

Freedom and the Baha'i Writings

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Freedom and the Bahá'í Writings

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Abstract: First, the Bahá'í philosophy of freedom is rational, coherent and comprehensive. It is rational because its teachings are developed according to the principles of reasoning, specifically, the law of non-contradiction. It is coherent because the principles and teachings are interdependent and mutually supportive. Every teaching builds on its predecessor and sets the stage for its successor. We might also say that that each subsequent deduction is potentially present in its predecessor. Furthermore, the Bahá'í philosophy of freedom is also coherent because its teachings are all based on certain metaphysical principles that ensure the underlying unity of its philosophy of freedom. This unity will become more apparent throughout our study. Finally, the Bahá'í Writings cover the broad spectrum of issues about freedom such as the metaphysical basis of free will; the body and free will; consciousness, intentionality and freedom; freedom and responsibility; personal freedoms vis-à-vis community rights; legitimate limitations on personal freedom; positive and negative liberty; circumstantial, natural and acquired freedom ; and free will and the after-life. This comprehensiveness should encourage Bahá'ís to promulgate the divine teachings about freedom by engaging in constructive dialogue with other viewpoints.

Second, the Bahá'í Writings understand freedom as spiritual, teleological and instrumental in nature. Freedom is one of mankind's divinely given spiritual capacities and achieves its highest expression in advancing our spiritual development. It is also teleological, i.e. it exists for a purpose, namely, the actualization of mankind's physical, intellectual and spiritual potentials. Such progress is, after all, the purpose of all the Manifestations of God. Furthermore, in contrast to many other philosophies of freedom, the Bahá'í Writings teach that while freedom is a necessary instrument for the achievement of greater spiritual ends, it is necessary but not sufficient for human progress. Freedom is not an absolute end in itself and by itself does not lead to progress that is appropriate to human nature. The Manifestations are must provide the needed spiritual guidance.

Finally, the Bahá'í philosophy of freedom includes — and possibly originates — at least two original arguments about the basis of free will. These arguments, while somewhat technical, are important because they not only solve two long-standing scientific and philosophical problems but, more important, they further show the untenability of materialist and determinist positions on free will. The first of these provides a new solution to the mind-body problem whereas the second demonstrates the impossibility of mind-brain identity theory there by showing the necessity of invoking non-physical entities to explain certain brain functions.

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