

# From the Editor's Desk

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If asked which human undertaking is most concerned with the soul, and which with the mind, most people would say that the soul is the province of religion, while the mind is an area of focus for philosophers (and, in the modern age, scientists). The Bahá'í writings disrupt this facile distinction, not only by grounding the ontology of the mind squarely in the spirit, but also by highlighting it as the preeminent feature of the human essence whose gradual perfection is the very purpose of religion:

As for the mind, it is the power of the human spirit. The spirit is as the lamp, and the mind as the light that shines from it. The spirit is as the tree, and the mind as the fruit. The mind is the perfection of the spirit and a necessary attribute thereof, even as the rays of the sun are an essential requirement of the sun itself. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 55:6)

This supreme emblem of God stands first in the order of creation and first in rank, taking precedence over all created things. Witness to it is the Holy Tradition, "Before all else, God created the mind."

From the dawn of creation, it was made to be revealed in the temple of man. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 1).

Given the importance accorded to the concept of mind in the Bahá'í Faith, and the extensive reflection on it in philosophy, this is an area that demands the kind of work that the Guardian calls for in our nascent explorations of Bahá'í scholarship, in which those "who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance . . . correlate [the Faith's] beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world" (21 October 1943 letter to an individual believer, qtd. in *Compilation on Scholarship* no. 13).

In this issue of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, we are pleased to present two articles that approach the question of the nature of mind from different perspectives. In the first, "Mind, 'the Power of the Human Spirit,'" Gerald Filson engages with contemporary philosophy of mind, finding points of resonance with a Bahá'í understanding. Since Descartes, the nature of mind—and specifically whether it is fundamentally distinct from the matter that composes everything else, or somehow derivative of that matter and therefore bound by the same causal deterministic laws—has been a central question for philosophy. Relatively more recently, science has come to be seen as an important contributor to this discourse, with the establishment of neuroscience as a discipline in the twentieth century, and technological

advances in scientists' ability to investigate and measure structures and processes in the brain. Yet there remain properties of the mind—human thought and emotion, and will and purpose, as well as consciousness itself—that can be cogently argued not only to sit beyond the current limits of science's grasp, but to be categorically outside the reach of scientific inquiry. Subjective experience, which Filson argues to be holistically integral to all features and capacities of mind, may represent a *Sadratu 'l-Muntahá*<sup>1</sup> for science. In addition to presenting the philosophical arguments for this position, this article explores a wide range of capacities of the mind, from language to scientific inquiry itself, as well as human pursuits such as art and religion that illuminate particular facets of the mind. It ultimately argues that not only can understanding the mind as an essentially spiritual entity help ground important philosophical positions on the nature of mind, but that it is in the very pursuit of a spiritually-informed, collaborative process of personal and social development that the mind may best achieve its potential as the agent of social progress.

In our second article, “The *Mizán* of Affect in Material versus Metaphysical Models of Human Consciousness,” John Hatcher approaches the topic of mind from an experiential, poetic perspective, in order to consider some of

the practical implications of a model in which the mind, and the self, are essentially spiritual. In particular, he explores implications for the understanding and treatment of the affective conditions that have become commonplace in our society. There are no easy answers for those of us who either live with depression, anxiety, and other affective conditions, or who are trying to learn how to support family or friends who do. We are fortunate to live in a time of ever greater awareness about these conditions and a concomitant reduction in the stigma historically attached to them; a time in which novel treatments and approaches to managing affective disorders are constantly being explored. Hatcher's goal in this paper is not to pronounce on the efficacy of these approaches—a matter for experts in the field to consider—but to provide a broader framework for thinking about the ultimate goals of any treatment in light of our spiritual reality. Rooted in the author's own personal mental health journey, the article is the fruit of hard-won insights into the relationship between mind and brain, external reality and internal emotional state. These insights are cast into the mold of the image of the *Mizán*, a set of balance scales that Hatcher uses to represent the brain. This article provides a beautiful example of the capacity of the Bahá'í writings to illuminate reality, when we cast into their ocean our experiences, of pain, joy, and all the other myriad dimensions of human life, and see how these become transformed in the waves.

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1 “The Tree beyond which there is no passing;” see Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* note 128.

We are also pleased to be publishing reviews of two recent books: *The Life of Laura Barney* by Mona Khademi, reviewed by Jack McLean, and *The World of the Bahá'í Faith*, a volume edited by Robert Stockman. As the number of high-quality Bahá'í publications continues to grow, we invite both authors and potential reviewers to contact us with proposals for future reviews.

This issue features two poems by June Perkins that speak of longing—a capacity of mind that seems to demand description by a language other than that of science, as Filson argues. The cover art by Michèle Jubilee is titled “Grow through What You Go through;” you may want to look back at it, now and then, as you read Hatcher’s reflections on the potential for a spiritual perspective to transform even the direst of experiences.