Washida Kiyokazu's Paradoxes of Property and the Clinical Philosophy of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

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1. Paradoxes of Property

"Paradoxically, this notion of something that is owned uniquely by 'me' ('*watashi' ni koyū na mono*), or, in other words, something that is just mine [or, mine only, simply mine, *watashi dake no mono*], cannot endure except through a denial of the notion of 'simply, for me' (pour-moi-seulement) (*watashi dake ni totte*)," writes Washida Kiyokazu, president emeritus of the University of Osaka and founder of the discipline of "clinical philosophy" (*rinshō tetsugaku*). He makes the observation in his 2024 tour de force *Shoyūron,* or *On Property*.[1] Perhaps the paradox is hard to parse without greater context, so let us restate it in slightly different terms: what enables the individual to claim unique and exclusive property is the universal acceptance of the idea of unique and exclusive property; if the premise of unique property were not universally accepted, the possibility of an exclusive claim to something would be vitiated or would indeed entirely collapse. And so, the principle of unique, exclusive, and inviolable property relies on the denial of each individual claiming his or her unique, exclusive, and inviolable principle of property, and by extension, the denial of the property of individual uniqueness or exclusivity. To put the paradox more punchily: the possibility of property rests on the denial of the possibility of property.

Washida comes to this paradox from a place of deep skepticism, indeed hostility. Property has engendered excess in the contemporary world, he laments: "At one stage of history, the right to property was posited as one to be defended when the freedom and autonomy and security of the

[1] Washida Kiyokazu, *Shoyūron* (Kōdansha, 2024), 19, Kindle. Washida states this problem as a question among other questions later in his book: "(6) Should the basis of that right under which something is the thing of somebody (*dareka no mono de aru*) (or in other words, the state of property) be sought within the subject that seeks to own that thing, or should it be sought in the social consent or assent on that matter? And if it is the case that that consent or assent is not established, where should the locus of ultimate determination be sought? (7) Following from this previous point, if we grant that property is established through the social assent that something is 'mine only' (*watashi dake no mono*), then because that means that it is not possible to say that something is 'simply, for me' (*watashi ni totte dake*), then is "mine only" possible only through "the negation of 'simply, for me' (pour-moi-seulement)"? In other words, does the concept of 'property' in the first place contain the very reason for its own legs being pulled out from under it?" (p. 211) The translation of the terms Washida uses is itself a major question of property. Washida discusses whether his title *shoyū* should be understood as "property" or "ownership" early in the text, for example (pp. 17-18), and he extends his linguistic analysis throughout.

individual (or in some cases of an organization or group) were at the brink," he observes, before continuing, "and yet now, property has taken on an even excessively coercive function, and it has, conversely, obstructed freedom, autonomy, and security like shackles or constraints or fetters—such instances are on the rise."[2] He fires off examples in apparently ascending order of gravity, examples on which he expatiates through his book: opposition to the rebuilding of an apartment building, or overly restrictive copyright measures, or the isolation of families from one another, or the loss of broad-mindedness and open-heartedness in community life. Property, he protests, "has well now narrowed and is ready altogether to exterminate mutual accompaniment, mutual aid, or mutual protection, or gray zones between the self and other or common spaces."[3] Society itself falls into jeopardy. He draws from the work of Shingū Kazushige: "We face a situation in which the theories that constitute our modern social system are following the same trajectory as that of the pathologies (*byōri*) that arise from an obsession with property."[4]

Washida thus lays out two different but interlocking paradoxes: the first, an intellectual problem, that immanent to property is the self-contradictory denial of the very premise on which it relies; the second, which comes prior to the first inasmuch as it forms the cultural impetus for worrying about the first, that the notion of private property has gone so far in the contemporary era as to subvert the purpose for which it was created, undermining the freedom and security of the individual precisely by protecting the freedom and security of the individual.[5]

Of course, Washida is hardly the first to recognize and deplore these problems, as he himself readily acknowledges, racing through Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Proudhon, Marx, and Engels in but a single sentence of his text before delving expansively into their and more theories.[6] Yet Washida presents the matter with inimitable force and vigor, and indeed with inimitable virtuosity, at our contemporary national moment. Departing from Locke, he construes the problem for us, now, ingeniously: The social crisis of property is at least in part a crisis of the cultural construction of the self. What is the self?[7] And how has the modern and contemporary conception of the self, a conception

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[2] Washida, *Shoyūron*, 16.
[3] Washida, *Shoyūron*, 17.
[4] Washida, *Shoyūron*, 258.
[5] These are not the only paradoxes (or "iffy points" [*kiwadoi ten*] as he calls some of them) Washida explores. Among many others, another he explores at length with important resonance in the discussion here is, drawing from Pierre Klossowski, "Only as a result of transfer can my assets (*zai*) be sustained as nontransferable to me" (Washida, *Shoyūron,* 438). Or, stated otherwise, "An indispensable premise contained in property was the possibility of its being dispensed with = transferred, and from that [premise], the subject of property also is replaceable" (410).
[6] Washida, *Shoyūron*, 19.
[7] Washida discusses this problem expansively. Among many other issues he discusses relevant here is the question of whether the body can be considered the property of the self and thus whether the self fully owns the self. He also thinks phenomenologically about the relationship between having and existing; early on, for example, after consider European linguistic notions of the problem, Washida quotes Watsuji Tetsurō, who examines the semantic polysemy of the Japanese *ga aru*, which can mean both to have and to be: "That *gold* [or money] *is* (ga aru が有る), is that a human *has gold* (ga aru が有る), and therefore, gold is property.

whose hegemonic power has robbed our imagination of the ability to conceive of the self as anything other than that, a self-contained material self—how has this hegemony stripped the self of humanity by extricating it from its place in community and society or in other forces that transcend it? Considering the problem of property in our country today demands, he perceives, a reckoning with these foundational problems. And it demands that reckoning at the level not just of economics and law but of common habits of thought and ideation that are both engendered by and undergird the legalistic and economic dimensions of property.

It is beyond the scope of this essay, and indeed beyond my present intellectual and practical capabilities, to reckon meaningfully with the breadth and depth of Washida's thought. The problems broached in this essay, such as those of law, life and death, purity, bodily physicality, material evanescence, and time, together with many other problems that should appear but do not, such as work and labor, all receive rigorous treatment in Washida's work. I hope it is a sign of respect, not of disrespect, that I do not even attempt to engage substantively with him. But even taking this bare minimum from his philosophy, the important insight that the problem of property pries into deep cultural paradoxes of the self in contemporary society, opens up avenues for thought insofar as it takes us to another of Washida's contributions to our country's intellectual realm: his founding of the field of "clinical philosophy."

Washida explained in developing the innovative discipline that problems of philosophy—What is the self? What is responsibility? What is the relation of the individual to community and to society?—cannot be extricated from the practice of everyday existing and thus consigned to the rarefied world of abstract theorizing. Indeed, it is through everyday life, through its turmoil and toil, that reckoning with these essential problems must occur. His identification of the problem of property appears to instantiate this general disciplinary approach. After all, "to own" is something that everyone must inevitably do in contemporary society, and inherent in that act is philosophy.

Let us use Washida's concepts and methodological and disciplinary approaches as a catalyst, or a springboard, for thought about a topic that might appear, at first, some distance away: the question of ownership and property in the legal and cultural order ordained by Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) in his religion, especially in the law and concept of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, which literally translates to "the right of God." What conception of Ḥuqúqu'lláh do Washida's paradoxes of property and the approach of clinical philosophy enable? The question seems all the more urgent at a time when the problem of the

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It is only based on in its pertaining to the human *having* (*motsu* 有つ) that gold is (*ga aru* が有る)." From this, Watsuji argues that therefore all notions of being rest on the having or owning human, and so the notion "a human is" itself rests on the notion that "a human possesses [or has, or owns] itself" (Washida, *Shoyūron,* 32). This notion of being/having (*ga aru* が有る) stands in opposition semantically and philosophically to the notion of being as a spatial concept (*ni aru* に在る), Washida continues. He then concludes that it cannot be that the problem of property in the sense of belonging to someone maps directly onto the problem of just having or possessing; possession and property are not necessarily the same, a problem that extends to the human self itself and its relationship to its own body.

meaning ascribed to financial and economic life—to property and ownership, and to the individual's relationship to them—has become one of immense importance in our country, particularly in relation to organizations recognized legally as religions and to how individuals who affiliate with those organizations come to apprehend their own selves.

Quite obviously, the turgid discussion already underway here ironically oversimplifies and flattens the concept of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and the discipline of clinical philosophy (and philosophy in general), to all of which I am a complete academic outsider with no professional training. I ask for the forbearance and magnanimity of practitioners of clinical philosophy, many of whom are my own colleagues here at the University of Osaka whom I have not met, if I have mischaracterized their work. Yet I hope this discussion stands as what Washida himself presents as the central genre of clinical philosophy: an essay, a *shiron*—an essay in the original sense of an attempt or a foray into something. "For clinical philosophy is not 'scholarship' (*kenkyū*); for it is an 'essay' (*kokoromi*)," as Washida stated plainly in his founding manifesto on the field.[8] It sees knowledge as process and the articulation of that knowledge as but a node or waypoint in an ongoing act of learning, as necessarily tentative and subject to revision in a communal endeavor of scrutiny and correction, as all "scholarship" of course should be. To begin this essay, let us seek to grasp the implications of the field of clinical philosophy before we tie it to Ḥuqúqu'lláh and property.

2. Clinical Philosophy

Clinical philosophy was born, we might say, in March 1997, when professors led by Washida working in the field of ethics in the Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University, launched a regular periodical modestly titled "The Clinical Philosophy Newsletter" (*Rinshō tetsugaku nyūzuretā*); the following year, the research division in ethics (*rinrigaku kenkyūshitsu*) rechristened itself the division in "clinical philosophy." In the periodical's opening salvo, aptly titled "The Start of Clinical Philosophy," Washida and his team conceded that the phrase "clinical philosophy" is "probably unfamiliar to many people."[9] But they adamantly, and sagely, refused to define the term. "We certainly do feel the allure of beginning with such questions as what meaning the concept of the clinic bears for philosophy," they conceded, "but … is it not more fitting in philosophy for definitions to come last? Definitions, like virtues such as simplicity and succinctness, are probably things at which people arrive at the very end. We have to break open our vista; it is not open from the outset."[10] They concluded, eloquently, "Clinical philosophy should take form in tandem with the clinic of philosophy. Let there be as many 'clinical philosophies' as there are clinics with which people engage."[11]

[8] Washida Kiyokazu, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa? Rinrigakuteki kōsatsu," *Rinshō tetsugaku nyūzuretā* 1 (1997), 71.
[9] Ōsaka daigaku bungakubu rinrigaku kenkyūshitsu, "Rinshō tetsugaku kotohajime," 1.
[10] Ōsaka daigaku bungakubu rinrigaku kenkyūshitsu, "Rinshō tetsugaku kotohajime," 4.
[11] Ōsaka daigaku bungakubu rinrigaku kenkyūshitsu, "Rinshō tetsugaku kotohajime," 4.

Yet complete nonsensicality could not work, and Washida and his cohort ventured this explanation, exploring the term *rinshō* 臨床, which they explicitly translate as, and which can mean, "clinic," but which literally signifies "bedside":

> We embark on this attempt at "clinical philosophy" with consciousness of this problem: What can philosophy do at clinical places of society (*shakai no rinshōteki na bamen*)? With "clinical philosophy," we seek to insert (*sashikomu*) philosophical thought into the "places of suffering" (*kurushimi no basho*) of people, which is to say, at the clinic of society. The clinic (klinikos [*rinshō*])—this refers to the very place at which people suffer, supine. It is, so to speak, the bedside of society (*shakai no beddosaido*). What is possible for philosophy at that place? The intellectual attempt to ask that question at that very place—we have thought to call this "clinical philosophy."[12]

Perhaps more important than what the incipient field was, was what it was not. Washida and his colleagues sought to overcome what they regarded as false premises and practices in the field of "applied ethics" or "applied philosophy." Foremost was a dichotomy between theory and practice. Washida lauded what he described in 1997 as a turn in the discipline of Philosophy away from "non-involvement in reality (*genjitsu e no hikan'yosei*)" toward "involvement in reality—or, in our words, 'clinicism' (*rinshōsei*)," and he himself followed in that course.[13] Yet he rejected the notion of "application" as the alternative. Application presumes, he explained, that thought can exist as a pure and abstracted form that can then be parachuted into lived experienced. It relies, as a result, "on the illusion that it is somehow possible for the field of Ethics to generate non-clinical general or basic theories at a distance from the clinic [or, bedside]."[14] Washida thus opposed wholesale the very notion of the possibility of a separation of practice from theory, seeing the binary as a product of the structural problems of modern knowledge.[15]

This wresting of theory from practice, Washida further observed, leads to the obfuscation of the institutions and thus the political meaning behind philosophy inasmuch as the notion of "application" assumes a static set of values that exist a-, trans-, or extra-historically, rendering the temporal contingency of those ethics invisible. And what is more, he continued, "application" splinters the gestalt of human knowledge by assuming that there are multiple discrete "applications" to various divisions of ethics. As a result, application bypasses a reckoning with essential questions of philosophy and becomes a means of inserting general ideas mechanistically into the field of life[16]: the received

[12] Ōsaka daigaku bungakubu rinrigaku kenkyūshitsu, "Rinshō tetsugaku kotohajime," 1.
[13] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 60.
[14] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 60, 67.
[15] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 63-64.
[16] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 67.

field of ethics, Washida wrote, consigns "to epoché foundational questions of philosophy that are irresolvable and, leaving them there, gratifies itself with the proceduralism" of simply grafting calcified ideas onto lived experience. The consequence, he concluded, is simply to take for granted regnant categories of thought without internalizing the metacriticism demanded by the questioning of historically produced paradigms.[17]

In short, then, "applied ethics" dichotomized practice and theory; splintered human knowledge and banished its subdivisions into arbitrary silos; and bracketed rudimentary questions of ontology in the process, Washida believed. And in doing so, he asserted, it flew in the face of what philosophy itself should be:

> Philosophy, and within it the field of Ethics, which excels at contemplating the existence and life of people, is an endeavor of simultaneously thinking and living at that place at which people live. Philosophy thus spins a problem, or a concept, or an idea, out from the place of living. It is that place that forces questions upon philosophy. Philosophy destabilizes previously obtained knowledge, spurs its reevaluation, and constitutes it anew. In other words, philosophy is not a field of study in which general principles are applied to discrete, individual examples. Nor is it a single, closed system in which one takes individual examples as fodder for thought and from there draws out universal principles, then integrating those individual principles. … Philosophical thought cannot be third-person intellectualizing as one stands "outside" of history, soaring overhead in the sky.[18]

Clinical philosophy was intended to counter these inadequacies and confront head-on the problems of ontology that necessarily emerge in everyday existence. When individuals act in such fields as social work, care, education, or volunteering, Washida explained, "they ultimately encounter in those on-the-ground places such questions as 'What is death?' 'What is the other?' 'What does it mean to live?' 'What is morality?' […]."[19] Clinical philosophy therefore must retain the "self-criticism, or scientific criticism, of knowledge in general."[20] It must reject the denigration of popular knowledge and overcome that tendency by which "modern scientific knowledge expels from the realm of our episteme (*ninshiki*) such impetuses (*keiki*) of suffering as pain and anguish [by casting them] as irrational, subjective, and particular things."[21] It must instead see in such quotidian affairs founts of philosophical reflection. And it must resist the smug supremacism of specious "neutrality" in philosophical thought, which "strips reality of its nature of value (*kachiteki seikaku*) in the name of

[17] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 61.
[18] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 68.
[19] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 60-61.
[20] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 65.
[21] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 66, 69.

amoral fact."[22] The philosopher must "go to town," Washida concluded.

All this was in 1997, when the field was just beginning. Washida followed with a 1999 book *The Power of "Listening": An Essay on Clinical Philosophy*, a founding text.[23] The subsequent passing of time wrought changes in academic life and global circumstances and thus in the purport and orientation of clinical philosophy itself, as homma naho explains.[24] The first generation of clinical philosophy, constituted by Washida and his colleagues, had successfully assailed the preoccupation with modern Western thought in the Japanese discipline of Ethics and turned against methodological positivism to rally behind "the other who has no methodologism and expertism," homma concedes.[25] "Philosophy has spent too long blathering too much," wrote Washida, who advocated listening. homma agrees.[26] But Washida's generation failed to provide a compelling alternative model for how philosophy should be approached, she asserts. Nor did its members give adequate attention to matters of identity, including race and gender, notwithstanding their knowledge that they had failed in this respect. Enter the second generation, homma observes, which originated in 2005 and which sought to muddy the field, in a positive sense, by integrating it with various other forms of knowledge and praxis and by sometimes turning against clinical philosophy itself. But then, as homma continues, the academic world changed from around 2010, producing forces precisely opposed to Washida's move away from fogeyish methodologism and expertism. The entire venture of clinical philosophy was thrown into disarray. Increased competition for jobs in Japanese academia together with the rise of more sophisticated approaches to qualitative research left a new generation of clinical philosophy, the third, starting from around 2015, disenchanted, or at least unable to be enchanted, with a free-flowing mode of philosophy lacking methodological guardrails. This new generation has sought to find a way between the pulls of academic convention and the relative liberty of clinical philosophy. And thus, the nascent field, homma concludes, has been forced to invent and reinvent itself amid the turbulent transformations of just decades of its existence.

homma explores what can be salvaged from the wreckage. She returns to the problem of the clinic itself, to the essential criticism Washida raised that philosophy must occur in situated places at which the self generates philosophical meaning through its interaction with other selves. She quotes Washida:

> The reason I fixate primarily on "place" in this endeavor of clinical philosophy is that something like clinical philosophy (*rinshō tetsugaku*) becomes unnecessary, and just clinical acts

[22] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 70.
[23] Washida Kiyokazu, *"Kiku" koto no chikara: Rinshō tetsugaku shiron* (TBS Buritanika, 1999). See also the foundational Honma Naoki and Nakaoka Narifumi, eds., *Dokyumento rinshō tetsugaku* (Ōsaka daigaku shuppankai, 2010).
[24] homma naho, "Rinshō tetsugaku kara firosofi e," *Rinshō tetsugaku nyūzuretā* 3 (2021): 38–48.
[25] homma, "Rinshō tetsugaku kara firosofi e," 39.
[26] homma, "Rinshō tetsugaku kara firosofi e," 39.

> (*rinshōteki kōi*) alone suffice, unless it is demonstrated why it is that philosophical thought can have especial meaning in the act of my interacting, as a distinct "somebody" bearing a name, with another "somebody," another distinct person, at the place of the "clinic," or this place we should even call the "place of suffering" of people.[27]

After raising concerns about assumptions in the passage, including the apparent disparagement of "just clinical acts," homma responds:

> Even if one divests oneself of such relationships as philosopher or doctor, patient or family, there are places in which [a person] interacts with "somebody" (*dareka*) as a "somebody." This "somebody" is not just any somebody who happens to have a name. At those places, in front of another "somebody," you are being asked the question, "who [or what somebody]" (*dare*) are you? I'd like to interpret the matter in this way: The clinic is not a place that starts with me but is the place at which I am asked, in front of you, "who [or what somebody]" I am, the place at which "a somebody" interacts with "a somebody."[28]

homma seeks here, it appears, to invert Washida's methodology precisely by being faithful to a core definitional premise of clinical philosophy: whereas Washida begins with a constituted self who interacts with other selves at the clinic, homma sees the individual as unconstituted and inchoate, only becoming a self at the clinic. The self, or the definition of the self, indeed in the sense of the self becoming definite, comes at the end, not at the beginning of, or it is the outcome, not the origin of, the clinic and the philosophical action that occurs there. homma thus objects to the loss of time and space, of the very notion of a situated "somebody," that occurs when sweeping philosophical questions are applied to practical existence, as if "somebody" were merely a formal ideal. She writes, "the place of suffering refers not just to the hospital bed but also to that place at which we, even while carrying the struggle to live, yet live."[29] From these places emerges the importance of dialogue and parrhesia, of weakness and love, in the formation of philosophy.

And so we are here, in the debris of a methodological maelstrom, or if we look at the situation positively, a place of unusual intellectual freedom and opportunity, precisely because the strains of social and political life have laid waste to regnant paradigms and structures of intellectual inquiry so that no particular approach or paradigm can claim dominant academic orthodoxy, at least in the field of clinical philosophy, whose very purport was to smash the regnant structures of Philosophy in Japanese academia. The place of suffering is the academic bedside itself: it is the intellectual enterprise

[27] homma, "Rinshō tetsugaku kara firosofi e," 41.
[28] homma, "Rinshō tetsugaku kara firosofi e," 41.
[29] homma, "Rinshō tetsugaku kara firosofi e," 44.

that itself is in need of clinical philosophy, perhaps. Amid this apparent helter-skelter, which has created a clearing in which the self itself no longer appears constituted and stable and can be or must be reconstructed, let us see what new insights or clarity can emerge by veering in a rather different direction, one in which the field has, to my knowledge, not gone. What do we find by bringing the tools of clinical philosophy to bear on the study of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, on a religious concept ostensibly far removed from the immediate field of focus of clinical philosophy, though one that might concern itself with the very paradoxes of property and problems of the constitution of the self that Washida and homma have identified?

The question is, incidentally, a significant one in the history of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and of the discipline of Philosophy. And after all, clinical philosophy is concerned with the metacriticism and historical contingency of knowledge; exploring clinical philosophy and Ḥuqúqu'lláh is to plumb that historical situatedness. In 1930, Inoue Tetsujirō, the eminent philosopher and one of the founders of the discipline of what is understood today as academic Philosophy in Japan, delivered a paper titled "Thoughts on the Bahá'í Faith" to a gathering of about 200 people convened by the prominent Bahá'í Martha Root at Hōchi Shinbunsha in Tokyo; according to a police report from the time, he noted in his paper that he "was not a believer but found many points of resonance," and he continued, "The Bahá'í teachings speak on the economy and on the equality of men and women, which are problems of the day, and in all this they have moral value, and what is more, they have no superstitions and call for greater peace, but on the other hand they lack philosophical elements, and that is a defect."[30] Inoue seems to have thought that so-called Oriental religions in general are inadequately philosophical, but in any case, the turning of the field of Philosophy over time now flips Inoue's concern: clinical philosophy developed precisely because Philosophy had too much philosophy and not enough practice. In either case, the framework of philosophical concern seems to be the same, the relationship between theory and practice, with the passage of time having but swung the pendulum of specific concern. How does Ḥuqúqu'lláh, a major Bahá'í teaching, stand in this methodological back and forth?

Our inquiry as posed here—how do we bring the tools of clinical philosophy to bear on Ḥuqúqu'lláh?—seems to run entirely counter to the repudiation of "application" that is the reason for being of clinical philosophy itself. And the structure through which the inquiry consequently unfolds—first let us see the philosophy, and then let us see the clinic, of Ḥuqúqu'lláh—implies the possible separation of general principles from lived praxis. The question and method themselves tip off, or perhaps foreclose or preempt, the argument: the self-defeating "application" of clinical philosophy to Ḥuqúqu'lláh, bifurcated between philosophy and clinic, reveals that the two fields are, in the most

[30] "Honpō ni okeru shūkyō oyobi fukyō kankei zakken Dai ikkan 7. Bahai kyō," Ref. B04012528100, Gaimushō gaikō shiryōkan, Ajia rekishi shiryō sentā (Japan Center for Asian Historical Records), National Archives of Japan, accessed May 2025 https://www.jacar.archives.go.jp/aj/meta/listPhoto?LANG=default&BID=F2006092117024858555&ID=M2006092117024858564&REFCODE=B04012528100

essential ways, probably incompatible, that the application of the discipline to this case is an exercise in self-contradiction; Ḥuqúqu'lláh, for its part, resists being contained within a particular disciplinary approach. Yet there are insights to be gained from the inquiry, precisely in the problems that practitioners of clinical philosophy identify: in the wresting apart of theory and practice; in the splintering of the single gestalt of human knowledge; in the demand that humans engage substantively with the most essential problems of philosophy in their everyday existence; in the insistence that philosophizing is the work of individual selves, at every place and all places, at the bedside of society; in the recognition that the self is interpellated and called upon to account for itself, for who it is, and for why it is, at those clinical places, which are everywhere insofar as people suffer everywhere; in the suggestion that that philosophizing is meant to continually destabilize calcified presumptions; and that the relationship between the self and society, and between liberation and constraint, a central object of cultural crises today, must be fodder for that philosophizing. The paradoxes of property, which are the stuff of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, act as a crucible for these philosophical problems.

3. The Philosophy of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

(a) Ḥuqúqu'lláh as Bounty

Our obvious point of departure now is the most foundational question: What is Ḥuqúqu'lláh? But in the spirit of Washida, we should end rather than begin definitions, because indeed, defining what precisely Ḥuqúqu'lláh is constitutes a foundational problem of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Of course, any embarkation from definition necessarily curtails, without transparent justification or reason, some aspect of a topic; that is an inevitable dimension of academic investigation, one that must be brought to the fore, not cloaked under the guise of positivist objectivism, through what Washida calls the metacriticism of modern knowledge. But this problem of restrictive a priori definitions matters especially in knowing Ḥuqúqu'lláh because Ḥuqúqu'lláh itself appears to presume that the act of knowing it should unfold through praxis, at the bedside of human society, in specific, contextualized places at which the self is constituted, through a paradoxical relationship between the self and society that the "somebody" of society must seek to resolve through the willful and relentless infiltration of philosophical thought into the realm of the everyday, or through a reckoning with the paradox that that which constrains is, paradoxically, if we refract Washida's anxieties, that which liberates.

Let us, in this definitional pursuit, embark from the point of origin of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, which appears in Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, a text composed in the early 1870s in or in the vicinity of the city of Akka and regarded as the most important and weightiest of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. Let us quote in its entirety the passage in which Bahá'u'lláh ordains Ḥuqúqu'lláh:

> Should anyone acquire one hundred mithqáls of gold, nineteen mithqáls thereof are God's and to be rendered unto Him, the Fashioner of earth and heaven. Take heed, O people, lest ye deprive yourselves of so great a bounty. This We have commanded you, though We are well able to dispense with you and with all who are in the heavens and on earth; in it there are benefits and wisdoms beyond the ken of anyone but God, the Omniscient, the All-Informed. Say: By this means He hath desired to purify what ye possess and to enable you to draw nigh unto such stations as none can comprehend save those whom God hath willed. He, in truth, is the Beneficent, the Gracious, the Bountiful. O people! Deal not faithlessly with the Right of God, nor, without His leave, make free with its disposal. Thus hath His commandment been established in the holy Tablets, and in this exalted Book. He who dealeth faithlessly with God shall in justice meet with faithlessness himself; he, however, who acteth in accordance with God's bidding shall receive a blessing from the heaven of the bounty of his Lord, the Gracious, the Bestower, the Generous, the Ancient of Days. He, verily, hath willed for you that which is yet beyond your knowledge, but which shall be known to you when, after this fleeting life, your souls soar heavenwards and the trappings of your earthly joys are folded up. Thus admonisheth you He in Whose possession is the Guarded Tablet.[31]

It is clear enough from the passage that Ḥuqúqu'lláh, inasmuch as it appears in a book of laws, is a law; that insofar as it is a law, it is binding and not voluntary in the sense of optionality or of the freedom of the individual not to abide by it with moral and conscientious impunity; and that inasmuch as it is a law, it contains specific, constraining conditions by which it must be executed. The basic features of the law appear to be directly stipulated in the quoted passage: that when an individual's personal wealth surpasses a certain threshold, then the individual must render a fixed portion of that wealth to God because that portion is a priori "God's," not properly the individual's own property; that by logical implication, the law is not applicable until one's individual wealth exceeds that threshold; that it is the individual who must exercise obedience to the law; that the threshold and the amount payable are pegged to the fluctuating value of gold; and that the amount payable is nineteen percent of one's wealth after the threshold has been passed. Bahá'u'lláh, as well as the individuals and institutions that succeeded him, have elaborated in other passages on these stipulations: the central authority of the religion Bahá'u'lláh founded is the sole body that collects and disburses the funds of Ḥuqúqu'lláh;[32] the figure of "19 mithqáls of 100" signifies the percent due,

[31] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), 22, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/kitab-i-aqdas/kitab-i-aqdas.pdf?7f57be30. The text is a translation; the translator or translating organization is not directly indicated in the source and therefore excluded from the citation. The same is true for other citations that follow.

[32] Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh—the Right of God" ([no publisher indicated], 2009), pp. 29–30, nos. 109 and 111, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/huququllah-right-god/huququllah-right-god.pdf?a35eae17.

whereas the threshold at which the law becomes applicable is itself 19 mithqáls, the equivalent of roughly 69.19 grams of gold;[33] the wealth on which the individual is liable is only wealth beyond that which is "needful" or "necessary" to the individual, a category that necessarily exempts such things as one's residence, its furnishings, the cost of funeral expenses after death, the repayment of debts, or the like;[34] Ḥuqúqu'lláh must be paid only once on a given sum;[35] beyond these clearly stipulated exemptions, it is the individual, and no one else, who must determine what is needful in life and therefore what is the amount liable for payment; and, therefore, the total amount of payment ultimately rests on the judgment of and calculation by the individual.[36] Explained in this way, perhaps the law seems rather byzantine, but what it amounts to in this sense is quite straightforward: after the personal accumulated wealth of an individual, less what the individual deems "needful," reaches a threshold of the equivalent of the value of 69.19 grams of gold, then nineteen percent of that surplus wealth must be paid as the Right of God.

To give a hypothetical but specific example: On March 1, 2025, the value of one gram of gold was approximately 15,058 yen. If a person determined that that person's surplus wealth, the wealth beyond what the person considered "needful," exceeded 1,041,863 yen, or 69.19 grams, in value, then nineteen percent of that excess wealth had to be paid to the central authority of the faith. If the individual held wealth above that value but believed that the amount exceeding the threshold was "needful," or if the individual did not hold wealth above that value, then no payment was required.

Ironically, the difficulty here is that what the above explanation amounts to is not very much at all, and that is why it is relatively easy to grasp. Of course, obvious technical questions still arise, such as liability on fixed assets as opposed to liquid wealth, or how to respond to the depreciation of one's assets after payment or to fluctuation in the price of gold, or the timing of payment. But these are ancillary issues. For if we return to the original passage in which Bahá'u'lláh ordains the law, such a mechanistic or technical description of what the law *is*, ontologically, so to speak—defining the law in financial terms as "paying nineteen percent of one's surplus wealth after a certain threshold is reached"—seems so far removed from Bahá'u'lláh's own description of it as to be almost unrecognizable; it is not incorrect or incompatible with the quoted passage, but it is at best deeply tendentious.

Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh's elaboration of the law appears to turn not on its mechanics but on the question of bounty, which he in turn links to the problem of inscrutability, or the finitude of human cognition or comprehension and its inability to apprehend a reality that necessarily exceeds human capacity to fathom. Bahá'u'lláh states plainly that the law is—and again, it appears that this is what

[33] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas,* 40.
[34] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas,* 13, 40 and 47; Research Department, "Ḥuqúqu'lláh—the Right of God, p. 13, no. 50; p. 15, nos. 57 and 58, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/huququllah-right-god/huququllah-right-god.pdf?a35eae17.
[35] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 12, no. 46.
[36] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 5, nos. 14 and 18; pp. 14–15, no. 55; p. 15, no. 57.

Ḥuqúqu'lláh *is* in this passage—a great "bounty." Elsewhere he states plainly: "It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful."[37] The definitional function of "is" seems crucial there. As Bahá'u'lláh elaborates in the original passage, Ḥuqúqu'lláh is this bounty because it enables humans to gain access to such "stations" of nearness to God that are incomprehensible except through this "bounty," except through what "God hath willed." Bahá'u'lláh states no fewer than three times in the passage that the law surpasses cognitive limits: it includes "benefits and wisdoms beyond the ken of anyone"; it leads to "stations as none can comprehend"; it implies that God has "willed for you that which is yet beyond your knowledge." And in each of these invocations of incomprehensibility, that which is incomprehensible is itself a bounty, is a world brimming with benefits and wisdoms. We find, we might argue, a doubling of bounties: Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a bounty, and its bounteousness, its quality of being bountiful, resides primarily in its enabling of the individual to gain access to other bounties that are otherwise inconceivable, or perhaps altogether inconceivable even through the aid of Ḥuqúqu'lláh but otherwise not even imagined.

Bahá'u'lláh links these inscrutable blessings to the contingency of humans and the non-contingency of that entity he calls "God." The contingency of the human being, or indeed just of human being, is of a piece with the finitude of human knowledge of the bounties of God and the reliance of the human being on those bounties. In his invocations of "God," Bahá'u'lláh's nomenclature revolves around these dual themes: God is that entity which is omniscient, all-informed, and also beneficent, gracious, bountiful, bestowing, generous, and perhaps most germanely here, all-possessing. The human is that whose existence, by implication, is contingent on these absolute qualities, not least of largesse, including intellectual largesse, which constitute "God." The problems of epistemology with which Ḥuqúqu'lláh concerns itself can be resolved only after the human begins to break through its existence on the contingent plane: after the human "soars heavenwards" and the "trappings" of its "earthly life" vanish. There indeed might be a subtle paradox in the coupling of the descriptors of God as "all-possessing" and "all-bountiful" in the identification of Ḥuqúqu'lláh as "a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful." If one who is (all-)possessing is bountiful and bestows that which it has on others, then does it not necessarily surrender its own property in this act of bountifulness, property in the sense of both the thing it owns and the characteristic it has, and cease to be (all-)possessing? How can it be that, bountifully, the surrender of one's property enables the property to remain with oneself eternally? How can the human itself, as it draws nigh to this station of both bountifulness and possession, give up its property and yet thereby retain its property, with property again meaning both that which the human owns and that which constitutes human identity? How can the human mind fathom this state? It might be that this ostensible paradox maps onto another paradox of property that Washida identifies:

[37] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 4, no. 13.

that it is transferable yet non-transferable.[38]

In short, the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh seems primarily, or at least significantly, to be related to epistemological problems that arise from human ontology. The law appears to function as a bounty at least partly because it is an epistemological expedient: by it, humans gain access to larger bounties of which they were otherwise unaware inasmuch as the human is a limited form in the face of the omniscient, all-bountiful entity referred to as "God." The exercise of Ḥuqúqu'lláh enables the human to break through its finite cognition and gain access to paradoxical worlds that remain inscrutable but are teeming with further bounties.

None of this is simply a mystical process, even if it might partly be that: we will turn shortly to the practical, perhaps even scientific dimensions of this bounty. But it will take several more steps to get there.

(b) Bounty as Epistemology

This conception of Ḥuqúqu'lláh as essentially a bounty that is necessitated by the epistemological limitations of the finite human follows from one of the central themes of Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws and his conception of law more generally, which he states explicitly in the opening paragraphs of the text. Or, we might say, the bounty of (the) law is in its, or is its, epistemological function. In a series of short statements that appear to ascend from discussing the social dimensions of law to the mystical, Bahá'u'lláh explicates the significance or purport of his law, describing his precepts as "the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples" and his commandments as "lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures." He then admonishes the reader, "Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power."[39] The notion of law as an inebriant seems to suggest precisely this epistemological function: that rather than a code by which one must simply abide point by point, or a fragmentary collection of commandments, the law as gestalt seizes hold of the individual's faculties of cognition and understanding and becomes the dominant means by which the individual regards reality. Such, too, is suggested by the notion of a lamp, perhaps also by that of a key: a lamp illuminates reality so that reality itself appears different as a result of its all-pervasive influence; a key unlocks worlds that are shut behind a barrier otherwise impenetrable and therefore imperceivable, perhaps unimaginable. In these metaphors, the law enables not only insight into new facets but rather entry into an entirely different realm of cognition, a leap into a new dimension of knowing, yielding access to bounties that are beyond human ken through a shift in the paradigm and gestalt, not simply in the degree or extent, of knowing.

[38] See footnote 5.
[39] Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas,* 10.

Bahá'u'lláh discusses the concept of metaphorical intoxication in a range of other contexts, strikingly, for example, in a passage in which he writes of "the wine of the Ancient of Days," of becoming "intoxicated with the beauty, and entranced by the glory, of Him Who is the All-Glorious," and of "divine rapture," as "indeed … the meaning of stillness in flight and flight in stillness, of fluidity in solidity and solidity in fluidity."[40] These various invocations of rapture, wine, intoxication, and entrancement appear to refer to the same state, a state that somehow reconciles apparently incompatible states of being: that of flight and stillness, of fluidity and solidity. These various states of being seem to correlate with what Bahá'u'lláh refers to metaphorically, in the passage on Ḥuqúqu'lláh quoted above, as the release from a material earthbound life and entry into a world of spiritual, celestial freedom: when "souls soar heavenwards and the trappings of your earthly joys are folded up," as he puts it, the moment when the problem of inscrutability becomes resolved. Divine rapture, we might speculate, refers to a state of knowing in which the material ceases to obstruct the spiritual, in which material or physical impossibilities, to be still and to take flight, to be solid and to be fluid, or indeed to be simultaneously all-bountiful and all-possessing, become possible, or at which material paradoxes become unparadoxical. Divine rapture, then, is a means of approaching this world of inscrutability and bounty, which remains of course inscrutable but becomes more accessible through the gestalt switch enabled by the bounty that is the law.

In light of these passages, it seems possible to interpret the law of Bahá'u'lláh, then, as an epistemological expedient, certainly, but also an epistemological mechanism that has, in this narrow context, an important function: to resolve the paradoxes and impossibilities that characterize the material condition of human existence by transferring human knowing to a higher state. A comparison to other laws ordained by Bahá'u'lláh might help corroborate this point. Bahá'u'lláh prescribes as a law the daily recitation of one or another specified prayer, and he opens one of those prayers with what we might call a meta-prayer. The suppliant begins by facing a physical center to which all other suppliants across the world likewise face and, "gaz[ing] to the right and to the left, as if awaiting the mercy of his Lord, the Most Merciful, the Compassionate," then prays that the prayer itself might "burn away the veils which have shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence."[41] The physical act of simulating search stands in, perhaps, for a recognition that the suppliant occupies a lower realm of cognition wherein "veils" obstruct the knowability and even perceivability of unseen "mercy"; the physical act of uttering the words of the prayer must engender a state of knowledge in which these "veils" vanish and the supplicant becomes cognizant of the existence of unseen mercy and beauty, though perhaps not of the nature of that mercy and beauty itself. The suppliant prays, then, searching, waiting for the unseen mercy of its Lord, that abidance by

[40] Bahá'u'lláh, "From the Letter Bá' to the Letter Há'," in *The Call of the Divine Beloved: Selection Mystical Works of Bahá'u'lláh* (Bahá'í World Center, 2018), 57–58. Translator not indicated in source.
[41] National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, ed., *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002), 7–8.

the law of prayer might engender a gestalt switch in which that mercy becomes recognizable.

In a telling passage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son of Bahá’u’lláh, whom he appointed in his will as the designated interpreter of his purport, perhaps stresses this point, supplicating in a prayer that the physical mechanism of utterance might become, mercifully, bountifully, a means for the revelation of an inscrutable divine reality, that the prayer itself might function as a mechanism to surmount itself, that is, to function as a means of overcoming the limitations of the physical act of reciting a prayer. “Reveal then Thyself, O Lord,” he writes, “by Thy merciful utterance and the mystery of Thy divine being, that the holy ecstasy of prayer may fill our souls—a prayer that shall rise above words and letters and transcend the murmur of syllables and sounds—that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendor.”[42] The suppliant supplicates that the act of supplication itself might enable a state of epistemological “ecstasy”—of rapture, intoxication—in which the material means of expression attain a higher state of “nothingness,” in which the material world appears, from this higher, perhaps vertiginous realm of cognition, as something altogether different.

And in another supplication, Bahá’u’lláh elaborates on the question of the paradox of movement and stillness: “If it be Thy pleasure,” he writes, “make me to grow as a tender herb in the meadows of Thy grace, that the gentle winds of Thy will may stir me up and bend me into conformity with Thy pleasure, in such wise that my movement and my stillness may be wholly directed by Thee.”[43] The prayer acts as an invocation that we may attain a state in which it is no longer human volition itself that controls movement and stillness; in a sense, the two settle into a single state in the light of the overwhelming might of the external force of God, whom Bahá’u’lláh defines in another passage as “He Who is both Stillness and Motion,”[44] so that we, as material “things,” are “merged into nothingness.” In short, the physical expression of prayer, which at one level of knowing is nothing more than a material act of producing sounds, transmutes, through the abidance by the law of prayer, inasmuch as it is a law, the physical act of vocalization or reading into a means of attaining an ecstatic, extra-material state of human epistemology, a different dimension in which lived reality is understood in an entirely different light, as Bahá’u’lláh’s metaphor itself goes.

The same is true for fasting, which stands alongside prayer as perhaps the most significant of Bahá’u’lláh’s laws. In one text, Bahá’u’lláh appears to situate the Fast in the same conceptual matrix in which he places Ḥuqúqu’lláh. After identifying the Fast as an “adornment” in the “Book of Thy Laws,” as something that has “decked forth” the “commandments” of God—an emphasis, then, on the

[42] National Spiritual Assembly, ed., *Bahá’í Prayers,* 70.
[43] Bahá’u’lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá’u’lláh,* trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi ([no publisher], 1938), 71–72, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/prayers-meditations/prayers-meditations.pdf?952a4e2d
[44] Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh,* trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi ([no publisher], [no year]), p. 52, no. LXXXV, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/gleanings-writings-bahaullah/gleanings-writings-bahaullah.pdf?022756ee

legal nature of the Fast and also on the allure, perhaps even entrancement, of the pulchritude of those laws—he turns to the question of inscrutability: "Thou has endowed," he writes, in his supplication of God, "every hour of these days [of the Fast] with a special virtue, inscrutable to all except Thee." He depicts observers of the Fast as people "who have been so inebriated with the wine of Thy manifold wisdom that they forsake their couches in their longing to celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy virtues, and flee from sleep in their eagerness to approach Thy presence and partake of Thy bounty"[45]: those who choose to abide by the Fast notwithstanding its inscrutability do so in a state of metaphorical inebriation, which is naught but an epistemological inebriation, an entrancement with wisdom that leads to an otherwise inaccessible repast of bounty. And with this invocation of inebriation, with this recognition that these "ardent lovers" have fallen under the sway of the rapture of abidance by the law of the Fast, new vistas on the world open up: Bahá'u'lláh proceeds further into the question of, indeed, bounty. "Rain down, then," he supplicates God, now that this gestalt switch has been reached, "upon us and upon them from the clouds of Thy mercy what beseemeth the heaven of Thy bounteousness and grace."[46] And immediately thereafter, again, he writes, "This is the hour when Thou hast unlocked the doors of Thy bounty before the faces of Thy creatures, and opened wide the portals of Thy tender mercy unto all the dwellers of Thine earth."[47] The Fast, a legal mechanism, deploys the things of the material world, indeed the very means of material sustenance, to open up a new realm of bounties that exist beyond the material world, bounties that exist in a world inscrutable.

The same could be true of the law of pilgrimage, though perhaps that is a more speculative, reckless claim. In pilgrimage, the act of movement becomes a means of attaining spiritual unity in the overwhelming diversity of human existence: as people come to a sacred center through the physical act of transferring themselves, they coalesce around, and gain physical proximity to, a center of oneness, and thus the symbolic in-gathering of the entire world around a single source of common identity is instantiated. People then spread outward again, across the earth, in the infinitude of heterogeneity. This act of coming together and spreading out in accordance with legal injunction balances the contrasting centrifugal and centripetal forces, the processes of expansion and consolidation, that lie at the heart of a variegated yet united community. And thus, we see the reconciliation of the stillness of a steady center and the movement or flight of teeming multitudes, the unmovable fixity of a pivot of unity and the unfettered liberty of human diversity—movement and stillness in one. Such an interpretation requires further textual evidence.[48]

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[45] National Spiritual Assembly, ed., *Bahá'í Prayers,* 270–271.
[46] National Spiritual Assembly, ed., *Bahá'í Prayers,* 271.
[47] National Spiritual Assembly, ed., *Bahá'í Prayers,* 272.
[48] For example, this passage, which has no necessary relevance to pilgrimage but might be germane: "Behold how, in this Day, the Beginning is reflected in the End, how out of Stillness Motion hath been engendered. This motion hath been generated by the potent energies which the words of the Almighty have released throughout the entire creation. Whoso hath been quickened by its vitalizing power, will find himself impelled to attain the court of the Beloved …" Although "court" here appears to be metaphorical, and although the mystical valences of this passage seem quite beyond immediate comprehension, it seems

Pilgrimage aside, the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, too, sits within this philosophy of law and plays this role of bridging the ostensibly irreconcilable realms of the physical and the spiritual to attain a unity between the two through an epistemological leap into hitherto unknown realms. Ḥuqúqu'lláh, to borrow words Bahá'u'lláh uses in a rather different context, enables the individual to "flee from the shadow of negation to abide in the limitless realm of affirmation, and abandon the privation of a transient existence for the bountiful assemblage of reunion." This shift in the grasp of reality engendered by the law, inasmuch as reality permits cognitive grasp, seems vividly illustrated in this passage from Bahá'u'lláh:

> The universe is pregnant with these manifold bounties, awaiting the hour when the effects of Its unseen gifts will be made manifest in this world, when the languishing and sore athirst will attain the living Kawthar of their Well-Beloved, and the erring wanderer, lost in the wilds of remoteness and nothingness, will enter the tabernacle of life, and attain reunion with his heart's desire. In the soil of whose heart will these holy seeds germinate? From the garden of whose soul will the blossoms of the invisible realities spring forth?[49]

To choose to abide by the law is to try to respond to the question, "in the soil of whose heart will these holy seeds germinate" with the answer, "in mine." The law enables unseen gifts in a world "pregnant" with bounties to become manifest, makes possible a promised "reunion" after existence in the "privation of a transient existence," and allows the "blossoms of the invisible realities" to appear in the life of the individual. Those "invisible realities," which are none other than "manifold bounties," are realities, even if they are unseen: they are no less real than the manifest or visible world. And thus, with the law, a new state of epistemological possibility emerges in which a fundamental paradox at the heart of the ontology sketched out by Bahá'u'lláh—how can it be that that the universe can be a physical reality but also a spiritual reality at the same time?—becomes more readily acceptable: the blossoms of invisible realities spring forth in our visible everyday praxis. Each law enables the reconciliation of the contradictory duality of existence by transforming the material—whether words and letters, in prayer; food, in the fast; or perhaps physical movement, in pilgrimage—into the very means of accessing, epistemologically, a higher world that transcends the material, a means of leaping into the infinitude of reunion, of "oneness." But this final leap into reunion, what it means, why it is necessary—these questions still require elaboration.

(c) Epistemology as Alchemy

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plausible, though not necessarily implied, that pilgrimage might be a physical instantiation or expression of this metaphor. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 52, no. LXXXV.

[49] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, trans. Shoghi Effendi ([no publisher], 1931), 16, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/kitab-i-iqan/1#990539395.

What is especially striking about the paradigm shift or gestalt switch that constitutes the bounty that is Ḥuqúqu'lláh is that it does not merely transmogrify something material into a means of attaining the "spiritual" in the sense of something otherwise anodyne becoming constructive. Rather, it takes that which is, without the application of the law, an obstruction or an encumbrance to the "unseen worlds," the very antithesis or enemy of the spirit, and turns it into an entryway into it, into its ally and its very means of attainment. Whereas materialism in the sense of a negation of the realm of the non-contingent and a denial of the "spirit" is condemned frequently in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, such specific material phenomena as language or food or movement are not, of course; this flipping of reality is less readily discernible in other laws, perhaps. Materialism in the more colloquial sense of single-minded obsession with money and things of excessive indulgence is condemned, vociferously and frequently, by Bahá'u'lláh. The epistemological ecstasy enabled by Ḥuqúqu'lláh throws into particularly sharp relief how that which is otherwise deleterious becomes salutary through the law.

To mix the metaphor of inebriation somewhat, though it is not really mixing, for the essential purport of the metaphors appears to be the same, let us call this transmogrification the alchemical function of the law—though, again, with the important qualifier that it is not a magical or merely mystical process.

Bahá'u'lláh's frequent references to the notion of "purification"—that Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a means of purifying the wealth we have, or, in the original quotation reproduced above, "He hath desired to purify what ye possess"—no doubt have implications related to social justice and the corruption that accrues as individuals function in an oppressive collective economic system. But perhaps they also have implications at the individual level: that much as Bahá'u'lláh frequently refers to the need to "cleanse thy heart with the burnish of the spirit"[50] that it may become a mirror to reflect the non-material world, Ḥuqúqu'lláh purifies both human epistemology and human existence so that they may move from an obstruction to a channel of the worlds of the spirit. As Bahá'u'lláh wrote to an individual,

> Is it within human power, O Ḥakím, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed with the capacity required for so

[50] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words,* trans. Shoghi Effendi et al. ([no publisher], [no year]), p. 8, pt. 2, no. 8, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/hidden-words/hidden-words.pdf?d603a3a0

great and far-reaching a change.[51]

We move from purification here to alchemy. Let us consider more closely this alchemical function of turning "satanic strength"—meaning the debilitating forces of the material condition—into "heavenly power" through the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, inasmuch as law is a subset of the "Word of God." Regarding "crass materialism" generally, "which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being, forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society," Shoghi Effendi, great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh and the authorized interpreter, following 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of his word, writes with uncompromising and trenchant denunciation: it is "cancerous," he writes; it is "the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises" including nothing less than the "burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men."[52] It might be that this arraignment by Shoghi Effendi alludes to an admonition by Bahá'u'lláh about "civilization," which, if "carried to excess," can "prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation." Bahá'u'lláh warned of the day "when its flame will devour the cities."[53] The law comes in and flips this "cancer"— material as things, and its tendency toward materialism as a system of knowing—into the very means of ecstatic wonder.

Amid this censure of materialism as an epistemological distraction from the "things of the spirit" generally, Bahá'u'lláh condemns wealth more narrowly. "Thou dost wish for gold and I desire thy freedom from it. Thou thinkest thyself rich in its possession, and I recognize thy wealth in thy sanctity therefrom. By My life! This is My knowledge, and that is thy fancy; how can My way accord with thine?" Bahá'u'lláh asks, turning, notably, from problems of wealth to problems of knowledge.[54] "Busy not thyself with this world, for with fire We test the gold, and with gold We test Our servants," he warns.[55] He bemoans those who "with the utmost endeavour and effort, collect a handful of worldly goods and greatly rejoice in this act" only to find that "troubles are endured, and wealth becometh a source of affliction."[56] Throughout his writings, the "poverty" of the human being in the face of the

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[51] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 62, no. XCIX. This passage suggests that what I have discussed here as the "alchemical function of the law" might better be construed as the alchemical function of the "Word." Of course, the former is a subset of the latter, so it is if the latter is alchemical, then so must be the former. But I have not provided a theoretical explication of why law in particular has an exceptional alchemical function, if it indeed does. I have not provided that explication because I have no idea. There is a troubling undertheorization of (the) law here.

[52] Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957* ([no publication source or date indicated in source]), 69, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/citadel-faith/citadel-faith.pdf?23fe460a

[53] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 107, no. CLXIV.

[54] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words,* p. 6, pt.1, no. 56.

[55] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words,* p. 6, pt.1, no. 55.

[56] Bahá'u'lláh, "Additional Tablets and Extracts from Tablets Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh," accessed May 2025, p. 12, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/additional-tablets-extracts-from-tablets-revealed-bahaullah/additional-tablets-extracts-from-tablets-revealed-bahaullah.pdf?464aac6f.

"shoreless oceans" of the "incorruptible wealth"[57] of an all-bountiful, all-possessing entity functions as a central metaphor in understanding the relationship between the contingent human and non-contingent Creator—or perhaps it is not a metaphor at all. In a brief obligatory prayer that Bahá'u'lláh prescribes, the suppliant testifies to the suppliant's "poverty" and to the "wealth" of the one who is supplicated.[58]

In his epistle to the Iranian monarch Náṣiri'd-Dín, among the authorities primarily responsible for his exile ultimately to the Ottoman penal town of Akka, Bahá'u'lláh expatiates on wealth. Even if only for the vehement force of its tone, the passage is worth quoting at length:

> Shall a man's wealth endure forever, or protect him from the One Who shall, erelong, seize him by his forelock? Gazing upon those who sleep beneath the gravestones, embosomed in the dust, could one ever distinguish the sovereign's crumbling skull from the subject's mouldering bones? Nay, by Him Who is the King of kings! Could one discern the lord from the vassal, or those that enjoyed wealth and riches from those who possessed neither shoes nor mat? By God! Every distinction hath been erased, save only for those who upheld the right and who ruled with justice.
>
> Whither are gone the learned men, the divines and potentates of old? What hath become of their discriminating views, their shrewd perceptions, their subtle insights and sage pronouncements? Where are their hidden coffers, their flaunted ornaments, their gilded couches, their rugs and cushions strewn about? Gone forever is their generation! All have perished, and, by God's decree, naught remaineth of them but scattered dust. Exhausted is the wealth they gathered, dispersed the stores they hoarded, dissipated the treasures they concealed. Naught can now be seen but their deserted haunts, their roofless dwellings, their uprooted tree-trunks, and their faded splendour. No man of insight will let wealth distract his gaze from his ultimate objective, and no man of understanding will allow riches to withhold him from turning unto Him Who is the All-Possessing, the Most High.
>
> Where is he who held dominion over all whereon the sun shineth, who lived extravagantly on earth, seeking out the luxuries of the world and of all that hath been created upon it? Where is the commander of the swarthy legion and the upraiser of the golden standard? Where is the ruler of Zawrá', and where the tyrant of Fayḥá'? Where are those before whose munificence the treasure-houses of the earth shrank in shame, and at whose largesse and swelling spirit the very ocean was abashed? Where is he who stretched forth his arm in rebellion, and who turned

[57] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 101, no. CLIII.
[58] National Spiritual Assembly, ed., *Bahá'í Prayers,* 4.

his hand against the All-Merciful?[59]

Let us approach the passage in reverse: the solution it offers, and then the problem it resolves. Bahá'u'lláh's admonition that "no man of insight will let wealth distract his gaze from his ultimate objective, and no man of understanding will allow riches to withhold him from turning unto Him Who is the All-Possessing, the Most High," and his denunciation of the "shrewd perceptions" and "subtle insights" of the indulgently opulent, enable, once again, the general interpretation that an essential function of abidance by the law, including that of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, is to alter human "gaze" and "perception" in a way not simply to modify it but to set it aright: to let human perception rise to a level at which wealth, no longer an obstruction, fails to hinder insight into that which is most important.

For indeed, Bahá'u'lláh lauds wealth in superlative terms even while condemning it. "The best of men," he explains, "are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds."[60] Of the individual who engages in work, Bahá'u'lláh writes, "wealth that he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy."[61] "The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith," he aphorizes.[62]

The epistemological inebriant of Ḥuqúqu'lláh mediates this paradox of wealth as condemnable yet commendable, tempering that which can become "excessive" and alchemizing that which can spread "terror and consternation" into a bounty, into the something "praiseworthy," into that which makes one the "best" of people. Baha'ú'lláh writes, "All that is in heaven and earth I have ordained for thee, except the human heart, which I have made the habitation of My beauty and glory; yet thou didst give My home and dwelling to another than Me."[63] Ḥuqúqu'lláh enables the individual to possess all that is heaven and earth without all that is in heaven and earth possessing the individual.

In this sense, Bahá'u'lláh's remonstrances against wealth appear as objections not to wealth in and of itself but rather to the phenomenological and gnoseological problems, the problems of the perception of reality, that wealth potentially engenders.

The question, then, is perception of what? The passage to Náṣiri'd-Dín quoted above points to the inherent transience of all things. It is against this notion of the temporal nature of human earthly existence, the evanescence of all material life, that Bahá'u'lláh's anaphora raises protest; there is a

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[59] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* ([no publisher, no date]), 44, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/summons-lord-hosts/summons-lord-hosts.pdf?162f46af. Translator not indicated in source.
[60] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words,* p. 16, pt. 2, no. 82.
[61] Bahá'u'lláh, "Ṭarázát," in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, ed. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Bahá'í World Center, [no date]), 13, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/tablets-bahaullah/tablets-bahaullah.pdf?f5762905
[62] Bahá'u'lláh, "Aṣl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr," in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 54.
[63] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, p. 10, pt. 2, no. 27.

certain resonance to the syntactical relentlessness to his cries of reproach against the inability of humans to recognize the impermanence of the material world and the relentlessness of the need for reminders that indeed the world is evanescent. Bahá'u'lláh writes elsewhere, "The world is continually proclaiming these words: Beware, I am evanescent, and so are all my outward appearances and colors. Take ye heed of the changes and chances contrived within me and be ye roused from your slumber. Nevertheless there is no discerning eye to see, nor is there a hearing ear to hearken."[64] Ḥuqúqu'lláh seeks to correct human "gaze" so that it can "discern" what it is that the world and its colors continually proclaim, making those outward colors—the material world itself, with that which is "outward" perhaps contrasting with "unseen gifts," "holy seeds," and "unseen realities"—themselves intimate to the human that it is evanescent. For otherwise, without this discernment, those colors allure and distort. This question of evanescence might elucidate another rather challenging passage in which Bahá'u'lláh writes: "In this day the true Heir is the Word of God, since the underlying purpose of inheritance is the preservation of the name and traces of men. It is indubitably clear that the passing of centuries and ages will obliterate these signs, while every word that hath streamed from the Pen of Glory in honour of a certain individual will last as long as the dominions of earth and heaven will endure."[65] Wealth, evanescent, disguises its own dishonorable evanescence and thus the dishonorable evanescence of the material condition altogether.

It is partly in this sense, perhaps, that Ḥuqúqu'lláh has a fundamentally protective function. Throughout the body of his writings, Bahá'u'lláh and the authorities that succeeded him repeatedly lay stress on the protective function of the law: protective intellectually, no doubt, and also practically, materially.[66]

This notion of human and material evanescence is linked, in the passage to Náṣiri'd-Dín, to the question of the inherent oneness of all phenomena, and especially of all human beings. As the first paragraph of the passage seems to suggest, distinctions of wealth are deplorable when they produce a false sense of division among people, or when they introduce artificial and oppressive forms of haughtiness or superiority. The distinctions and discrimination that wealth engenders in the fleeting world of material life vanish for the individual after death, quite obviously. When they are regarded as anything but transient, they obstruct the recognition that they are non-essential, a superstructure, we might say, over the essential oneness of the human essence, which originates in the eternal spiritual realms. The unseen gifts with which the universe is pregnant are available to anyone who seeks to let their holy seeds germinate the soil of the heart; it is the outward colors of the world that create specious distinctions. It is because wealth obstructs knowledge of evanescence that it obstructs knowledge of essential unity. It is for this reason that the gestalt switch effected by the law, the epistemological

[64] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 89.
[65] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 3, no. 9.
[66] For example, Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 4, no. 12; p. 23, no. 88.

ecstasy and rapture it produces, are necessary.

(d) Alchemy as Oneness

We have thus arrived at our critical paradox: how Ḥuqúqu'lláh addresses property both as of a unique, exclusive matter and as a matter of communality and commonality. We arrive, then, at the question of the self. The alchemical process of transforming obstructive material means into a salutary epistemological intoxicant most of all operates on the human self, for indeed, the use of material means for spiritual ends derives from the duality that inheres in the human being itself according to the ontological writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Why is it that human beings must use this epistemological intoxicant to recognize the higher nature, to transmute that which is material into a means of accessing the higher? Why must they seek to recognize the "unseen world"? It is because the human body itself, and by extension human worldly existence, is a material means that must be used for spiritual ends, which means nothing other than the ends of others, for in essence human beings are one interdependent family. It is because, as 'Abdu'l-Báha explains, the human being, in the ontological order of the world as explained by Bahá'u'lláh, stands at the ultimate limit of the material world and the lowermost limit of the spiritual world.

In a letter to an individual, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained, "man standeth on the demarcation line between light and darkness. In the circle of existence, he is situated at the lowest point, which marketh at once the end of the arc of descent and the beginning of the arc of ascent. For this reason, he is free to move in either direction: towards light or darkness, towards ignorance or guidance—depending on the one that prevaileth."[67] And 'Abdu'l-Bahá elaborated in other remarks that "the material worlds terminate at the end of the arc of descent; that the station of man lies at the end of the arc of descent and the beginning of the arc of ascent, which is opposite the Supreme Centre; and that from the beginning to the end of the arc of ascent the degrees of progress are of a spiritual nature."[68] Because the human being, situated at this cusp of existence between two distinct realms, has the autonomy "to move in either direction," the law functions as a "bounty" that moves man toward the inscrutable realms of ascent, transmuting the material dimensions of human existence into the means of ascending to the spiritual.

What is it, then, that gradates the various levels of material existence, that distinguishes the reality of the human against that of other grades of earthly existence and situates it at the cusp of ascent? And what is it that characterizes the "degrees of progress," which "are of a spiritual nature," along the arc of ascent? 'Abdu'l-Bahá observes "that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world

[67] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Bahá'í World Centre, 2021), p. 72, no. 29.
[68] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions,* trans. Laura Clifford Barney, ed. Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre (Bahá'í World Center, 2014), p. 106, no. 81, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/some-answered-questions/some-answered-questions.pdf?c9046869.

of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that cooperation, mutual aid, and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being."[69] The simple yet fundamental example that 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself presents is that of the co-dependency of plants, producers of oxygen and consumers of carbon dioxide, with animals, producers of carbon dioxide and consumers of oxygen. Greater complexity and sophistication in these "characteristics" of mutuality within and among organisms mark higher stages in the order of material existence, not unlike biological taxonomic kingdoms: "the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "the more conspicuous are the signs and evidence of the truth that cooperation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order."[70]

Inasmuch as the human being occupies the culmination of the order of the material world or the termination of the arc of descent and the embarkation into the arc of ascent, it necessarily follows that the human does so because it exhibits these spiritual qualities of mutuality and reciprocity, of cooperation and integration, at a greater degree than any other form of earthly life, or, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, because we find "this wondrous phenomenon" of interdependency and reciprocity "shining resplendent" among humans. But crucially, for human beings, "acts of cooperation, mutual assistance, and reciprocity are not confined to the body and to things that pertain to the material world"[71]—that is, it is not simply matters of biological exigency that characterize human mutuality and reciprocity, such as the dependency of animals on plant photosynthesis or of one aspect of a given animal's physiology, say its blood circulation, on another, say its respiration. Rather, humans experience this cooperation and mutual assistance "for all conditions, whether physical or spiritual, such as those related to minds, thoughts, opinions, manners, customs, attitudes, understandings, feelings or other human susceptibilities."[72] It appears that it is this capacity for sophisticated volitional forms of cooperation and mutuality, the ability to make a willful decision to harmonize with others and share intellectually and practically with them not out of biological or natural requirement but out of "human susceptibilities," that places the human being at the cusp of the arc of ascent, at the threshold of the worlds of spirituality.

And thus, the paradox of the human entity being at once a material and a spiritual being has now been recast into the paradox of the human entity being at once a discrete, self-sufficient individual and a contextually constituted, dependent social being—and the two paradoxes are one and the same paradox. We have arrived at our paradox of property: how can it be that the act of claiming ownership presumes a discrete individual yet must be commonly held by all? It is worth noting, too, that we have now once again returned, at the same time, to our point of origin: the relationship between the question

[69] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 6, no. 23.
[70] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 7, no. 23.
[71] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 7, no. 23.
[72] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 7, no. 23.

of bounty and the question of inscrutability. Because the human being is at lowest limit of the arc of spiritual life, it cannot know fully what is above it, yet it must turn in that direction. The inebriating, alchemical function of the law pulls it away from its orientation to material descent into contingent or incidental interdependency and upward to higher realms of more epistemologically and ontologically sophisticated mutuality and oneness. The bounty of Ḥuqúqu'lláh enables access to a world of inscrutability, though that world remains inscrutable; the bounty of Ḥuqúqu'lláh enables the material realm, in which things remain segregated and discrete though at increasing levels of interdependency, and which was once a potential obstruction to recognizing the spiritual worlds of sharper collaboration and of interdependency, to act as the vehicle by which to gain access to the higher world; and the bounty of Ḥuqúqu'lláh allows the individual human to retain its individuality as a material being while recognizing the paramount principle of ever-intensifying cooperation and mutuality. These three point are, in essence, one and the same.

And indeed, "This is the basic principle"—the principle of mutual aid and cooperation being manifest in humans at a greater and nobler degree than in any other life form—"on which the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is established," 'Abdu'l-Bahá concludes, "inasmuch as its proceeds are dedicated to the furtherance of these ends."[73] The principle of mutuality finds expression in economic means: in abiding by the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, which is an act of individual intellectual volition, a property of humans, the human deploys its property to engage in a practice at once intensely personal and entirely communal. Ḥuqúqu'lláh calls for a surrender of a fixed portion of one's surplus property for the benefit of others not out of a sense of benevolence but out of a recognition that that property was never properly one's own in the first place: that as a social being existing in a web of mutual assistance and cooperation, one's own being is constituted by forces of interdependency, that inasmuch as "the more this interrelationship is strengthened and expanded, the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity."[74] The alchemical function of Ḥuqúqu'lláh enables it to transform the property of the human—that which it owns; that which is characteristic of it—into a mechanism of gaining higher and higher degrees of oneness with others, while preserving the right of the individual to property, both its exclusive possessions and its selfhood.

To state the issue once more, then, the "basic principle" of Ḥuqúqu'lláh appears to be precisely what Washida (and again, many others, of course) identifies as the core paradox of the problem of property: how universalism and particularism, how the recognition of irrevocable sociality and of inviolable individuality, can both operate in the concept of property. This then relates to the problem of how something that is intended to free the individual and preserve its autonomy can also be limiting and binding—to phrase the problem otherwise, how a law, which demands individual subordination to institutional fiat, can also be that which entails the utmost freedom and discretion of

[73] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 7, no. 23.
[74] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 7, no. 23.

the individual. That question is similar to that of how law can be an inebriant: something that makes us take flight into the limitless worlds of the spiritual, as Bahá'u'lláh states, enabling "reunion" with other beings in the spiritual realms while preserving the sanctity of individuality. Ḥuqúqu'lláh mediates these paradoxes not only by declaring that a portion of an individual's private possessions belongs to "God," that universal entity that is bountiful to all, in the first place; it does so by using the concept of property or ownership to induce an epistemological reckoning with these problems of philosophy at the level of the individual, by inducing an epistemological leap out of the discreteness and individuality of the material condition and into a higher level of oneness and interdependency even while retaining the boundaries of the person.

We have remained, though, at the level of theory: we have toured problems and paradoxes without thinking about how, precisely, their resolution is generated by the law, how, precisely, that epistemological leap occurs. If we accept that Ḥuqúqu'lláh uses the material world to transmogrify that world into a means of inducing this epistemological "rapture," then what is the mechanism by which it does so, if that mechanism is not exclusively mystical? That is the question we now face.

Before we continue, it is important to acknowledge that there are many questions that are entirely relevant but unbroached here. One is the relationship between Ḥuqúqu'lláh and time, or law more generally and time. The question matters especially here because of Washida's emphasis on probing the temporal contingency and historical embeddedness of philosophical thought. In his exegesis of a well-known Biblical verse from Matthew, "Immediately after the oppression of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven," Bahá'u'lláh interprets the "sun" and "moon" as signifying, among other things, such "laws and teachings as have been established and proclaimed in every Dispensation," especially the laws of prayer and fasting, which lose their efficacy and potency as time passes and therefore require reinvigoration.[75] The renewal of laws, and the ordaining of new laws, constitute a critical part of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of a new religious dispensation. Ḥuqúqu'lláh, and generally the practical and philosophical problems of finance and property, must be understood in this context of the historical relativity of law and of the concept in the dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh of historical renewal for an age of global modernity, as we might call it—although we have not conceived of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in that way here.

This problem of historical time across religious dispensations is intertwined with the question of to whom, at a given point in a given dispensation, the funds of Ḥuqúqu'lláh must be "rendered," as stated in Bahá'u'lláh's original injunction. These dual perspectives on historical time can be restated in more technical Bahá'í terminology as the relationship between the "greater covenant" and "lesser covenant." It is implied in the passage quoted at the outset of this investigation, and it is clarified in other parts of that source text and in separate texts, that "rendered unto God" referred at

[75] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán,* 7, 10–11.

one point in history to specific individuals and refers now to a specific institution endowed with the authority to receive the funds; implicit in offering the funds, then, is faith that the entity to whom the individual is rendering payment is endowed with legitimate authority, a sign of the individual's willful entry into a covenant with that authority in which one renders the funds faithfully and those funds are received and disbursed faithfully. This covenant is a central feature of the dispensation Bahá'u'lláh established, and thus the practice and philosophy of Ḥuqúqu'lláh are intimately associated with the question of the passage of religious time within a given dispensation and the nature of religious authority over that era of time. They also imply that the relationship between the individual and surrounding society immanent to the law must be expressed through a relationship with governing authority, another crucial topic given distressingly little thought here.

And this question of the covenant demands that we think earnestly about another central topic that we have but implicitly encountered: the question of justice. The philosophy of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and its implications for time and oneness cannot be dissociated from the theme of justice, both in the exercise of the individual's rational faculty of fairness and judiciousness in the individual's epistemological world and in the function of Ḥuqúqu'lláh of establishing relationships of justice between, first, the individual and the institutions of governance and, by extension, the individual and society. Ḥuqúqu'lláh quite obviously seeks a reordering of a deranged economic and social system not only in which some are exorbitantly wealthy and some impoverished but also in which appalling inequalities of opportunity, knowledge, and education and a host of other injustices endure. These themes are, troublingly, at once too significant to ignore and too significant to explore here.

4. The Clinic of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

These vital themes of history, time, and justice perfunctorily thrown behind us, let us turn to "how." If the foregoing interpretation of the philosophy of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is legitimate—once again, if it is the case that the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, like law in the Bahá'í episteme more generally, is a bounty; that it is a bounty because it is as an epistemological inebriant, enabling access to bounties otherwise unknowable; that this epistemological shift transmutes an obstruction to spiritual knowledge into an avenue for that knowledge, transmogrifying the self and the material world into pathways to more bounties; and that the law thus works toward the resolution of the paradoxes and irreconcilabilities of existence, drawing humans from material splintering to spiritual oneness and enabling higher and higher levels of interdependency and mutuality—then it does not follow that this process is necessarily a magical or even an altogether mystical one, nor does it follow that it is simply a procedural one, as if Ḥuqúqu'lláh were just a tax, in which the act of payment in and of itself is at once the problem and the solution. It is not as if the act of "rendering unto God" a portion of one's wealth and abiding by the law simply produces some sort of rapture that "purifies" the self and its property, nor is it that simply tossing out money for redistribution among others creates a more balanced society and assuages the

individual conscience, even if there might be elements of truth buried in both of those readings. Rather, the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh implies intellectual toil, exertion, day-to-day effort, and constant questioning and questioning of one's questioning to bring about the gestalt switch it demands. It is at least partly through practical, even scientific mechanisms that Ḥuqúqu'lláh proceeds with its alchemical process, which unfolds in the quotidian world, at the place of human suffering, by people who exercise and act upon their humanity and render and constitute their own selves through the process. There is, to use words or theories external to the episteme of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, a "clinic" to the law.

My basic guess here, and it is little more than a guess, is that this "clinic" of Ḥuqúqu'lláh achieves its philosophical resolution of paradoxes, most of all that of individuality and sociality, precisely by breaking those paradoxes open: it makes them problems for everyone, at the individual level, by bringing them into the very core of the individual's everyday life, thus "philosophizing" or "spiritualizing" life and demanding individual reckoning with these issues at the level of both thought and practice, together. The responses to these paradoxes cannot be formulated in a boardroom, classroom, or assembly hall and then to parachuted into the life of the individual by institutional diktat. Perhaps there are a priori answers to these paradoxes, but those answers are inscrutable and can only be approached through a disciplined process of learning in which every individual must autonomously, willingly, and joyously partake. This very act of universalizing and proliferating the philosophizing of life contributes to gaining the necessary balance that the paradoxes of property demand.

This interpretation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh might be corroborated by the passage quoted in part above about the nature of "rapture." How is it that we attain the "entrancement" and the alchemical transformation that Ḥuqúqu'lláh requires, that Ḥuqúqu'lláh *is*? Perhaps for some, Bahá'u'lláh seems to acknowledge, it is not an intellectual or methodical process. But for others, the "wilderness of search," or the "realm of effort and striving" to attain "reunion" in the worlds of oneness and out of the world of divided contingency, demands "spiritual struggle and physical toil."[76]

This "struggle" or "toil," or the clinical operation of the law, might emerge from ostensible paradoxes inherent in the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh itself, which is at once binding and voluntary, at once exact and vague, at once open to no modification and subject to wide interpretation. These apparent contradictions induce, at the practical level, a reckoning with balancing responsibility to society, to institutions of governance, and to the self. And because they do so, these seeming contradictions force on the individual the intellectual onus—the intellectual bounty—of this struggling relentlessly with philosophy in the everyday. Let us consider this problem further.

Bahá'u'lláh is unequivocal about the obligation of all believers to abide by Ḥuqúqu'lláh and all who cross the minimum threshold to render it financially. "This ordinance is binding upon everyone," he writes plainly.[77] "It is incumbent upon everyone to discharge the obligation of

[76] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Call of the Divine Beloved,* 58.
[77] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 3, no. 9.

Ḥuqúqu'lláh," he writes again.[78] As we have seen in the original passage cited at the outset, Bahá'u'lláh's reproof of those who neglect or deliberately flout the law is unsparing: "He who dealeth faithlessly with God shall in justice meet with faithlessness himself."[79]

And yet Bahá'u'lláh is equally unequivocal, if not even more emphatic, about the spontaneity and voluntariness that must undergird observation of the law—of course, spontaneity in the sense of individual autonomy, not in the more colloquial sense of caprice, and voluntariness in the sense of being based on one's volition, not in the sense of optionality. "The question of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh dependeth on the willingness of the individuals themselves," he writes.[80] People "should observe the injunctions prescribed in the Book with the utmost radiance, gladness and willing acquiescence," he writes.[81] "Should anyone offer Ḥuqúq with utmost joy and radiance, manifesting a spirit of resignation and content, his offering shall be acceptable before God."[82] And again: "The Right of God must be paid whenever possible and should be offered in a spirit of joy and radiance."[83] In fact, he writes that abiding by the law is not permissible unless it is done volitionally and indeed joyfully: "If one spontaneously offereth Ḥuqúq with the utmost joy and radiance it will be acceptable, and not otherwise."[84]

It follows, then, that no individual, entity, or institution has the right to demand payment, to question the amount of payment, or in any way to intervene in the unfettered freedom of the individual to make judgments about when and how and indeed whether to pay. Bahá'u'lláh again leaves no ambiguity in this regard: "We have, in view of the exigencies of the times, accepted the payment of the Ḥuqúq, but have forbidden solicitation thereof," he writes.[85] And again, "To discharge one's obligations is highly praiseworthy in the sight of God. However, it is not permitted to solicit Ḥuqúq from anyone."[86] And again, "Time and again have We written and commanded that no one should solicit such payment."[87] No executive or judicial authority has the right to enforce or otherwise litigate on an individual's payment of or failure to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh. The law itself mandates that the law cannot be enforced.

This prohibition on solicitation and the injunction that payment must occur spontaneously necessarily mean that the exercise of the critical proviso in the law that it should only apply to wealth beyond what is "needful" also devolves on the individual, who must make the determination of needfulness before the act of calculation and the possible monetary execution of the law can occur.

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[78] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 4, no. 11.
[79] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas,* 22.
[80] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 5, no. 18.
[81] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 4, no. 12.
[82] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 5, no. 16.
[83] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 5, no. 16.
[84] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 2, no. 5.
[85] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 2, no. 5.
[86] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 23, no. 88.
[87] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 3, no. 8.

And the prohibition implies that this act of determining need must occur critically but also joyfully. In other words, every individual must determine autonomously through an unfettered, spontaneous, and earnest reckoning what portion of its property is needful. Bahá'u'lláh rejects, apparently deplores, the practice of exceeding the requirements of the law or, seemingly, interpreting the concept of "needful" to the extent of depriving oneself of comfort and material joys in life. Of those who seek "to observe maximum austerity in their lives" to donate more of their wealth, he writes: "Let them act with moderation and not impose hardship upon themselves. We would like them both to enjoy a life that is well-pleasing."[88] But the decision is with the individual.

The delineation of unambiguous regulations within which the individual thus has both a grave obligation and vast liberty to interpret and understand how those legal regulations operate in life—this must, according to the foregoing discussion on law as epistemology, mean nothing less than the obligation of the individual to grapple with basic problems of knowledge, and to do so not fleetingly but pervasively and persistently, across all dimensions of life. The notion of paying nineteen percent of one's wealth after a certain threshold beyond what is needful quite obviously poses the question, what is needful? What is the pool of wealth that is measured against the threshold and then subject to payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh? And those questions imply an evaluation of the self: What is it that is for me, that is my property and only mine, and what is it that is extraneous to my needs and therefore not necessarily mine—therefore necessarily not mine? Going beyond a handful of categories that Bahá'u'lláh has articulated, the joyful and unencumbered exercise of individual judgment in this respect demands intense reflection in which the individual, in the most private of acts, determines what to give for the greater good because it is beyond what is necessarily individual property. And here we encounter another great paradox: it is at the most intimate, private moments of conscience that the individual opens itself up not only to the institution that collects a portion of its surplus wealth but also to the recognition that the individual is not a self-contained unit and must therefore willingly and joyfully return that with which it was bounteously endowed. At moments of intense, sacrosanct privacy, the individual encounters the awareness that it is not intensely private or sacrosanct and that that which it possesses is not private or self-contained either. In other words, this clinical process rests on the recognition that that most intimate of spaces in which the individual reflects on its individual property and its property of individuality is induced by an understanding of the individual's communal and public constitution. The imagined "other" of the private individual, the interlocutor in the philosophical process of reckoning, appears where the other is not permitted to intrude. And thus, the concept of property is cast in a new light. The individual fully owns what is needful to the individual, but beyond that, once wealth surpasses a certain threshold, what one possesses is not ipso facto what one owns. In fact, a portion of what is individually possessed is necessarily not the individual's property. Rendering nineteen percent of the "excess" wealth in one's possession as the Right of God,

[88] Research Department, ed., "Ḥuqúqu'lláh," p. 6, no. 19.

to be reverted to the greater good, is not an act of contribution or charity in the strictest sense but rather a recognition that one did not wholly own what one possessed in the first place. The judgment of what is needful and what is not is therefore necessarily a judgment concerning what part of the individual's possessions is properly individual property and what part is not properly individual property.

And if, according to the foregoing discussion, Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a "bounty," a means of epistemological "rapture" that pulls the individual out of the privation of the material world up the arc of ascent along a spiritual gradation of increasing oneness, then it follows, presumably, that this private yet public exercise of intimate conscience is precisely the ecstasy-inducing act that enables the alchemical processes that constitute Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the bountiful movement from material segregation to unification, interdependence, and mutuality with others. And the separation of knowledge and action itself becomes a form of segregation that is obliterated inasmuch as it is action on interdependency that constitutes knowledge of it, knowledge that results from the epistemological inebriation effected by the law. This alchemy is a scientific process: the day-to-day measuring and testing of what is needful and what is not, what one is fully entitled to or not, what is individual and what is not, what one is able to return for the greater good joyfully and where the limits of the joy in communality reside. The principles are clear, but there are no fixed answers beyond what the individual learns through rigorous testing upon those general principles. And in this science is spirit: as Shoghi Effendi has written in an admittedly rather different context, it is "nothing short of the spirit" of that individual who abides by the law that "can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender."[89]

The implications, perhaps obviously, are sweeping. The principles of the exercise of Ḥuqúqu'lláh necessarily infiltrate all dimensions of life and destabilize static or received notions of needfulness, property, and ownership, and thus of self and society. Let us take, for instance, two overly simplistic examples. First, landholding, a problem of staggering historical import throughout the modern history of our country. Certainly, to own a dwelling is needful, and thus if one is a homeowner, one is entitled to full ownership of one's property. But if one then proceeds to expand one's possession of land beyond the primary residence, the individual must make a judgment on whether that expansion is truly "needful" for the individual and then, if it is not, to recognize that that expansion exceeds the realm of the individual and moves into that of the community. And once the limits of the self are exceeded, the full extent of what one possesses might not be what is properly one's own. That possibility does not imply that the individual has no right beyond what is needful: far from it. Inherent in Ḥuqúqu'lláh is the assumption that the individual does have such a right, and an immense one at that. But the extent of that right requires thought. Or perhaps more challengingly, another example:

[89] Shoghi Effendi, "Letter of February 23, 1924," in *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages: 1922 – 1932* ([publisher and date not indicated in source]), 35, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/bahai-administration/bahai-administration.pdf?366ab20f.

what of savings to avert future financial emergencies? The determination of what is needful is not simply about the individual and what it might need to defray possible unforeseen costs. Rather, it demands a recognition that after a point, the amassing of individual wealth has social consequences, and it calls on the individual to weigh social responsibility against responsibility to oneself. If we press the point far enough, that weighing must occur in all life's choices on consumption and property independent of the threshold of actual payment inasmuch as the threshold of payment hinges on the conclusion of that weighing. Under Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the entire purpose of individual property becomes to undermine the premise of exclusive individual property, and thus also to enable it.

The law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, then, is a matter of applying discipline to everyday life, the discipline to infuse daily activity with philosophical content. The Universal House of Justice, the institution today with the sole authority to collect and disburse the funds of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, appears never to call for payment and rarely to comment publicly on other aspects of the law. In one of the relatively unusual references it has publicly made, which occurred in one sentence in 2017 in the context of a discussion on economic life, it stated, "Examining one's life to determine what is a necessity and then discharging with joy one's obligation in relation to the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is an indispensable discipline to bring one's priorities into balance, purify whatever wealth one possesses, and ensure that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good."[90] Ḥuqúqu'lláh requires a disciplined exercise of theory in everyday life—not only an application of theory but an engendering, an abstraction, of theory out of everyday life, from the experience of what is needful to a more principled approach to life in which needfulness acts as a heuristic for comprehending one's own selfhood and its relationship to society and its governing institutions.

Perhaps an overly coy or arch reading of this notion of Ḥuqúqu'lláh as "discipline" might construe the concept in dual senses, then: that Ḥuqúqu'lláh requires the regimented, systematic exercise of volition and that Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a field of knowing, a domain of inquiry, a "discipline" in which a certain set of accepted methodologies and shared values guide the variegated practice of individual, autonomous inquirers. Perhaps one reads too far, or perhaps one does not, in noting that the particular formulation of that sentence—"Ḥuqúqu'lláh is an indispensable discipline to bring one's priorities in balance"—permits, might even encourage, that dual reading.

Through this demand of discipline, then, the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh philosophizes, or "spiritualizes," life. Even the most quotidian of things, or of actions, can become an object of philosophical inquiry, inquiry that requires "discipline." And it must be inquiry, for quite obviously, no formula or diktat can cover every instance of human endeavor. That of course is the entire point: rather than proffering answers to these questions, Ḥuqúqu'lláh demands that the individual ask the

[90] The Universal House of Justice, "To The Bahá'ís of the World, 1 March 2017," Messages of the Universal House of Justice, accessed May 2025, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20170301_001/1#712004157.

questions. And thus the self, itself, becomes the object of inquiry. In this way, Ḥuqúqu'lláh acts as a mechanism for the continual destabilization of knowledge, especially knowledge of the self inherited from the past and from prior lived experience, since the individual must continually question whether something is needful or merely a product of desire, and the individual must question knowledge of its own self as it asks these questions, since the individual must question the individual's own motives: Why is it that I am doing something? Because I need to do so or because I want to do so? What does that imply for my situatedness with respect to others? The self appears as opaque to the self: the individual confronts its limits in its own recognition of itself, realizing that its own motivations and decision-making are less obvious to itself than it might otherwise realize.

Ḥuqúqu'lláh leaves the extent to which the individual engages in this act of philosophizing too to the judgment of the individual, and thus philosophical methodology itself becomes an object of philosophical inquiry: How much is too much judgment? How much is not enough? In what contexts, or at what bedsides, is inquiry more necessary? In a rather different context, but in one that seems to bear on the exercise of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the collecting body of Ḥuqúqu'lláh writes regarding this question of "discipline": "You are also mindful of one essential, practical point, namely: that believers differ in their capacity, aptitude and approach, in their understanding, wisdom and spiritual *discipline* [emphasis added], in their degree of commitment and willingness to sacrifice, as well as in their personal preferences and priorities."[91] Ḥuqúqu'lláh demands that the individual ask these questions of itself, not of course of others: What is my capacity, aptitude, and approach? What is my understanding and wisdom and discipline? How rigorously am I able to apply the discipline of the law? The methodology the individual exercises becomes a field of inquiry.

And because the methodology thus becomes the object of inquiry as much as the inquiry that the methodology is meant to facilitate, the discipline of Ḥuqúqu'lláh necessarily demands a metacriticism of knowledge that infuses day-to-day action. Ḥuqúqu'lláh asks not only what it is that is needful or not, what is properly mine or not, what is me or what is not me, but also how it is that I can possibly know these things. Perhaps that is the bounty, or a bounty, of Ḥuqúqu'lláh: its epistemology, the alchemical processes it induces in the self.

Two brief examples of the implications of this clinical epistemology might elucidate what is at stake, even if they are overly hasty. Even if the injunction of Ḥuqúqu'lláh reverts to the individual, Ḥuqúqu'lláh necessarily calls into question the concept of the "individual," especially within the household, for often it is the family, not the individual, that acts as the most basic financial unit. The collecting institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has written, "Wise and attentive stewardship of family finances

[91] The Universal House of Justice, "To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith, 31 October 2008" Messages of the Universal House of Justice, accessed May 2025, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20081031_001/1#110178581

must take into account … how to discharge the obligation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh," before reflecting, "the family provides a space to learn in practice about generosity, responsibility, the difference between needs and wants, and the management of material means."[92] At one level, the simultaneously philosophical and practical demands of Ḥuqúqu'lláh call for a conceptualization of what the family is: not simply a matter of biological expediency, not simply a unit of social organization, but a clinical-philosophical arena of inquiry, a space to "learn in practice about generosity, responsibility," and other questions. The family, we might say, becomes a clinic, a space of constituting the self in self-conscious philosophical inquiry on property through dialogue with others. And in this transformation of the family into a place of philosophy, questions of gender necessarily come under scrutiny, insofar as engaging in the requisite learning for Ḥuqúqu'lláh demands consultation between spouses, with implications for children. That consultation must occur under "the principle of the equality of women and men," with the result that the family becomes a place for "a new understanding of equality and its practical expression."[93] This equality of men and women, and of husband and wife, is a corollary to the inherent interdependence and oneness on which the principle of Ḥuqúqu'lláh rests. It follows from the notion that human beings, regardless of whatever external differences of wealth that might exist, regardless of which party in the household is the primary breadwinner, must exist above the variegation of material life and the delusions that it creates and thus in a state of oneness. In the clinical-philosophical space of the family, Ḥuqúqu'lláh counters illusory, transient differences of wealth and material being within the household and their gnoseologically deceptive function, which have the risk of destabilizing the relationship between married people or among all members of a household, by using that which can destabilize to help weld the family together through relentless clinical-philosophical thought. It prompts the individuals in the family to consider, explicitly, the extent to which they are individuals and the extent to which they exist in inextricable symbiosis with one another through the question of property, and then to consider how the family exists as a unit within broader society. The discipline of Ḥuqúqu'lláh transforms the family into a place for ministering at these philosophical problems in everyday life.

This alchemical transformation of the sociobiological expediency of the family into a clinic for principles of philosophical interdependency extends to the concept of (the) economy itself. Through Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the economy comes under scrutiny and becomes the subject of transformation: the transformation induced in the individual transmogrifies the sphere in which that individual engages in productive and consumptive activity. As the institution that collects and disburses Ḥuqúqu'lláh writes, though not directly about Ḥuqúqu'lláh, "economic life" must be an "arena for the expression

[92] The Universal House of Justice, "To The Bahá'ís of the World, 19 March 2025," Messages of the Universal House of Justice, accessed May 2025, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20250319_001/1#186716982

[93] The Universal House of Justice, "To The Bahá'ís of the World, 19 March 2025"

of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, generosity, and other qualities of the spirit"[94]—what happens to the economy in the clinical-philosophical enterprise expands on what happens to the family. That, of course, is a different conception than those at the heart of economic systems of the past century, one that requires far more thought and far more discussion. It seems clear, in any case, that the very conception of consumption and production becomes the object of relentless philosophical inquiry. And for what they are worth, here, sitting in the philosophy of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, we thus find the two social concerns Inoue Tetsujirō communicated to Martha Root in 1930, as we saw a couple dozen pages ago.

The philosophizing of life demanded by Ḥuqúqu'lláh, then, occurs at the bedside of society, where a "somebody" is constituted as "somebody" in implicit or sometimes explicit interactions with other "somebodies": the individual, through experience, because the individual continues to live on with pain and struggles, thinks earnestly about its constitution within society as an individual holding property among other individuals holding property, and out of that simultaneous living and thinking at the bedside of society, the individual reckons with foundational problems of philosophy.

5. The Clinical Philosophy of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

Are Ḥuqúqu'lláh and its exercise, then, a form of "clinical philosophy"? The answer must certainly be that they are not.

At a basic level, Ḥuqúqu'lláh seems to accept that questions of ontology—what is the self? what is morality? to give but a few examples that Washida himself raises—have potentially or perhaps even absolutely stable answers independent of the praxis of individuals. It is not through the experience and practice of individual life that true philosophical principles are first generated, as in clinical philosophy. Bounties are there: the universe is pregnant with those unseen realities. The alchemical potential inherent in Ḥuqúqu'lláh is there. It is up to the individual to exercise those existing philosophical potentialities.

And yet those principles and potentialities are not fully knowable. They are beyond the ken of the individual. The individual is stuck within epistemological limits. And it is here that practice comes into play: it is not possible, Ḥuqúqu'lláh seems to posit, to arrive at a greater understanding of these philosophical principles strictly through armchair philosophizing, nor can the problem of philosophical inquiry be relegated only to a group of intellectuals who, because of their erudition, stand apart from society. Ḥuqúqu'lláh seems to agree fundamentally that philosophy cannot occur at a distance from the bedside. The answers to the paradoxes of property and thus of the self might exist independently of practice, but inasmuch as those answers are unknowable, it is practice, rather than pure thought, as if such a bifurcation were even tenable, that enables an entry into the world of reconciliation of paradoxes. And so in this sense, at the level of the individual, philosophical principles

[94] The Universal House of Justice, "To The Bahá'ís of the World, 1 March 2017"

must be generated through practice. Practice is epistemology. The knowing of answers cannot occur but at, or if we step back from the assertion of impossibility, usually must occur at, the "clinic," at the bedside of a suffering society, by people who are individuals at places where they live, even while carrying their suffering. Those people engage in a scientific, rigorous testing and retesting of flawed, fallible answers in a search after a principled, disciplined life. It is a philosophy of weakness: humans are never right. And that weakness is epistemological because there is ontological weakness: the human is limited, fallible, on the cusp, at the bottom of the arc of ascent. The interlocutor with whom the "somebody" of philosophy converses in this philosophical process of acknowledging weakness, this poverty before manifold unseen bounties, is always implicitly present, there in the assumption that what one possesses might not be what one properly owns. And there in the recognition of that weakness is access to abounding might. It is, then, a philosophy of might.

We then encounter, too, the problem of "application," whose rejection was the very reason for being of the discipline of clinical philosophy. If the concept of Ḥuqúqu'lláh accepts the a priori existence of philosophical principles and ontological truths, then it follows that it necessarily accepts the notion of "application" of the law to everyday life. Ḥuqúqu'lláh involves the application of philosophical principles to life: it seems futile to refute or otherwise tergiversate or euphemize around this basic reality.

But the criticisms leveled by the field of clinical philosophy against the notion of application generally and the field of applied ethics more specifically—specifically, that application bifurcates and separates theory and practice, as we have just discussed; that it splinters and siloizes what should be a single, wide-spreading field of fluid knowledge; that it brackets foundational ontological questions in favor of the mechanistic insertion of preexisting principles into lived experience without substantive contemplation on those principles—call for a refinement of what the notion of applying philosophical ideas might mean.

Even if Ḥuqúqu'lláh bears fundamental differences from clinical philosophy, perhaps the ultimate payoff of seeking to put the two into conversation might be in the necessary destabilization of the conception of "religion" that results. Quite obviously, we bypass here centuries upon centuries of inquiry into these categories of human thought and practice, but let us, for the sake of argument, look at the problem only in this narrow case. Bringing the metacritical tools of clinical philosophy to bear on a concept that is fundamentally religious means necessarily to engage in metacriticism of received knowledge on "religion" itself: religion is not a set of rituals, or a collection of cultural practices, but rather a field of philosophical questions that pervade life; it is not a dogmatic set of beliefs in which answers are preordained and demand submission but rather a critical arena of inquiry in which faith is retained in the existence of absolute answers but in which the individual relentlessly confronts the individual's inability to grasp those answers. Unalloyed obedience and inviolable liberty thus do not contradict each other but rather must critically engage each other and each enable the other.

The purport of religion here lies not in or not only in the "salvation" of individuals but in the intellectual transformation of those individuals to minister more effectively at the bedside of society—that itself is what salvation is, perhaps. In short, religious thought and practice function clinically and perhaps even exist in order to do so. The grasp of religion's social truths must occur in "places," at the bedside of society, in a rational, scientific reckoning with basic questions of existence at which the individual, as "somebody," is constituted: in which the individual reckons with the limitations of its epistemology and recognizes that it is those very limitations, that "weakness," that constitutes the human individual. The intoxicant that is religious law then raises these "weak" people to a level of strength in which "spiritual" reality, a reality of ever-increasing mutuality and collaboration, supplants the limitations of the material condition—for the very purpose of compelling the individual to reckon remorselessly, unsparingly, destabilizingly, with the problems of material existence. That intoxicant works toward a resolution of the problems of material existence by using the material world itself to throw reality into question, demanding its thoroughgoing defamiliarization by exalting the individual out of that condition toward higher degrees of interdependency and oneness.[95] In Washida's words, "At the place of suffering, even if we cannot find conclusive answers, even knowing 'if I think this way, then maybe this might be the answer' can form a great asset to thought."[96]

Ḥuqúqu'lláh ultimately rests on faith—faith in the veracity of the law itself, faith in the salutary effects of its epistemological consequences, faith in the institution to which the material payment is entrusted, faith in a "covenant" between the believer and those institutions in which the believer believes. Bahá'u'lláh's admonitions against "faithlessness" in the passage ordaining Ḥuqúqu'lláh themselves seem to testify to this reality. Faith is not philosophy, and neither is religion, yet the notion of clinical philosophy helps to think through how 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who stands in Bahá'í episteme at the center of that covenant, speaks of the notion of faith: "Deeds should proceed from knowledge," he avers, stressing the inadequacy of simply acting without consciousness of the intellectual underpinnings of good acts. "The point is this," he continues, "that faith compriseth both knowledge and the performance of good works."[97]

The philosophical act of incessant questioning amid the inability to settle at final answers, and the consequent lifetime of self-scrutiny, can only occur anchored or moored to a bedrock of certain knowledge that the inquiry in and of itself is a "bounty" with blessings both evident and beyond the individual's ken. Without that certitude, the continual self-induced undermining of the self would no

[95] For example, Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 29, no. XLIII: " … the counsels which the Pen of this wronged One hath revealed constitute the supreme animating power for the advancement of the world and the exaltation of its peoples. Arise, O people, and, by the power of God's might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies …"

[96] Washida, "Tetsugaku ni totte rinshō to wa?" 71.

[97] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Extract from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," Additional Tablets, Extracts and Talks, accessed May 2025, p. 3, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-tablets-extracts-talks/additional-tablets-extracts-talks-abdul-baha.pdf?2ae6121c.

doubt be an intolerable state of being. But 'Abdu'l-Bahá's definition of faith quoted above might suggest that the reverse is also true: that faith cannot exist without "good works" stemming from that faith, and perhaps it follows that that practice of good works necessarily engenders questions and inquiry, a scientific process of skepticism about whether that faith is being suitably exercised in action. Just as scientific skepticism cannot exist without certitude, certitude cannot exist without scientific skepticism, at least in Ḥuqúqu'lláh. We thus approach another contradiction, another paradox, that Ḥuqúqu'lláh brings to the fore and seeks to reconcile: religion and science, to be sure, but then also faith and doubt, unquestioning certainty and critical inquiry. It is striking that the collecting body of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, quoting Bahá'u'lláh, construes the problem of faith, again in an ostensible paradox, as fundamentally a question, a "penetrating question" that lies at the "heart" of religion: "Where shalt thou secure the cord of thy faith and fasten the tie of thine obedience?"[98] Ḥuqúqu'lláh takes up property to raise this question, and it demands that in the individual's interaction with its properties, again properties in multiple senses, the individual relentlessly answers the question.

And indeed, Ḥuqúqu'lláh, in its assigning to the individual of this destabilizing philosophical work on property, thrusts the question of faith into all dimensions of the individual's life, at the level of mundane, everyday existence: Do I believe, do I know this to be true, and if I do, does knowledge manifest itself in my actions? Do my actions reflect my faith? Does my non-action reflect my non-faith? This faith, then, is a thinking, active faith, one that demands knowledge and good works. We have circled back to the origins of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the book in which Bahá'u'lláh ordained the law, in which Bahá'u'lláh asserts, in the opening paragraph, the inextricability of these two dimensions of the exercise of his law: acceptance and obedience; recognizing the truth of the law and putting it into effect; theory and practice, we might say.

The personal and social alchemical process of Ḥuqúqu'lláh plays out in time. As the body that collects Ḥuqúqu'lláh has written, "the infinite bounties bestowed" by, among other things, Ḥuqúqu'lláh and the body of laws and ordinances of which it is part, "make possible the attainment of that stage"—that is, "realization of the unity of humankind"—at which "universal peace may be firmly established, the earth become the mirror of the highest paradise, and the Most Great Justice, awaited with hope by all peoples throughout the ages and centuries, become manifest."[99] It is to this grand alchemical process, this level of mutuality and interdependence at the greatest earthly scale, that Ḥuqúqu'lláh is philosophically and clinically tied, ultimately. That is why it seeks to pull the individual up to higher levels of cognition of interdependency: to pave the way to this enrapturing, entrancing, highest paradise. Such is the alchemical process that the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh initiates, one in which

[98] The Universal House of Justice, "To the Bahá'ís of the World, 28 November 2023," Messages of the Universal House of Justice, accessed May 2025, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20231128_001/1#973422615.

[99] The Universal House of Justice, "To the Bahá'ís of Iran, Naw-Rúz 180," Messages of the Universal House of Justice, accessed May 2025, https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20230321_001/1#224957644

intellectual acknowledgment of a higher, stronger entity whose very existence is implied in the weakness that is the human individual, or acknowledgment, in a word, of what is construed as "God," leads to action based on abidance on laws that enables greater access to that entrancing higher world of power. Indeed, in a challenging message to an individual who appears from the context of the reply to have asked about alchemy, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, in fitting paradox, in terms at once abstruse and familiar, at once metaphorical and unequivocal, at once mystical and practical:

> Sulphur is the fire of the love of God, and mercury is the quicksilver of the ocean of the knowledge of God. Combine then these twin noble elements, and harmonize and unite these twin soundest pillars, and so obtain the Noblest Stone—that is, the Jewel of Jewels, the Ruby of the Mine of the Kingdom—so that thou mayest discover the Most Great Elixir and find the Alchemy of Truth, and, casting it upon the copper and iron of men's souls, transmute them into purest gold.
>
> Seekest thou the Mystery of Alchemy? It is this![100]

According to its philosophy, Ḥuqúqu'lláh, we might conclude, constitutes a bounty inasmuch as it initiates this alchemical process, clinically, with the individual and its property, using gold to transmute souls into purest gold. That process then necessarily extends to the family, the economy, and the entirety of humanity. This alchemy, or this inebriation, raises the individual to a place at which the individual can break open the paradoxes of the individual itself as discrete yet interdependent, as material yet spiritual, as constrained yet free. At the individual's multifarious places of suffering, Ḥuqúqu'lláh lifts the individual, at the culmination of the material arc, out of its material self and orients it to the inscrutability of its own existence, demanding that it reckon with its own unknowability at the threshold of the spiritual arc of ascent. For indeed, those paradoxes that lie at the heart of property themselves constitute that ultimate inscrutable entity which Bahá'u'lláh calls God: that being which is all-possessing[101] yet most generous[102]; which is of "supreme singleness"[103] yet whose will and power and "loving providence" pervade all things[104]; which is the restrainer[105] yet which grants true liberty.[106] Bahá'u'lláh writes: "Again He saith: 'And also in your own selves: will ye not, then, behold the signs of God?' And yet again He revealeth: 'And be ye not like those who

[100] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "A Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," Additional Tablets, Extracts and Talks, p. 55.
[101] Bahá'u'lláh writes of people "quaff[ing] the wine of reunion, from the chalice of the beauty of their Lord, the All-Possessing, the Most High." Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 10, no. XIV.
[102] For example, Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 86, no. CXXVIII.
[103] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 16, no. XXII.
[104] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 10, no. XIV; p. 105, no. CLIX.
[105] Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 36, no. LXXIII.
[106] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 105, no. CLIX.

forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their own selves.'"[107] And as Bahá'u'lláh exults in an apostrophe to that greater entity which exists, in inaccessibility, at the apex of ascent and which is therefore confounding but majestic and glorious, and bountiful and graceful:

> Far, far from Thy glory be what mortal man can affirm of Thee, or attribute unto Thee, or the praise with which he can glorify Thee! Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.[108]

[107] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 55, no. XC.
[108] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,* p. 1, no. I.