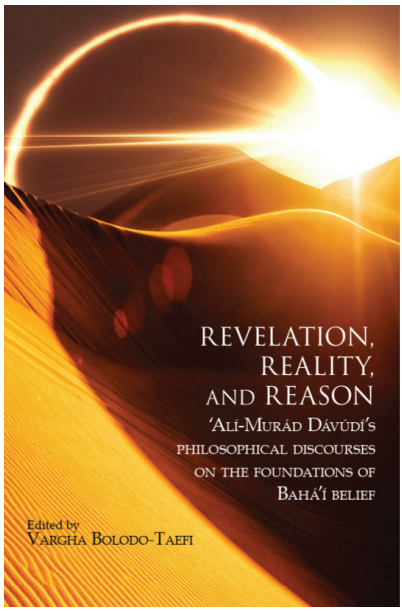

Revelation, Reality, and Reason, 'Alí-Murád Dávúdí's Philosophical Discourses on the Foundations of Bahá'í Belief, edited by Vargha Bolodo-Taefi, Association for Bahá'í Studies, 2025, Ottawa, ON, Canada, XXI+218 pages, including Biography, Biographical Information, Notes and Index.

During the weekly meetings of the National Bahá'í Publications Committee of Iran, Dr. 'Alí-Murád Dávúdí hardly seemed like the serious-faced philosophy professor at the University of Tehran, nor the calm and composed speaker at Bahá'í events. Here, his words no longer carried the complexity of his phenomenology talks on Radio Tehran's weekly program. Tall in stature, and dignified and refined in character, he was certainly eloquent even in casual conversation, but in these meetings he was a joyful companion, full of warmth and emotions. He seemed to have forgotten the burdens and hardships of his daily life, his genial laughter echoing throughout the building.

In those joyous moments, who could have foreseen that, as Secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, he would later journey across the country to support persecuted Bahá'ís, offering them counsel, or weep at the ruins of the House of the Báb, praying that God might accept the destruction of his own home as a ransom? Who could have imagined that he and five other participants in these small gatherings were destined to offer their lives for their Faith?

This humble, cheerful man was a philosopher and a prolific author, not only deeply versed in Bahá'í literature, but also one of the few Eastern Bahá'í scholars whose intellectual contributions extended far beyond defending or propagating the Bahá'í Faith. He enriched Iran's academic scholarship, following in the footsteps of distinguished Bahá'í scholars such as Adíb'u'l-'Ulamá, the director of Iran's first university, Dár al-Funún, appointed as a Hand of the Cause of God by Bahá'u'lláh; Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, who taught at Al-Aẓhar, the most prestigious university in the Islamic world; and Dr. Muhammad Báqir Houshiar, the author of the first Bahá'í-inspired book on a modern educational theory, *The Principles of Education*.

Dr. Dávúdí's contributions to Iranian intellectual life are particularly significant in the field of philosophy.

His original books, talks, and essays on philosophical subjects were published in Iran, as were his translations of Western philosophical texts. His extensive writings and lectures on subjects of particular importance to the Bahá'í community are of enduring value. Yet, while Dr. Vahid Ra'fatí has compiled five volumes of Dávúdí's lectures and essays in Persian on topics related to the teaching of the Bahá'í Faith, very few articles by Dr. Dávúdí have been translated into English.

We are thus fortunate to have in hand *Revelation, Reality, and Reason*, offering English-speaking readers the opportunity to become acquainted with this brilliant mind, and to benefit from his profound insights. The book compiles fifteen of his talks and essays, skillfully translated from Persian by Azita Vahdat Mottahedeh, Vargha Bolodo-Taefi, Elham Afnan, and Nima Rafiei. The volume is edited by Vargha Bolodo-Taefi, a scholar 'whose prior work translating Dr. Dávúdí has been featured in this journal.[1]

Dr. Dávúdí's contributions to Iranian academic scholarship are thoughtfully presented in the Introduction by Vargha Bolodo-Taefi and Bahá'í scholar Omid Ghamemahgami. This section offers a biographical overview of Dávúdí's life leading up to his tragic execution by the Iranian Government. It explores his impact on Iranian intellectual and academic development, the books he authored and translated on Western classical and modern philosophy, his service to the Iranian Bahá'í community, and his enduring influence on Bahá'í scholarship in Persian.

In his talks and essays, Dr. Dávúdí frequently addressed certain misconceptions about the Bahá'í Faith current in Iran and other Islamic countries. Chapters 1, 3, and 7 of the book primarily respond to questions and objections raised by critics of the Faith—questions such as why Bahá'u'lláh claimed divinity while Muḥammad declared himself merely a servant and messenger of God, accusations that the Bahá'í movement is not a religion but a political system, or claims that Baha'is do not believe in God or Islam. It is quite possible that, in the future, followers of other religions in the West may raise similar objections. Familiarity with these questions and the skillful way in which Dr. Dávúdí addressed them may prove to be invaluable for defending the Bahá'í Faith against misinformed critiques.

Each chapter of this book provides a wealth of insight for the reader, who stands to benefit from studying Dr. Dávúdí's novel approach to the question of the existence of God (Chapter 2); his insights into core spiritual concepts such as the Holy Spirit (Chapter 4), prayer and meditation (Chapter 5), and life in the next world (Chapter 6); his explanation of the oneness of religion (Chapter 8); his profound discussion of the interrelationship between unity and diversity (Chapter 9); and

1 Vargha Bolodo-Taefi, trans. "A Discourse on Bahá'í Theology: A Treatise by Dr. 'Alí-Murád Dávúdí on God and Revelation," *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2020.

an in-depth exploration of prevalent conceptions of liberty and the Bahá'í perspective (Chapters 11, 12, 13). The subjects explored shed light on concepts found in The Book of Certitude, *Some Answered Questions*, The Seven Valleys, and other mystical and philosophical Bahá'í literature.

The chapters are wide-ranging without ever losing focus, as Dr. Dávúdí connects disparate concepts and draws on multiple traditions of thought in ways that are sure to increase the reader's understanding. A brief outline of Chapter 10, "Countering the Forces in Our Environment," can illustrate this point. It begins with the historical use of the term "environment" by Western philosophers, its application in sociology, and its use in modern science, which has led to flawed conclusions—such as the idea that human beings, like animals, are mere products of their environment, lacking the power to free themselves from nature's dominion. Dr. Dávúdí highlights the negative consequences of theories such as determinism and relativism, and how political movements have exploited these theories to justify their goals and behaviors. "It seems destined that science, like everything else, should become the plaything of politics… politics has made a plaything of everything—art, morals, science, philosophy, and religion" (164). He refers to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertion that, in addition to heredity and environment, there is another factor that influences human beings—their innate character, which is specifically human, and explores the consequences for the human being's relationship to nature. Having begun with philosophical and scientific theories, Dr. Dávúdí concludes with suggestions for action, noting that just as Christianity's spiritual forces once transformed Roman civilization, Bahá'ís must now strive to change the environment shaping humanity as a whole.

At the end of each chapter, the translators and editor provide useful notes and sources of the many quotations Dr. Dávúdí draws on in his reasoning. The book concludes with biographical information and a helpful subject index.

Revelation, Reality, and Reason is an invaluable resource for those seeking a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í Faith's central spiritual and social principles. It inspires profound reflection and meditation, exemplifying how the Bahá'í teachings can coherently and productively be put in dialogue with philosophy and the sciences. Spiritual principles—such as life after death, justice, peace, obedience to the laws of God, and prayer—are often presumed to be merely religious tenets, accepted without reflection on their meanings and implications. As a result, these beliefs are vulnerable to being weakened or shaken by the pervasive forces of materialism, liberalism, consumerism, and relativism, or by the criticisms of opponents. Dr. Dávúdí's method of presenting spiritual principles, as evinced in this book, is grounded in scientific and rational approaches, helping readers gain a clear understanding of them. Moreover, it enables readers to analyze and reflect scientifically and

methodically on spiritual beliefs not directly addressed in the book.

In spite of the erudition of its author, this book is inviting: while exemplifying the depth and rationality that Bahá'í studies should embody, it remains accessible and engaging. Dr. Dávúdí has conveyed complex philosophical ideas in lucid, conversational language—a testament to his intellectual clarity. The book presents a treasure trove of reflections by a philosopher who spoke and wrote with a conviction born of deep, lived committed to the principles he espoused. Like Socrates, he expressed his thoughts with clarity and fearless resolve, and ultimately offered his life for his beliefs.