

On the Reconciliation of Shi'a and Sunni Islam Jon Trevathan

There is a Bahá'í Teaching as follows:

"Any religious belief which is not conformable with scientific proof and investigation is superstition, for true science is reason and reality, and religion is essentially reality and pure reason; therefore, the two must correspond. Religious teaching which is at variance with science and reason is human invention and imagination unworthy of acceptance, for the antithesis and opposite of knowledge is superstition born of the ignorance of man. If we say religion is opposed to science, we lack knowledge of either true science or true religion; for both are founded upon the premises and conclusions of reason, and both must bear its test.

(Abdu'l Bahá, [The Promulgation of Universal Peace](#), page 107)

The issue I wish to explore in this paper is whether there is a scientifically plausible ontology that can reconcile selected doctrinal disputes in the early Shi'a and Sunni Islam creeds; as identified in A. J. Wensinck's book titled "The Muslim Creed". Because the Bahá'í ontologies have their roots in the Islamic philosophies, they are integral to this reconciliation. With this foundation, the Primal or Divine Will (*Mashíyyat*) may be understood to be the "only direct emanation or creation of the Divine Essence, the hidden God." [see: [Realms of Divine Existence as described in the Tablet of All Food](#)]

...and that the "world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force (*the Primal or Divine Will - Mashíyyat*) and that which is its recipient (*the Divine Purpose - Irádih*)." Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Hikmat (Tablet of Wisdom); Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p.140; above as quoted in Divine Philosophy p. 180. *Italicized text added*].

In this context, we must first ask if there is a "something" to represent the interaction of God's Primal Will (*Mashíyyát*) and God's Divine Purpose (*Irádih*)? As matter is reducible to oscillations, it would seem permissible that we borrow the Hindu **Aum** (or Om) as our starting point.

Ignoring, for now, that string theory is not background independent, what would happen if a Planckian-sized string were in the presence of our Primal Aum? If in a harmonic, would it not vibrate? In string theory, matter is represented by multi-dimensional strings that are curled up in what is called a Calabi–Yau manifold. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/String_theory and

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calabi%E2%80%93Yau_space When curled up, each shape is understood to behave in a way that is roughly analogous to a crystal such that each shape will manifest a unique vibratory pattern. Therefore, if we place our Calabi-Yau "crystal" in the presence of the Primal Aum, it will, if it is a harmonic of Aum, vibrate. In the symbolic represented of creation through the disconnected letters of the Qur'an, the initial vibratory frequency would be "alif" and the remaining disconnected letters our initial set of resonate frequencies.

Then there appeared from these [Disconnected] Letters which shone forth from the Primordial [letter] "A" (al-alif al-awwliyya) in the first of the Theophanies [Manifestations] the worlds of delineation and multiplicity. [18] They were differentiated, separated and disconnected then gathered together, reconciled, united and linked together. [19] Then assembled words and gathered letters appeared in the worlds of creation in the forms of Names and Attributes (*hayakil al-asma' wa'l-sifat*).” . . . Tafsir hurufat al-muqatt’ah ("Commentary on the Isolated Letters") or Lawh-i ayah-yi nur ("Tablet about the Light Verse [Q. 24:35] ") of Bahá'-Allah (1817-1892 CE). provisional translation and brief introduction by Stephen Lambden ~ April 1998.

There are five different string theories which are each based on a distinct and totally incompatible, Calabi–Yau configuration. However, these five only reflect a high-level classification. The actual number of mathematically distinct Calabi–Yau configurations is currently believed to be at least 10^{500} (a one with five hundred zeroes)" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superstring_theory) As noted, only a, possibly very small, subset of these "crystals" would be a harmonic of the Primal Aum. However, as also noted, only five configurations are presently associated with corporeality, leaving a potentially vast numbers of configuration as the underlying correlates to spirituality and consciousness. Next, please consider that when two vibrating strings are proximate to each other, they may resonate in sympathy with each other. As analogy, if the individual "crystals" may be representative of the Qur'an's disconnected letters, certain combinations of sympathetic vibrations involving multitudes of "crystals" may be understood to represent the Names and Attributes of God, and cumulatively to represent the word of God.

Every theory that contemplates a beginning must assume something about that beginning. For string theory, it is a fixed Minkowski spacetime, which the string theory-defined graviton paradoxically curves. For loop quantum gravity (LQG), Planckian-sized loops are woven into a quantized spacetime. For Casual Dynamical Triangulation (CDT) which I feel has the best potential to merge general relativity into quantum mechanics, spacetime is emergent from a superposition of 4-dimensional tetrahedrons (4-simplexes) which, through CDT's causality rules, is assembled into a space-like mosaic. Our Primal Aum may now be translated into quantum mechanics; either by borrowing the initial state that Causal Dynamical Triangulation assumes (See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causal_dynamical_triangulation) or we may otherwise assume a hyperpoint as our starting condition. According to the physicists, Carlos Castro, Alex Granik, and Mohamed El Naschie, a hyperpoint is an "infinite dimensional hyper-sphere of unit Planck radius" ... "where infinite Dimensions, infinite Energy and infinite Information merge and become ONE." Castro, Granik, & El Naschie, "Why We Live in 3+1 Dimensions (August 18, 2000).

“(C)onsider the dot (or point); how letters and words are folded up and hidden within the essence (huwiyat, ipseity) and reality of a dot with perfect effacement and annihilation so that no trace can be discerned of the existence of these letters and words nor is there any differentiation between them. Rather they are completely obliterated and utterly annihilated and have no existence except in the essence [dhat] of the point. In the same way the Names and Attributes of God and the Essential Dispositions [shu’únát dhátiyya] [15] are completely and utterly annihilated in the station of Primary Oneness so that not a whiff can be inhaled from them of substantial or intellectual existence [16]. This original point is the 'Hidden Treasure' of these letters and words and they were incorporated and immersed within it and from it they appeared.” ([Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on "I Was a Hidden Treasure..."](#))

As previously described, the coeternal and unchanging names and attributes of God, and cumulatively the "Word of God", may be understood to be subsumed within our Primal Point of origination and, as Creator, God may be understood to first emanate these eternal and unchanging forms of the "Good". In this context, please note that [Dialetheias](#) are "true" contradictions, such that, applying Boolean negation, if A then not B and If B then not A would violate the law of non-contradiction; but are nonetheless both A and B are "true" or, in this case, both are presumed to be "Good" and "of God". (see also The Law of Non-contradiction: New Philosophical Essays by Graham Priest, J. C. Beall, Bradley P. Armour-Garb <http://books.google.com/books?id=vpSxuBtQfjQC&printsec=toc&dq=The+logic+of+inconsistency.+A+study+in+Non-Standard+Possible-World#PPR8.M1>)

And, if so, would not God, as creator, cause A and B to both "BE" as alternatives to each other? Quantum mechanics and quantum superposition provides our answer. "Quantum superposition, as a fundamental principle of quantum mechanics, holds that any quantum system will simultaneously exist in all of the system's theoretically possible states. (See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_superposition) Therefore, all of creation, in all of creation's possible forms, shapes, compositions, structures, and embodiments will, in superposition, be simultaneously undifferentially present within the Primal Point and emergent as a probability distribution of every possible state which is consistent with the system's starting boundary condition.

"When He purposed to call the new creation into being, He sent forth the Manifest and Luminous Point from the horizon of His Will; it passed through every sign and manifested itself in every form until it reached the zenith, as bidden by God, the Lord of all men. This Point is the focal centre of the circle of Names and marketh the culmination of the manifestations of Letters in the world of creation." (Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah, p. 101)

We must next note that virtually all of the laws of physics are time symmetric. (See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symmetry_%28physics%29 and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T-symmetry>) For example, Roger Penrose, in the article titled "The Big Bang and its thermodynamic legacy, wrote:

"Normally, one thinks in terms of systems evolving into the future, from data specified in the past, where the particular evolution takes place is determined by differential equations. ... One does not, on the other hand, tend to think of evolving these same equations into the past, despite the fact that the dynamical equations of classical and quantum mechanics are symmetrical under a reversal of the direction of time! As far as the mathematics is concerned, one can just as well specify final conditions, at some remote future time, and evolve backward in time. Mathematically, final conditions are just as good as initial ones for determining the evolution of a system." (Quoted from Roger Penrose, The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Universe, Chapter 27, "The Big Bang and its thermodynamic legacy", p. 687)

Additionally, in a paper titled "New Insights on Time-Symmetry in Quantum Mechanics", the Wolf Prize physicist Yakir Aharonov and his co-professor for the "Quantum Paradox" class I attended at GMU, Jeffrey Tollaksen, have written as follows:

"Up until now we have limited ourselves to the possibility of 2 boundary conditions which obtain their assignment due to selections made before and after a measurement. It is feasible and even suggestive to consider an extension of QM to include both a wavefunction arriving from the past and a second "destiny" wavefunction coming from the future, which are determined by 2 boundary conditions, rather than a measurement and selection. This proposal could solve the issue of the "collapse" of the wavefunction in a new and more natural way: every time a measurement takes place and the possible measurement outcomes decohere, then the future boundary condition simply selects one out of many possible outcomes [35, 32]. It also implies a kind of "teleology" which might prove fruitful in addressing the anthropic and fine-tuning issues [77]." (See: <http://arxiv.org/pdf/0706.1232> Jun 2007)

Applying time symmetry to the probability distribution arising from our Primal Point will simultaneously constitute the set of all futures and the set all histories which can arise from and lead to a single point, which constitutes both the system's point of origination and its point of destiny. Therefore, as the Primal Point constitutes both the system's beginning and ending boundary conditions, all actualizations must occur within this contextuality.

"God wrote down the decrees regarding the created world fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth, while His throne was on the water ". (Wensinck, "the Muslim Creed", page 54, quoting Muslim, Kadar, trad. 16; Tirmidhí, Kadar, b. 17.)

If the Big Bang is then understood to have occurred as an actualization event within this matrix of preexistent contextuality, it would constitute the initial boundary condition for our universe and, inter alia, embody all of the laws of physics pursuant to which our universe could thereafter evolve. All subsequent actualizations would then be strongly bounded by these laws of physics and the set of all actualizations that immediately precede each successive "now"; but would also be subtly influenced by the future boundary condition, the Kadar, toward which all of our possible futures must necessarily converge.

At this point, we could explore the physics underlying these speculations (which I can provide in separate papers) or further speculate on the relationship of this model to the Islamic "Realms of Being", Malakút and the world of similitudes ('alam-i-mithál). However, to preserve some brevity, it is time to see if my speculations can provide an explanatory universal into which the disputations that Wensinck has described might be subsumed.

For example, the model I have described, in recognizing Kadar as the eternal decree of God, introduces a kind of "determinism" into the time-evolution of Creation. It is a form of determinism which many scientists, including Einstein, had sought and is not inconsistent with Article 3 in the Fikh Akbar I ("What reaches you could not possibly have missed you; and what misses you could not possibly have reached you." Wensinck, page 103). From the frame of reference of the scientist, the process is an entirely "natural phenomena", which appears to also be consistent with the doctrine of natural religion (fitra). Additionally, from the frame of reference of the theologian, the centripetal convergence toward unity is the Divine destiny of Creation ordained by God.

In the context of our lives, the human "soul" may be understood to represent the set of potentials which may be actualized during the course of our lives. The gestalt of our lives, including our thoughts and prayers, participate in the probability of what happens next. However, the influences of the Divine Unity as the destiny state of Creation will operate through our soul's potentials to provide guidance toward the optimal paths for our lives.

"Everyone is guided to that for which he was created" (Wensinck, page 56, quoting Bukhari. Djana'iz. b. 2.)

The beauty of the speculation is that "determinism" comprised of contingency preserves the "Free Will" of the Kadarites within that contingency while also fully affirming God's Eternal Decrees (kadar). Additionally, the model simultaneously validates the Mu'tazilites' belief in human choice and moral responsibility as existing within individualized boundary conditions -- a set of preordained future potentials and a present that is reset by each successive "Now". In this context, sin becomes situationally defined as the gap between the life choices we actualize and the potentials which, through our choices, we have squandered. The orthopraxy of the five pillars, commands the various lists of meritorious and prohibited behaviors that Wensinck describes, may then be understood as necessary, if not mandatory, guides for our choices that will probabilistically generate sequential outcomes that are in furtherance of our individual and societal purposes/optimums.

The Mu'tazilite in affirming man's authorship over human behaviors (Wensick, page 60) was, under the existing paradigms of thought, forced to denying God's authorship (Wensick, page 51). This dilemma, which was perhaps fatal to their "free will" contentions, can now be avoided as all human choices, including those which can only be called evil, will necessarily be resident within the matrix of potentials that will inexorably return God's creation to its originating Primal Unity. The disputations over faith versus works becomes an affirmation of faith and works, with the view of the Kharidjites, that faith may be impaired by sin (Wensick, page 44), confirmed. The idea of intercession becomes the constant blessing of all human beings as seemingly serendipitous, yet probabilistic, events, including seemingly evil events, occur in our lives to draw us back to paths which are most direct in leading us to our spiritual potentials.

As to the "Word of God", it assumes a station that is co-eternal with the Divine Essence and is all that is knowable of God, and in this sense, it is uncreated. However, in the sense that the Word of God is an emanation of God, it may be thought of as a creation of God. As to the knowledge of God, if the Essence of God is simple and without division, the knowledge of God may not be resident within this Essence. However, within the model, the knowledge of God is resident within the matrix of potentials as the necessary emanation of the Divine Essence. In this sense, the views of Christianity and orthodox Islam, that the Word of God (Logos) is pre-existent, and is eternal, and is God, can be confirmed. As to the discussions concerning anthropomorphism, human-like references are reduced to mere aids to our understanding.

"All the people have formed a god in the world of thought, and that form of their own imagination they worship..." (Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i World Faith - Abdu'l-Bahá Section, p. 381)

This is not to say that mysticism does not have an important role: "Had not mysticism in course of time acquired a place in official Islam, chiefly through the influence of al-Ghazali, the Muslim religion would have become a lifeless form. (Wensick, page 58)

However, it must be appropriately restrained by science and reason: "The rationale understanding of nature prevents the intuitive imagination from following capricious fantasies...". (H. A. R. Gibb, "The Structure of Religious Thought.", page 19)

Rational discourse (Kalam) can help curtail human propensities toward "capricious fantasies" when cooperatively pursued in the search for Truth. However, as the "gems" hidden within the potentials of each human beings' souls will vary, different Divine names and attributes may be in ascendancy for expression. This means the "ahha" moments that led the leaders of each faction to take the various adversarial positions that Wensick has described may reflect an interplay of complementary truths which would be best understood as being in superposition to each other, rather than constituting a basis for controversy and disunion.

In this paper, I have attempted to show that there is a plausible scientific basis to believe teleological principles may operate within a natural universe, to include the matrix of our souls' potentials. In this context, I have hinted at how, what theists would call, divine guidance could, through prayer and meditation, be continually available in our lives. If valid, the model promises to give the concept of submission new and richer meanings within Islam. I have also hinted at how the probability density of future potentialities or contingencies could be influenced by our thoughts and prayers. (See <https://www.facebook.com/notes/jon-trevathan/a-meditation-on-consciousness/10150924830029263>) Within this

model, all things are interconnected affording an opportunity for synchronicity, the law of attraction, and the value of intercessory prayer to also be explained.

Is the model "shirk"? Gibb, in his book, "The Structure of Religious Thought," warns us that "[t]he scientific 'mind,- whose attitudes are determined by the heritage of Greek thought finds such a controlling power in natural law, which is then equated by the religious intuition with the Law of God" (Gibb, page 116). If that which is lower is partnered with the higher, shirk would definitionally occur. However, this is not the case where the Law of God is the sole determinant of all that is, including the natural law.