

# The End of Theology: Bahá'í Metaphysics and the Limits of Speculative Reason

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## *Abstract*

This article opens a philosophical inquiry into the theological and metaphysical implications of Bahá'í teachings, with particular attention to the closure of speculative theology. It argues that in the Bahá'í Writings, theology reaches not an end as cessation but a fulfillment—its 'end' understood as *telos*, the completion of speculative possibilities. The unknowability of God, the ontological mediation of the Primal Will (*al-Mashiyyat*), the function of the Manifestation as Logos and theophanic presence, and the eternal ascent of the human soul form the central pillars of this metaphysical architecture. Drawing on Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and his reorientation of thinking toward Being, the article repositions theology from the domain of conceptual mastery to one of ontological orientation, where knowledge yields to reverence and speculation to lived response. It establishes the epistemic and ontological limits of theology in Bahá'í thought.

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## *Introduction*

Theological discourse, once regarded as the apex of intellectual inquiry into the nature of being, meaning, and destiny, now confronts its own boundary conditions. This article proposes that in the Bahá'í Writings, theology does not merely undergo crisis or decline, as modernity often suggests, but reaches its *telos*—its consummation. It argues that speculative metaphysics, particularly regarding the divine, the cosmos, the soul, and the structure of reality, is no longer a viable domain for theological innovation. Rather than being abolished, theology in the Bahá'í

dispensation is restructured, recentered around the limits of reason and the fullness of revealed epistemology. In this sense, the end of theology is not a negation but a transformation.

This thesis is articulated in dialogue with three intersecting intellectual legacies. First, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) revealed that when reason attempts to grasp the unconditioned—God, soul, and cosmos—it generates antinomies that expose the inherent limits of speculative metaphysics. Kant's transcendental critique did not refute metaphysics outright but confined it within the boundaries of possible experience, leaving theology either to moral faith or to regulative ideas. Second, in the sociological domain, Herbert Spencer envisioned the gradual displacement of religious metaphysics by scientific rationality. In *The Study of Sociology* (1876), Spencer predicted that theological explanations would yield to empirical and evolutionary paradigms—a view later echoed by secularization theorists who saw modernity as a progressive eclipse of religious authority. Third, Martin Heidegger declared the “end of philosophy” as metaphysics, arguing that Western thought had exhausted its ontological resources by reducing Being (*Sein*) to mere presence or objectivity. Heidegger's call for *Denken*—a meditative form of thought that transcends calculative representation—reflected a radical transformation in how thinking itself was to be understood. These thinkers do not merely represent historical turning points; they constitute the intellectual horizon within which Bahá'í metaphysics situates its own intervention.

The “end” of theology, in the framework advanced here, must not be confused with its exhaustion or disappearance. It does not indicate the failure of theology to sustain meaning in a secular age, nor does it suggest that God or revelation has been rendered obsolete. Rather, this end is a moment of conceptual closure and spiritual fulfillment. Classical metaphysics, from

Plato to Kant, labored to articulate the divine in rational terms—through essence, causality, contingency, necessity, and the hierarchy of being. The Bahá'í Writings bring this arc to completion. They neither dismantle nor discard metaphysical language, but saturate it—bringing it to its highest coherence while simultaneously affirming its intrinsic limit. This culminative gesture signals that the role of theology is no longer to speculate about the divine essence, but to orient human consciousness toward action, transformation, and spiritual becoming. In this sense, the end of theology is its rebirth in another mode: not as systematic knowledge of the divine, but as a lived response to the structure of divine manifestation.

By contrast, this article contends that the Bahá'í Writings simultaneously close and fulfill the speculative theological project. They do so not by renouncing metaphysics, but by completing it—by affirming the limits of what can be known of divine realities while offering a coherent ontological structure grounded in revelation. This is neither a flight into irrationality nor an embrace of dogmatism. Rather, it is a principled reconfiguration of theological method: from demonstrative abstraction to epistemic humility; from metaphysical conjecture to revealed structure; from speculative totality to spiritual orientation. The Bahá'í closure of theology is not the end of thinking about God—it is the end of thinking about God in ways that exceed the legitimate boundaries of reason and revelation.

This article focuses on the epistemological and ontological closure enacted by the Bahá'í Writings concerning God, the Logos, the Manifestation, and the soul. It argues that theology, in its classical metaphysical form, has reached its internal limit and that Bahá'í metaphysics marks this limit not through negation but through fulfillment. Rather than abstract speculation, the

Bahá'í Writings reposition theology as an orientation toward revelation, transformation, and the lived response to divine manifestation.

### *1. The Unknowability of God*

A foundational premise of this inquiry is the necessity of epistemic humility before that which transcends the boundaries of human cognition. Any object or reality not situated within time and space, incapable of quantification or qualification, devoid of directionality or positionality, and unbound to empirical cognition, must be considered, within the strictest epistemological terms, as fundamentally unknowable. This limitation is not provisional but structural, inscribed within the architecture of reason itself. Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1998) decisively exposed this boundary: metaphysical concepts—God, the soul, the cosmos as totality—are ideas of reason which, when pressed beyond possible experience, generate antinomies—pairs of equally rational yet contradictory propositions. Such concepts exceed the limits of discursive reason, which cannot verify or falsify them within the categories of understanding or the bounds of spatio-temporal intuition. Kant thus excluded them from the domain of theoretical reason (*Vernunft*), while acknowledging their role within the domain of moral faith and practical reason.

Consequently, the question of God's existence cannot be adjudicated as demonstrative knowledge. To insist otherwise demands either assent to classical philosophical arguments—the cosmological, teleological, or ontological proofs—or an acceptance, with Kant, of the inherent limitations of human cognition. The latter leads not to skepticism in the pejorative sense but to a disciplined acknowledgment of ignorance: a knowing that we do not know. This epistemic humility entails recognition of the legitimacy of boundaries, compelling us to declare, with the language of apophasis, *al-ṭrīq masdūd wa 'l-ṭalab mardūd* (“The way is barred and all seeking

rejected”), not because the object is illusory but because it transcends the cognitive apparatus through which knowledge is conventionally mediated.

Such recognition finds analogical support in the hierarchy of being: inanimate matter cannot comprehend vegetal life, plants cannot grasp sentient consciousness, animals cannot intuit human rationality; so too the human intellect cannot ascend to comprehend the infinite and transcendent reality of God. Within this hierarchy, any theological claim to exhaustive knowledge of divine essence is not only epistemologically unfounded but spiritually presumptuous. True theological maturity begins in the acknowledgment of divine unknowability—a principle profoundly affirmed in the Bahá’í Writings, where God is designated as the Unknowable Essence.

It must be categorically rejected that divine unknowability is a contingent limitation awaiting future remedy—whether by human progress or through subsequent revelations. Such an assumption misconstrues the ontological nature of divine unknowability as articulated in the Bábí and Bahá’í revelations. The unknowability of God is not a function of humanity’s current epistemic weakness but a permanent condition of the structure of being itself. The divine essence (*dhāt*) is and will remain inaccessible—not because of temporal ignorance but because of ontological transcendence.

The Báb expresses this radical apophatic theology in unequivocal terms: “He hath not manifested the sign of His recognition within any thing save through the incapacity of every thing to comprehend Him.”<sup>1</sup> Further, the Báb affirms the divine solitude beyond all relations of likeness, resemblance, or exemplarship. There is no peer, no equal, no correspondence. All that is

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<sup>1</sup> خلق نفرموده آیه عرفان خود را در هیچ شیئی الا بعجز کلشیئی از عرفان او – بیان فارسی، واحد اول، باب اول

predicated upon God by the term "thingness" is itself a created designation, brought forth through the dominion of divine Will. Recognition of God's essence is impossible; comprehension collapses before the infinite.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá reiterates this principle with theological precision: “Know that the reality of the Divinity and the nature of the divine Essence is ineffable sanctity and absolute holiness... The Invisible and Inaccessible can never be known; the absolute Essence can never be described.”<sup>2</sup>

The encompassing cannot be encompassed. The divine Essence remains enshrined within the inaccessible heights of sanctity. Human comprehension—however refined—can apprehend only the signs and attributes of God within creation, never the Essence itself.

This distinction between signs and essence is not merely semantic but foundationally metaphysical. The ontological asymmetry between the encompassed and the encompassing rules out any possibility of ascent from creation to the Creator. Just as lower forms of existence cannot comprehend higher ones, so too the human intellect cannot pierce the veil to grasp the Absolute.

The doctrine of divine unknowability functions as both theological imperative and epistemological boundary. It preserves divine transcendence from reduction into conceptual grasp and secures the radical otherness of God against the presumption of speculative theology. The Bahá’í texts thus command a theology rooted not in comprehension but in orientation: from essence to sign, from speculative ascent to reverent acknowledgment.

The Báb's systematic negation of all categories of relation, likeness, and predication with respect to the divine essence marks a definitive closure to speculative theological ambition. God is not merely ineffable; He is beyond the reach of all created categories. The incapacity of all things to

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<sup>2</sup> Some Answered Questions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Fifth Edition, page 165

comprehend Him becomes the only true sign of His reality. This renders any hope of future access—whether by spiritual evolution, revelation, or intellectual progress—a theological misconception. Divine unknowability is not a temporary veil but a permanent horizon.

Accordingly, all legitimate theological discourse must be anchored in radical apophysis: a theology that refrains from pronouncing upon the essence and confines itself to the signs and traces of divine manifestation within the created world. To transgress this boundary is to blur the ontological distinction between Creator and creation, the Necessary and the contingent. The unknowability of God is not a deficiency but a constitutive condition of theological coherence. It compels epistemic humility and orients discourse toward the Manifestation as the site of relational access to the divine.

Thus, theology finds its fulfillment not in mastery but in recognition, not in exhaustive comprehension but in reverent response. This fulfillment is not the exhaustion of inquiry but the reorientation of thought from abstraction to the concrete, from speculative metaphysics to the lived reality of divine signs. Theology ends where orientation begins—in the acknowledgment of limit and the acceptance of divine transcendence.

### *The Unknowability and Mediation of the Primal Will (Mashiyyat)*

The ontological and epistemological status of the Logos, identified in Bábí theology as the Primal Will (*al-Mashiyyat al-Ūā*), constitutes a pivotal axis for understanding the metaphysical architecture of Bábí and Bahá'í thought. Though ontologically superior to all contingent realities, the Primal Will remains fundamentally unknowable in its essence (*kunh*), even while serving as the exclusive medium of divine self-disclosure and the principle through which cosmic actualization occurs.

In a passage of considerable metaphysical density, the Báb states: *“That which is predicated of Him by the designation of ‘thingness’ (shay’iyya) — He has created Him by the sovereignty of His Will (malīk mashiyyat), and He has manifested Him unto Himself, by His own Self, in the exaltation of His Seat (‘uluw maqʿadīh). He has created the sign (āyah) of His knowledge in the very essence (kunh) of all things. There is no ‘First’ for Him except through His own Primacy, and there is no ‘Last’ for Him except through His own Finality. And everything that has been decreed within it or will be decreed has been rendered a ‘thing’ by His thingness, and realized by His being-ness (āniyya). Through Him, the Lord has initiated the creation of all things, and unto Him He shall return all creation.*

*He is the One for whom all the Most Beautiful Names (asmāʾ al-ḥusnā) have ever belonged — and yet the essence (kunh) of His Reality is sanctified above all names and attributes; and the pure natures (kāfūr sādhiḥ) of His reality are exalted above all glory and loftiness; and the essence of His abstraction (jawhar mujarrad) is purified from all limitation and elevation. He is the First, yet He is not known by [being] the First; He is the Last, yet He is not described by [being] the Last; He is the Manifest, yet He is not qualified by [being] the Manifest; He is the Hidden, yet He is not grasped by [being] the Hidden.*

*He is the First to believe in He Whom God shall make manifest (man yuḏhiruhu ʾllāh), and He is the first who believed in He Who is manifest. He is the One Reality (shayʿ wāḥid) through whose creation all things are created, by whose sustenance all things are sustained, through whose death the death of all things is made manifest, through whose life the life of all things is made*

*manifest, and through whose resurrection the resurrection of all things becomes manifest. Never has the eye of existence beheld the like of Him — neither before nor after.”*<sup>3</sup>

This passage affirms a classical apophatic stance: the Primal Will is the vehicle of divine causality, the cause of causes, and the locus of divine Names — yet it transcends even these categories. The Báb’s assertion that “the essence of His Reality is sanctified above all names and attributes” resonates with the Qur’ānic dictum *laysa ka-mithlihi shay’* (Qur’ān 42:11) and reflects the metaphysical strategies of *via negativa* prominent in Islamic theosophy (e.g., Ibn ‘Arabī) and Neoplatonism.

Despite the radical unknowability of its essence, the Primal Will functions as the ontological and epistemic bridge between the Absolute Essence (*dhāt muṭlaq*) and the realm of creation. The Báb affirms, “Through Him, the Lord has initiated the creation of all things, and unto Him He shall return all creation.” This corresponds with the doctrine of the Logos as the eternal principle through which all realities are instantiated and to which all realities return — a conception echoed in the *al-‘aql al-awwal* of Fārābī and the First Emanation in Ismā‘īlī cosmology.

The theological implications are threefold:

**1. Unknowability in Essence.** Although subordinate to the divine Essence, the Logos remains utterly unknowable in its own ontological reality.

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<sup>3</sup> “آنچه اطلاق میشود بر او ذکر شینیت خلق فرموده است او را به ملیک مشیت خود، و تجلی فرموده به او، به نفس او، در علو مقعد او، و خلق فرموده آیه معرفت او را در کنه کلشیی... و نبوده از برای او اولی الا به اولیت خود، و نیست از برای او آخری الا به آخریت خود، و کلشیی بما قد قدر فیہ او بقدر قد شیئی بشینیتہ و حق بانیتہ و به او بدء فرموده خداوند خلق کلشیی را، و به او عود میفرماید خلق کل شیئی را، و او است که از برای او کل اسماء حسنی بوده و هست و مقدس بوده کنه ذات او از هر اسم و وصفی و متعالی بوده کافور ساذج او از هر بهائی و علانی و منزہ بوده جوهر مجرد او از هر امتناعی و ارتفاعی و او است اول و لا یعرف به و او است آخر و لا یوصف به و او است ظاهر و لا ینعت به و او است باطن و لا یدرک به و او است اول من یؤمن ”بمن ینظہرہ اللہ“ و او است اول من آمن ”بمن ینظہر“ و او است شیئی واحد که خلق کل شیئی بخلق او میشود و رزق کلشیی برزق او داده میشود و موت کلشیی بموت او ظاهر میشود و حیات کلشیی بحیات او ظاهر میشود و بعث کلشیی ببعث او ظاهر میشود لم یر عین الوجود بمثلہ لا من قبل و لا من بعد..”

**2. Mediated Knowability.** All knowledge of God, His names and attributes, and all created effects proceed through the Logos. It serves as the horizon through which the divine becomes manifest without ceasing to transcend creation.

**3. Ontological Axis.** The Logos undergirds existence itself, not merely as a creative function but as the sustaining axis of all being. Its "life" and "death" entail metaphysical consequences for all existence.

This duality — unknowability in essence, knowability in manifestation — defines the structure of negative theology and delineates the limits of human cognition with respect to the Primal Will. As the Báb states, “He is the First, yet He is not known by being the First... He is the Manifest, yet He is not qualified by being the Manifest.” This underscores that human comprehension of the Logos remains perpetually indirect, mediated through signs, operations, and analogies rather than through apprehension of its essence.

Consequently, this theological framework insists that the Logos can be known only insofar as it reveals itself through its operations: bringing forth creation, sustaining existence, orchestrating death and renewal. In its ontological reality, however, it remains beyond the grasp of speculative reason. Thus, the Primal Will delineates the horizon beyond which theology cannot pass and marks the threshold at which speculative inquiry yields to contemplative awareness. This awareness acknowledges the sacred unknowability at the heart of divine function and positions the Logos as both the site and the limit of theological reflection.

## *The Unknowability and Mediation of the Manifestation of God*

When the hidden and unknowable God—the Absolute, the Necessary Being—wills to make Himself known within the finite structures of the contingent world, this self-disclosure does not occur directly. The abyss between essence (*dhāt*) and existence (*mawjūd*) is ontologically impassable. The Divine Essence is not a being among beings, but Being itself (*al-wujūd al-mahḍ*), transcendent beyond all concept or category. Thus, divine self-disclosure necessitates mediation: a locus of manifestation (*mazhar*), a theophanic appearance embodying the fullness of God's will within the limitations of phenomenal reality.

This locus, however, is not a direct reflection of the Essence itself but a disclosure of the *Mashiyyat* (Divine Will). In Bábí and Bahá'í metaphysics, the *Mashiyyat* is the first emanation, the primal ontological act wherein the unknowable God manifests His will to be known. While it is not the *Dhāt* (Essence) of God, and thus cannot be said to be identical with God, it is wholly divine and serves as the sole operative and knowable face of divinity. The Manifestation of God is not a manifestation of the *Dhāt*, but the emergence of the *Mashiyyat* operating in the modes of relationality, command, and volition.

The Báb states: “The Cause of God is too exalted, too majestic, to be comprehended except through Himself. Rather, all else is known only by means of Him. By the essence of the Divine Being—He Who is One and alone in His oneness—the signs of this Cause are more radiant than the light of the noonday sun... How could the Eternal Ocean (*Baḥr al-Azal*) be grasped by the finite ocean of contingency? How can the Primal Word (*Dhikr al-Awwal*) be known by the

secondary word of limitation? Glory be to God, and exalted is He beyond all that is described by the allusions of creatures...”<sup>4</sup>

This passage establishes the asymmetry of epistemic access: the Manifestation is the exclusive locus through which divine reality discloses itself. Even this disclosure is mediated through signs (*āyāt*) proportionate not to divine infinity but to human receptivity. The analogy of the "light of the sun" and "light of the stars" emphasizes the analogical structure of knowledge: while all beings reflect traces of the divine, only the Manifestation is the direct theophany of the *Mashiyyat*, the radiant point of divine Will.

Bahá'u'lláh describes this descent of the *Mashiyyat* through time and form: “Thou didst create from the essence of Thy grace a subtle, luminous water... transmitting it from one locus to another, until it came to rest in the loins of one of Thy servants... Thus did He enter the garden of gnosis, repose in the abode of certitude... Until He was honored with the encounter (*liqā'*) and was nourished by the wine of everlasting life...”<sup>5</sup>

This is a sacred *Christogenesis*—a theology of divine manifestation—purified of Chalcedonian dualism. The Manifestation is not a hybrid of the human and divine but a pure transparency: the

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<sup>4</sup> "امر الله اعزّ و اجلّ از این است که بتوان او را شناخت بغیر او بل غیر او شناخته میشود باو قسم بذات خداوندی که وحده وحده بوده و هست که آثار آن مضنی تر است از ضیاء شمس در نهار و آثار آنهائیکه مهتدی شده—اند بعلو هدایت او اگر با علی علو درجه علم و عرفان و اصل گردند مثل آثار آنها مثل نور کواکب است در لیل و استغفر الله عن ذلك كيف يدرك بحر الازل ببحر الحدوث و كيف يعرف ذكر الاول بذكر الحدود سبحان الله و تعالی عن كل ما يذكر به الاشارات فی ملکوت الارض و السموات كلّ اینها نظر بمقامات حدودیة خلق بود که ذکر شد و الا آنچه احتجاج میشود بوم قیامت این است چنانکه بهمین احتجاج شد در این قیامت..."

<sup>5</sup> "مظاهر ظهور در بطن ام مظهر ظهور هستند..." :خلق فرمودی از جواهر نعمتهای خود آب لطیف نورانی و جاری نمودی او را در صلبهای روحانی و نقل نمودی از صلبی بسوی صلبی و از محلی تا اینکه منتهی شد و مقّر گردید در ظهّر یکی از عباد تو و بعد نازل فرمودی از ظهّر او در سدف یکی از اماء خود و تربیت نمودی او را بدستهای باطنی خود و لطیفه های بخشش و رحمت خود تا اینکه خلق فرمودی او را در بطن ام بر هیکل کرامت و بزرگی و به بهترین صورت او را زینت دادی و از عیون صافیة شیر دادی او را و از قدرت کامله حفظ فرمودی او را تا آنکه بزرگ شد در جوار رحمت تو و ساکن شد در دیار حکومت تو و چشید از خمرهای مکرمت تو و نوشید از چشمه های لطف تو تا آنکه به حدیقه عرفان وارد شد و به محل ابقان مستریح گشت و در ریاض قرب و مشاهده سائر بود و در بساط وصل و مکاشفه میخرامید تا آنکه بشرف لقا مشرف شد و از خمر بقا مرزوق گشت و ثمره قرب را از شجره وصال اخذ نمود و آب زلال را از چشمه جمال بنوشید..."

descent of the *Mashiyyat* into the structure of existence. Bahá'u'lláh distinguishes spatial from ontological presence: the Manifestation “walks among men” but does not tread by foot; He dwells within history but belongs to the realm of command (*'alam al-amr*), transcendent of causality and temporality.

The Báb writes: “Whatever reality exists or shall come into being derives from Him... Before He attains physical maturity... the aid of the All is from Him... This Being is a singular entity, whose likeness is that of the sun: even if it rise countless times, it remains one in essence...”<sup>6</sup>

The Manifestation is ontologically recurrent, like the sun rising in different epochs yet remaining singular. This is not reincarnation but theophanic constancy: one being, shining in many mirrors. Historical development is pedagogical, accommodating human weakness, not indicative of change in divine reality.

The Báb clarifies: “Observe the Manifestation of He Whom God shall make manifest—He is the very Primal Will in all realms... His Book is the Book of the Primal Will in every world... He is, in very truth, the Point of the Bayān... The Sign inscribed upon Him is the same Sign inscribed from before...”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> فرض کن که آنچه شئییت در امکان هست یا بعد متکون میشود باو است اگر چه قبل از ظهور در بیت خود لا یعرف باشد بلکه قبل از حدود ظاهریه در گهواره از برای شیر گریه کند که همان وقت مدد کل از او بوده و هست آنچه که بوده از ظهورات قبل او است و آنچه میشود از ظهورات بعد او است و آن شئی واحدی است که مثل آن مثل شمس است اگر بما لا عدّ طالع گردد واحد بذات است در صقع ابداع و اگر غارب گردد واحد بنفس است در علو اختراع و کل بضیاء او مستمد از عالم افنده گرفته که جوهر توحید در آن مشرق تا حدّ جماد که منتها الیه ظهور فیض است منتهی گردد”

<sup>7</sup> “...همین قسم مشاهده کن ظهور من یظهره الله را که او است بعینه مشییت اولیه در کلّ عوالم و کتاب او است کتاب مشییت اولیه در کلّ عوالم و او نبوده و نیست الا مدلّ علی الله و کتاب او نبوده و نیست الا ناطق عن الله و اسماء او نبوده و نیست الا متجلّی از اسم الله عزّ و جلّ و امثال او نبوده و نیست الا مستقرّ در ظلّ الله جلّ و عزّ الخلق و الامر من قبل و من بعد لا اله الا هو انا کلّ له مخلصون و بعینه نقطه بیان همان آدم بدیع فطرت اول بوده و بعینه خاتمی که در ید او است همان خاتم بوده که از آنروز تا امروز خداوند حفظ فرموده و بعینه آیه که مکتوب بر او است همان آیه بوده که مکتوب بر او بوده این ذکر نظر بضعف مردم است و الا آن آدم در مقام نقطه این آدم میگردد مثلاً جوانی که دوازده سال تمام از عمر او گذشته نمیگوید که من آن نطفه هستم که از فلان سماء نازل و در فلان ارض مستقرّ شده که بگوید تنزل نموده و نزد اولوالعلم حکم بتمامیت عقل او نمیشود اینست که نقطه بیان نمیگوید امروز منم مظاهر مشییت از آدم تا امروز که مثل این قول همین میشود و از اینجهت است که رسول خدا (ص) فرموده که من عیسی هستم زیرا که آن وقتی است که عیسی از حدّ خود ترقّی نموده و بان حدّ رسیده و همچنین من یظهره الله در حدّ زمانیکه محبوب چهارده ساله ذکر میشود لایق نیست که بگوید من همان دوازده ساله بودم که اگر بگوید نظر بضعف مردم نموده زیرا که شئی رو بعلو

‘Abdu’l-Bahá further explicates the three stations (*maqāmāt*) of the Manifestation: “The first is the material station... the second is the human station... the third is that of divine manifestation and heavenly splendor... This station has neither beginning nor end... The Word of God is sanctified above all these conditions...”<sup>8</sup>

The physical station is temporal; the rational soul shares in humanity and endures; but the station of divine revelation—the self-expression of the *Mashiyyat*—is eternal. The Manifestation’s essence cannot be contained within language or metaphor.

Thus, the Manifestation of God is:

1. The emergence of the *Mashiyyat*, not the *Dhāt*.
2. The mirror of divinity, reflecting but not containing the Absolute.
3. The Logos, the singular medium of divine acts and knowledge.
4. Ontologically recurrent, one theophanic identity.
5. Mediated and mediating, the sole bridge between Creator and creation.
6. Epistemically veiled in essence, revealing only what can be known.

To seek beyond this is not reverence but reductionism. The Manifestation embodies not only the articulation of the Word but also the boundary of linguistic and conceptual comprehension.

### *The Unknowability and Eternal Progression of the Human Spirit*

The reality of the soul remains among the most luminous and yet impenetrable truths disclosed in the sacred writings of the Bahá’í Faith. In its textual and metaphysical register, the soul—or

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است نه دنو اگر چه آن جوان چهارده ساله در حین نطفه آدم بوده و کم کم ترقی نموده تا آنکه امروز دوازده ساله گشته و از این دوازده سالگی کم کم ترقی مینماید تا آنکه بچهارده میرسد...”

<sup>8</sup> Some Answered Questions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Fifth Edition, page 172

spirit—is affirmed as the ontological center of human identity, the substratum of consciousness, volition, moral responsibility, and existential continuity. Yet for all its centrality, its essence, its true nature (*kunh*), remains utterly concealed. Its ontological structure resists scientific inquiry, its quiddity transcends language, and its presence eludes the grasp of any epistemology that presumes to operate within the confines of space, time, or causality.

In a foundational discourse of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (*Mufāwadhāt*), a hierarchical classification of the "spirits" (*arwāh*) is articulated, not as multiple substances but as emergent principles. He identifies the vegetable spirit, a principle of composition and organic growth; the animal spirit, which adds perception and movement; the human spirit, which possesses abstraction, discovery, and reason; the spirit of faith, which arises from the breath of the Holy Spirit; and finally, the Holy Spirit itself, the direct medium of revelation and divine effulgence. Even within this ascending hierarchy, the human spirit occupies a paradoxical position: it is placeless, non-spatial, and immaterial, yet intimately linked to the body. It sees without eyes, acts without limbs, and in sleep or death, retains its awareness and function—demonstrating that its autonomy is not poetic metaphor but metaphysical actuality.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s analogy of the mirror and the sun is instructive: the spirit does not inhere in the body like a liquid in a vessel but relates to it as light to a mirror. In this same discourse, the Kingdom of God is described as placeless, beyond sense-perception, yet related to human consciousness. He writes, "The Kingdom has no location, but it is related to humanity... love, too, has no place, though it is associated with the heart." This speaks to a fundamental principle of Bahá’í ontology: the spiritual realm is not distant but transcendent, not absent but supra-empirical.

Bahá'u'lláh, in the *Súriy-i-Ra'īs*, deepens this metaphysical account. He affirms that "the soul is exalted above, and is independent of, all infirmities of body or mind." Analogies disrupt materialist assumptions: the soul is a lamp, the body a glass; should the glass shatter, the light remains. He insists: "The soul is the sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel." This metaphysics of negative theology affirms the soul is known only through its effects, never in itself. Its essence remains ineffable, a mystery before which reason must bow.

This unknowability is not a limitation to be overcome through intellectual striving but a constitutive dimension of its being. In *Lawḥ-i-'Abd al-Wahhāb*, Bahá'u'lláh writes: "This Wronged One testifies to the immortality of the soul, though inquiry into its manner and reality is inappropriate—for 'it cannot be described,' and ought not be mentioned save in a prescribed measure." This "prescribed measure" defines the ethical and epistemic humility demanded of the seeker: there are boundaries to knowledge that are not barriers but veils—thresholds of reverence.

To understand what the soul is not, one is invited to contemplate its paradoxical attributes. It is single in essence, yet manifold in expression. Bahá'u'lláh, in *Súriy-i-Ra'īs*, writes: "Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments... It is single in its essence, yet manifold through the diversity of its instruments."

These instruments—brain, senses, intellect—do not create the soul but manifest its latent capacities. The soul, by orienting itself, actualizes different modalities. Its unity is not compromised by diversity; rather, it is precisely in its self-differentiation that it reveals its coherence.

If the soul is unknowable in its essence, what then may be said of its destiny? The Bahá'í writings offer a vision not merely of personal immortality but of eternal progression. 'Abdu'l-Bahá teaches that "the soul is in ceaseless progress, and since regression is impossible, it must continue to advance... Although the stations are finite, the divine effusions are infinite..." This progress is not circular, nor annihilative, but ascent—ever toward the Source. Yet this ascent is conditioned: the soul must be turned toward the light. Entry into the higher realms of spirit is contingent not merely upon existence but upon purification. "Entry into the Kingdom is by the love of God, by detachment, by sanctification and purification, by truthfulness and sincerity..."

The analogy of the fetus is pivotal: "Just as a fetus in the womb develops eyes, ears, hands, feet... it cannot yet use them." As Shoghi Effendi writes (January 19, 1943), we cannot comprehend the next world any more than a fetus can comprehend this one. Our current faculties are signs of capacities to be actualized only upon death, which is not extinction but birth.

In death, the soul does not lose identity. It retains "individuality, intelligence, and consciousness," and engages in "intimate communion" with other souls. But this communion is "wholly spiritual and free from selfish desire" (Shoghi Effendi, March 10, 1936). The soul is raised "in the most excellent of forms," not materially but spiritually. It gains proximity, not in space, but in nearness to divine presence.

Bahá'u'lláh enumerates various dimensions of the soul's reality: "the soul of the kingdom, the soul of the dominion, the celestial soul, the divine soul..."—a taxonomy of spiritual states rather than species. He warns against reductionism: "Every group hath its own pronouncements concerning the soul and We are disinclined to dwell upon the sayings of the past." Instead, He calls the soul "a fire ablaze in the tree of man," whose destiny is to be ignited by the love of God or consumed by passion. Its orientation determines its station.

What, then, is eternal life? In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words, “The life of the Kingdom is the life of the spirit, and it is eternal, sanctified from time and space.”<sup>9</sup> It is life in God, not mere continuity. To say the soul survives is to affirm that its love, its memory, its consciousness, remain active and purified, elevated and individuated. Not all survival is luminous. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “those souls who are veiled from the Truth... although they possess life, their life is darkened, and in relation to the life of the believers, it is as non-existence.”

This perspective guards against simplistic notions of reward and punishment. The afterlife is not punitive but revelatory. It shows each soul what it has become. Thus, to “die before death” is to begin that process now. The metaphysical journey is already underway.

The soul’s journey is not isolated. In the next world, the soul is drawn toward others in sanctified relationships. Communion with departed loved ones is possible, not as ghosts or specters, but as mutual spiritual recognition. As Shoghi Effendi affirms, “we shall all join our departed loved ones and partake in their joy” (January 13, 1932).

Yet the veils of this world prevent us from seeing what awaits us. If “the vision to behold the rewards of the next world were granted... we would be unable to bear even an hour more of earthly life.” This divine concealment is not abandonment but mercy. It preserves the moral fabric of this world, which would collapse under the weight of immediate beatitude (October 22, 1932).

Thus, knowledge of the soul remains veiled even while affirmed. “Science itself is inherently incapable of providing answers,” writes Shoghi Effendi (January 19, 1943). Philosophy may

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<sup>9</sup> Some Answered Questions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Fifth Edition, page 279

speculate, psychology may analyze, but the soul's reality is only known in the mirror of revelation—and only then partially.

And yet, even partial knowledge suffices to transform. The soul, when turned toward the Divine, is sanctified, and as Bahá'u'lláh writes, “should it be kindled with the fire of the love of its Lord, neither the waters of opposition nor the oceans of the world can quench its flame.” This is not metaphor—it is ontology. The soul is a metaphysical flame: it does not consume but illuminates.

Such a soul does not regress. It ascends. In a world defined by motion, stagnation is death.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms: “there is no rest or stasis in the world of existence... the soul is in continual ascent.” This ascent is neither arbitrary nor aimless. It is the ceaseless realization of divine potential, the unfolding of that primordial “Word of God” that called it into being.

Ultimately, the unknowability of the soul is not a silence of ignorance, but of awe. It is the reverent silence of those who know they stand before the threshold of that which cannot be said, only lived. The soul is not an object to be studied but a presence to be purified. It is the mirror of God and the mystery of self. And its journey is unending. This subjection is not temporal or spatial; it is not a provisional limit. Rather, here theology reaches the end of all possible avenues of comprehension. The nature of the soul, in its essence, is a reality that no future Manifestation, however exalted, will articulate beyond what has already been revealed. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá do not merely define the boundaries of this knowledge—they constitute its fulfillment. In this domain, the horizon is complete; the path of inquiry culminates not in further propositions, but in reverent silence.

### *Conclusion*

The inquiry undertaken in this article has traced the closure of speculative metaphysics as a theological telos within the Bahá'í Writings. From the radical unknowability of the divine

Essence to the mediating role of the Primal Will, from the theophanic function of the Manifestation to the veiled mystery and eternal ascent of the human soul, each axis of this metaphysical architecture confirms the limits beyond which theology cannot and must not venture.

Bahá'í metaphysics, rather than abolishing the question of God or dissolving it into historical immanence, affirms the unknowable as the horizon and foundation of all theological discourse. In this affirmation, theology is redirected from speculative conquest to reverence, from abstraction to orientation. The unknowability of God signifies not an absence but the plenitude of transcendent presence; it safeguards the divine from reduction while orienting theology toward reverent silence. Within this architecture, the Manifestation of God functions as the definitive horizon of divine knowledge and the singular conduit through which humanity attains orientation toward the Absolute.

This article has established the internal limit of classical metaphysics within the Bahá'í dispensation. It concludes not with a silence of negation but with a silence of fulfillment—a theological acknowledgment that beyond the signs, beyond the Manifestation, beyond the veiled ascent of the soul, lies that which can only be approached in reverence and lived response. The end of theology signals the beginning of a transformative orientation: a turning of the soul toward its origin, recognizing that its path is one of ceaseless return to the eternal light.

The subsequent article will extend this inquiry to the cosmic order, revisiting Kant's antinomies in light of Bahá'í metaphysical principles, exploring how the structures of creation themselves participate in this reorientation of thought from speculative mastery to ontological reverence.

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