas first articulated in their mature 28 Discussed in the
 section
 "Simplicity."
 Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna 85
 in Suhravardí's radical essentialism) transcends all things in His
 essence
 or on existence (as in Mullá Sadrá's and yet imparts to them
 their very ex-
 Heraclitan existentialism).²⁹ Likewise, istence ceaselessly, and is thus
 "closer
 some subsequent thinkers, influenced to a man than his life vein,"
 as it is said

by Sufi mysticism, tended toward cer- in the Qur'án (50:16). Since the Bahá'í Faith evidently contributes to tain monistic or pantheistic ideas, at dition of classical this tra- find points of substantive variance with Bahá'u'lláh's teaching, ity between Bahá'u'lláh theism, one could phers such as Aristotle, in contrast to Avicenna's chaste insis- Augustine—before commonal- Maimonides, Averroës, and tence on God's transcendence. Conse- after him. Nonetheless, in the and philoso- abundance of Avicennian quently, Avicenna is well-deserving of that Bahá'u'lláh validates, Plotinus, and the affinities between Avicennian philosophy and explicit attention in Bahá'í studies, and the Bahá'í Faith Avicenna—and rich field for future work and it is with this aim that this article has cial interest to Bahá'í Maimonides, Averroës, and connection, Avicenna may Aquinas, to be one remarkably impressive focused exclusively on Avicenna, and influential member of a broad, sheer abundance of Avicennian multi- faith philosophical-theological I will note in closing, however, that tion whose relation to the tradi- Bahá'í Faith should be a matter of the theological agreement between and consideration. Bahá'u'lláh and Avicenna is no histor- Despite the above points, ical coincidence. Though Avicenna's ever, one may still wonder thought has a particular affinity with recognizing the Avicennian themes how- the Bahá'í Faith, he is admittedly one in a long line of thinkers who sup-

in
port what is called classical theism, Bahá'u'lláh's metaphysics
is anything
a view of God which recognizes Him more than a mere academic
exercise.
as the one metaphysically ultimate On the contrary, Avicenna's
philosophy
and absolute reality, who completely invests one with a powerful tool
in un-
derstanding the conceptual, philosoph-
29 As discussed by Wisnovsky ical, metaphysical, and logical
content
(111). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's position is decided- and implications of
Bahá'u'lláh's writ-
ly Avicennian when He confirms that for ings themselves. The Bahá'í
Writings'
contingent beings existence "is only one affirmation of the distinction
between
accident ('arad) among others that enter essence and existence; of the
two mo-
upon the realities of created things" (Some dalities of necessary and
contingent
Answered Questions 337–38; Mufávadát being; of the necessary
existence of
203).

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God; of a robust account of divine sim- revealed to be non-negotiable
tenets of
plicity holding that God's attributes are Bahá'u'lláh's system,
nowhere contra-
identical to His essence; of the eternal- dicted in His writings though
expressed
ity of God's creation; and of the role of in various ways depending on the
char-
the intermediary principle of the First acter of His particular audience.
Intellect or Primal Will—such central In this connection, it should
be ac-
affirmations are rendered intelligible, knowledged that there has been a
con-
and their rational basis elucidated, trasting view, in the literature of
Bahá'í
through an appreciation of Avicennian scholarship, that Bahá'u'lláh
"does not
metaphysics. assert the truth of any particular
meta-
Avicenna can serve a vital role in physical position," and even

“denies

Bahá’í studies for yet other reasons, that metaphysics itself is the core of

however. First, Avicennian philosophy, religion” (Momen 38). It is naturally

with its insistence on rational demonstration outside the scope of this article, in the

space of a conclusion, to address this

to Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, could well perspective fully, as it is expressed in

the essay “The God of Bahá’u’lláh,”

for Bahá’í scholars as they undertake which differs from this paper’s account

of the existence, consistency, and ro-

teachings, defending them, and clar- bust nature of definite metaphysical

principles in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings, ifying their rational structure, just as

It should first be noted that the thesis

of “epistemological stated that in this day rational argu- relativism,” which

ments (dalá’il-i-‘aqlíyyih) are requisite “The God of Bahá’u’lláh” argues is

operative in Bahá’u’lláh’s for the people of the world (Some An- writings,

swered Questions 8; Mufávadát 5). Avi- springs from a laudable goal of ex-

plaining how Bahá’u’lláh cenna’s argument for God’s existence, reconciles

different faith traditions with for example, is in full harmony with contrast-

ing metaphysical claims. Bahá’í teaching, clarifies the content Accordingly,

it is suggested there that of Bahá’u’lláh’s own theological state- Bahá’u’lláh

accomplishes this by generally teaches, and illuminates the reasoning in

ing that “religious support of God’s existence found in the metaphysical truth is

an individual truth which each Bahá’í Writings. Second, one who has person

sees from his or her own a foundation in classical, and indeed viewpoint”

Avicennian, philosophy will more easily realize that Bahá'u'lláh's writings kind of form a coherent and fully consistent no-metaphysical system. Matters such as revelation—and God's existence, necessity, simplicity, notes, in a and complete transcendence, as well as per-the contingent nature of the world, are of Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna (38). Though there is indeed a “perspectivism” implicit in the tion of progressive though Bahá'u'lláh clearly number of places, that differing spectives qualify the truth values

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certain statements—it nonetheless does not en- seems to me that epistemological relativism is not plausible, in any strong simply formulation, vis-à-vis Bahá'u'lláh's that God alone teachings. This is because definite and things intrinsically metaphysical and onto-conditionally, logical claims, open to human knowledge—such as the existence of God, cause, His transcendent reality, the station to of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation (Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárákih of God, the immortality of the human Bahá'u'lláh, soul, the reality of objective moral obligation, and many others—are essential, even foundational, to the Bahá'í Faith, and consistently stated as true without qualification. In addition, it Bahá'u'lláh's likewise seems to me that the thesis of in the Bahá'í Writings,” tail any monism or pantheism when read in context. Bahá'u'lláh affirms in that passage exists necessarily, while other exist contingently and by asserting that essential or existence is not preceded by a and that such existence is limited to God (165). This statement from therefore, actually confirms the scendence and ontological of God from a creation that tingently, and it is not at all a position differing from other statements.

epistemological relativism is supported by underemphasizing the remarkable conceptual consistency, over a life-writings, long ministry, of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, and by overemphasizing apparent disparities in them, which can be rather easily resolved, or even disappear, with Bahá'u'lláh reference to the evident metaphysical content of His explicit statements on the nature of God.

Consequently, and more generally, what is presented as two contrasting positions in Bahá'u'lláh's "theism" and consistent position, variously and elaborated: God, even as Avicenna logically deduced and repeatedly affirms, is the Necessarily Existent and thus exists without cause or on any condition, whereas all other things are contingently existent and thus depend on God ceaselessly as their ultimate cause.

As a case in point, we may consider Momen's suggestion that some of Bahá'u'lláh's statements, such as Shoghi Effendi "absolute existence is strictly confined to God" (Gleanings 157; Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubárákih 165) are monistic or pantheistic, and substantively differ from other statements from Bahá'u'lláh that support what the article calls the "theistic view of God," removed which holds that God completely transcends the world. This statement from Bahá'u'lláh, which we discussed in the section "The Necessarily Existent" 88

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of God—both of which the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh emphatically undisputed repudiate and the fallacy of which they expose. (112–13) the mirror of the entire creation.

Who is the Eternal Truth is the Power Who exerciseth sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in

Much more, of course, might be said to do justice to the arguments in “The God of Bahá’u’lláh.” In closing, however, it should only be noted that, to the degree that there are explicit and implicit metaphysical principles in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, we may regard Avicenna as an important ally in approaching the Bahá’í corpus as scholars determined to discover and understand the precise nature of Bahá’í-Ver-

Their teachings on the nature of reality. It remains for future studies to illumine further what positions of past philosophers are affirmed by Bahá’u’lláh, az Makátíb-i- and how the philosophical tradition Hadrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá, vol. of classical theism can be used to explicate, articulate, defend, and clarify the metaphysics and theology of Bahá’u’lláh. We may, nevertheless, remain confident in the explicit content of Bahá’u’lláh’s unequivocal testimony to the existence, transcendence, singleness, and unity of the self-subsistent and infinite God, on Whom all things ceaselessly depend, from Whom they derive their being:

George Ronald Publishers, 1978.

Regard thou the one true God as One Who is apart from, and immeasurably exalted above, all created things. The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is an-

All existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the all things. This is what is meant by Divine unity; this is its mental principle. (Gleanings 166; Iqtidárát 158)

W C

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Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the Heal-
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