

The Inner Beauty of Human Being



Let's Center Ourselves with a One Minute Music Meditation

- Music composed by William Grant Still (the most popular American symphonic composer from 1930 – 1950)
- “Summerland” – he referred to it as “a portrait of the promised beauty in the afterlife”
- Singapore Wind Symphony:

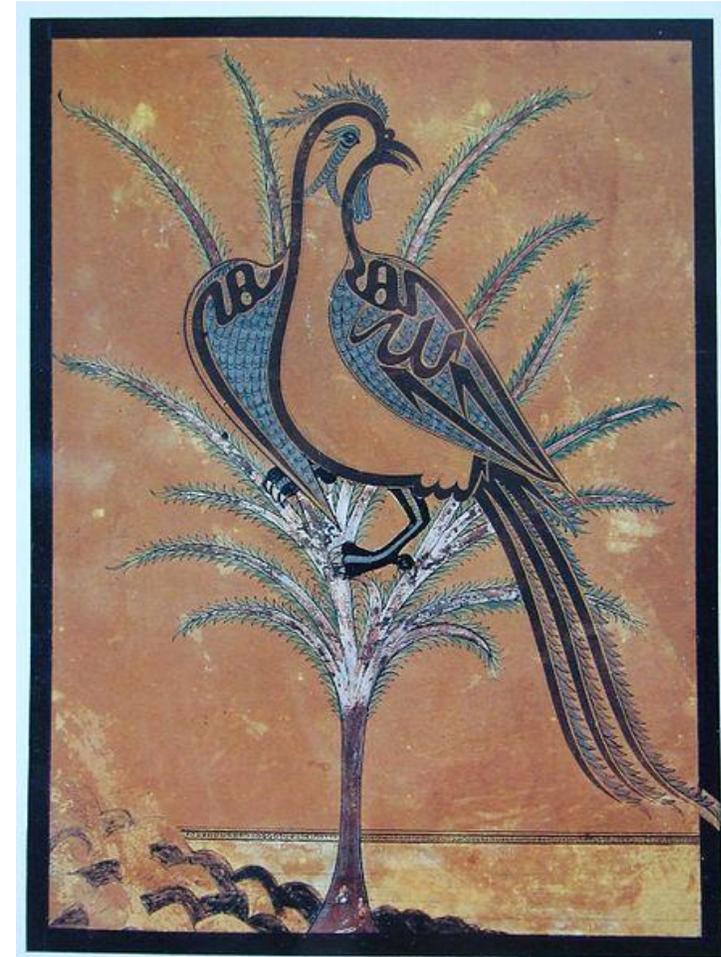
[\(35\) Summerland - William Grant Still - YouTube](#)



God is the Most Beautiful Being

Thus the most beautiful being in this world is the Universal Manifestation of God:

- The Blessed Beauty
- The Ancient Beauty
- The Glorious Beauty
- The Most Great Beauty



By Mishkin Qalam

From the Hebrew Pentateuch (Old Testament)

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” (Gen. 1:26--7)



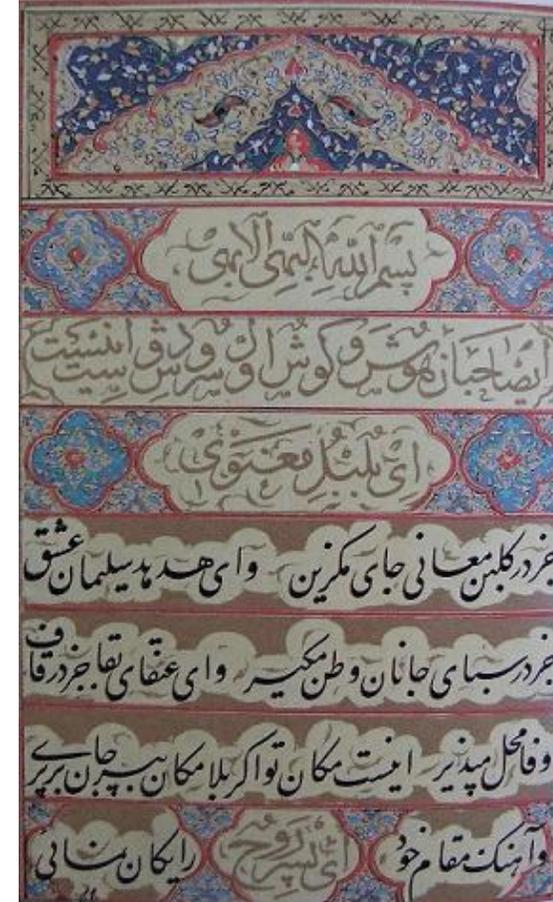
עמוד מחלק החסר של כתב ארץ־ישראל (בראשית כו, לו – לו, צולס במאה ה־19 והובא בראש ספרו של ויליאם ווקס

Genesis – the Aleppo Codex

The Blessed Beauty

“Veiled in My immemorial being
and in the ancient eternity of My
essence, I knew My love for thee;
therefore I created thee, have
engraved on thee Mine image and
revealed to thee My beauty”

(Bahá'u'lláh,
Hidden Words Arabic 3).



From the Beloved Master



Bahiyih Khanum – The Greatest Holy Leaf

- “...in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them.” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections 79--80).

However, it is not possible for humans to be in God's likeness nor image...

- “God in His Essence and in His own Self hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable . . . He, moreover, hath **never had**, nor hath He, any peer or **likeness** (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle* 118).
- Thou hast, verily, been at all times, and wilt everlastingly continue to remain, immensely exalted beyond and **above all comparison and likeness**, above all imagination of parity or resemblance (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers* 297).
- Cause us, then, to . . . acknowledge Thee as One Who is exalted above every comparison and is **holy beyond all likeness**, and will lift up our voices amongst Thy servants and cry aloud that He is the one God, the Incomparable, the Ever-Abiding, the Most Powerful, the All-Glorious, the All-Wise (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers* 38).



Possible Solution to “created in image” but God can have no likeness

- Humans are created in the Image of the Manifestation of God



The Lote Tree beyond which there is no passing

Let's be cautious...

Bahá'u'lláh observes that “the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel” (*Gleanings* 158–59).

- With this cautionary observation in mind, we will proceed with care, realizing that any effort we make to discuss the reality of the human soul will necessarily be inadequate and incomplete.

The Soul is “Simple” – No Elements, No parts

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Paris Talks*

“Scientific philosophy has demonstrated that a simple element ('simple' meaning 'not composed') is indestructible, eternal. The soul, not being a composition of elements, is, in character, as a simple element, and therefore cannot cease to exist. The soul, being of that one indivisible substance, can suffer neither disintegration nor destruction, therefore there is no reason for its coming to an end.”

(p. 91)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*

“Therefore, it is evident that life is the expression of composition, and mortality, or death, is equivalent to decomposition. As the spirit of man is not composed of material elements, it is not subject to decomposition and, therefore, has no death. It is self-evident that the human spirit is simple, single and not composed in order that it may come to immortality.”

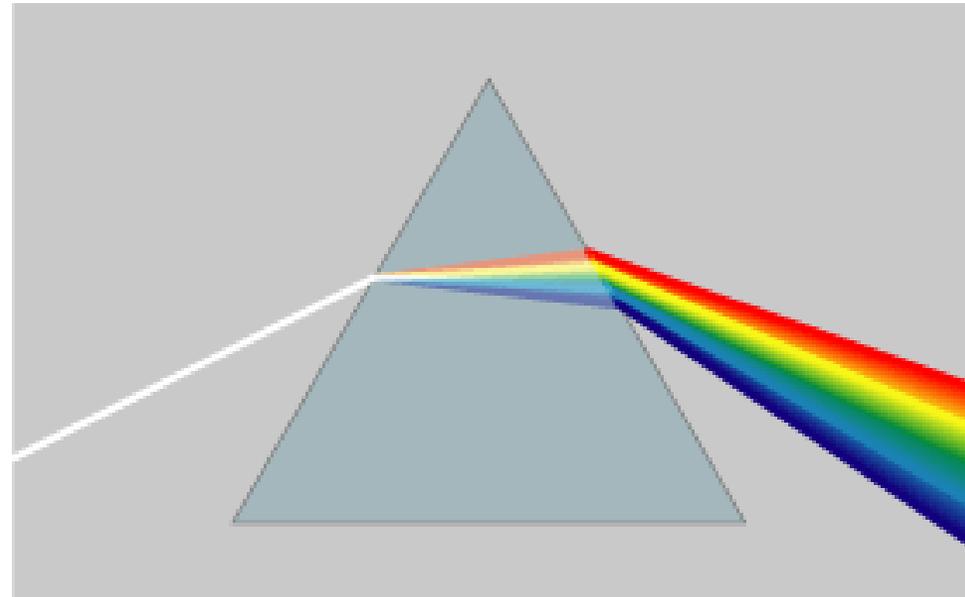
(p. 306)

Despite the **Soul** being **Simple** and **Uncomposed**...

Bahá'u'lláh:

“Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, **He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self.**” (*Gleanings*, p. 65)

Is the mirror the simple, uncomposed soul? Are the attributes of the Manifestation of God reflected in this mirror?



The Attributes of God (of the Manifestation) are Beautiful

- These attributes of the Manifestation of God, that are reflected in the human mirror, may be called the **human virtues**. In the field of psychology they are often called **character strengths** and are considered to be **moral beauty**.

WISDOM

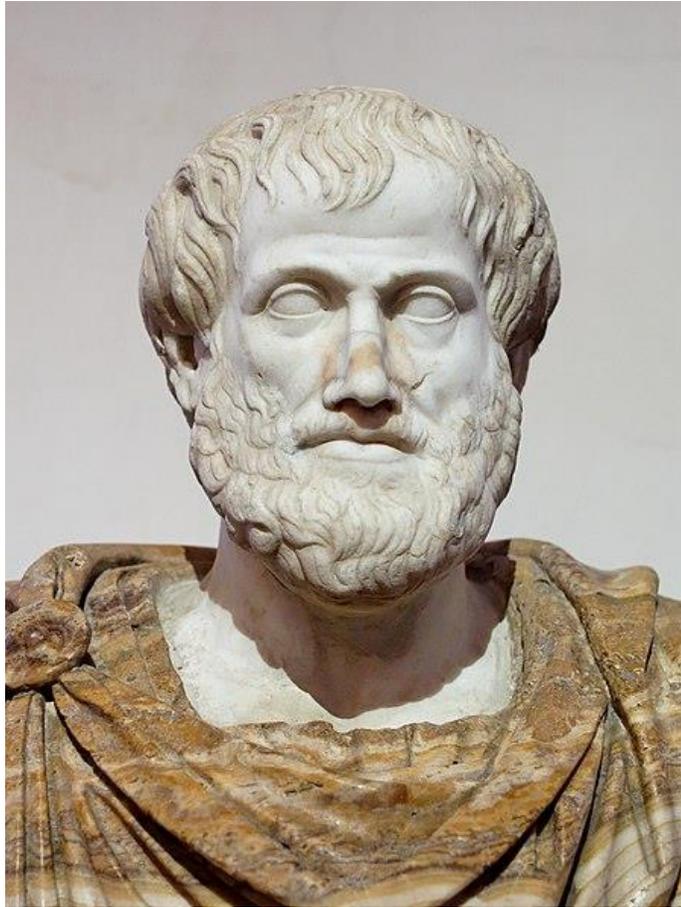
LOVE

JUSTICE

GENEROSITY

COURAGE

Aristotle: The Goal of all Virtues is to Create Beauty



- Aristotle (Sachs, 2002) considered beauty as an ultimate virtue, the virtue to which all other virtues aim; that is, the purpose (*telos*; *their end*) of the virtues, such as courage and justice, is beauty.

The Swans of Bodensee (1998)

For students and teachers of the Bahá'í Landegg Academy

In aura of snow-white beauty they glide
together, unruffled, on the lake.

They look ahead
wreathed in smiles.

They keep silence, and in their silence,
they say a thousand and one words.

What do they say?
Love and Beauty.

Whence do they come?
From the meadows of love.

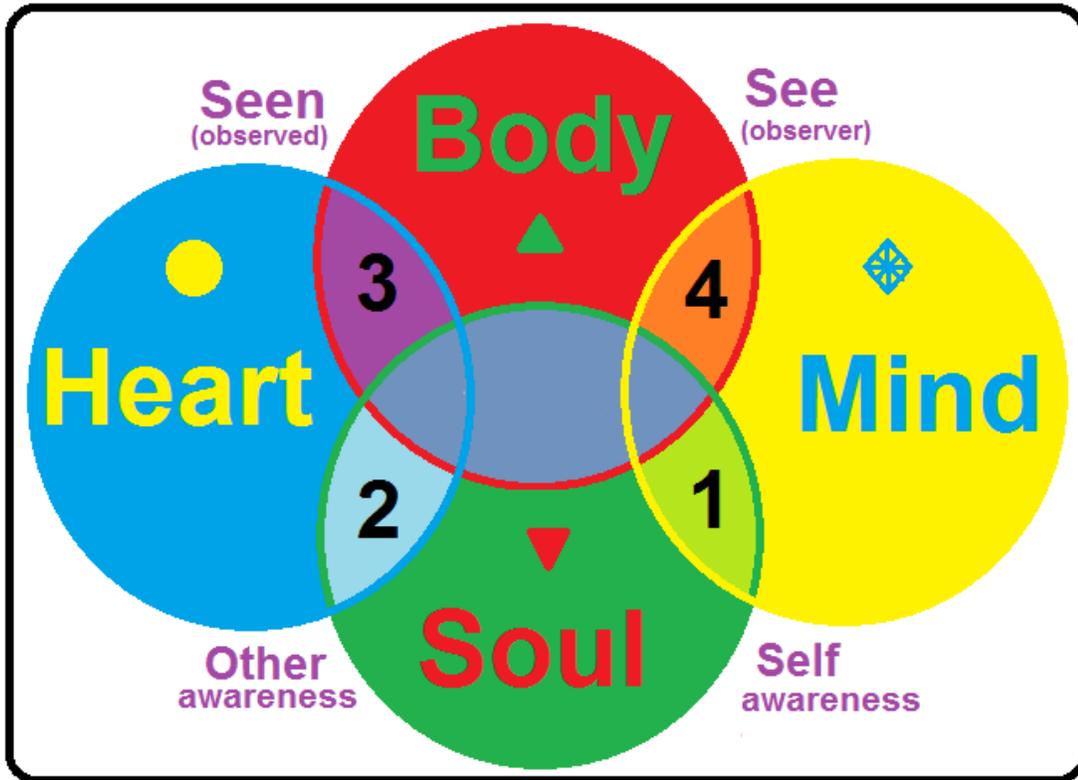
Where is their home?
In a nest of rapture.

Where are they going?
In search of lovers
of the Blessed Beauty.

Beautiful Poem Interlude: Julio Savi



Soul and Body interact through the Mind

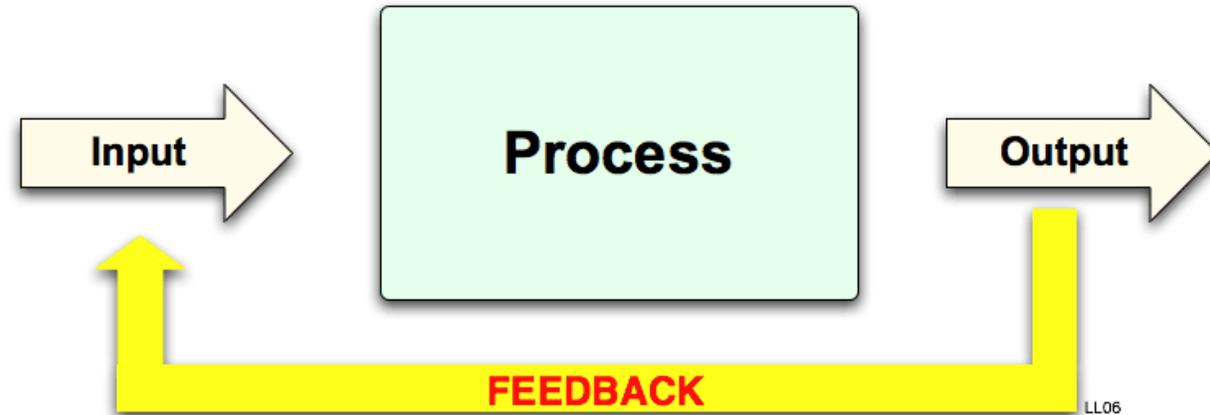


- A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: “we have three aspects of our humanness, so to speak, a body, a mind and an immortal identity—soul or spirit. We believe the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and the two interact on each other.”

(Messages to the Antipodes 241)

God > Manifestation > Soul > Brain/Body

Thus it may be that the attributes and virtues of God emanate from God to the mirror of the human soul and are then reflected from the soul to the brain via the mind; and from brain to behavior. And then there may be a feedback loop from behavior to brain to mind to soul. (“We believe the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and **the two interact on each other.**”)



YOUR BRAIN ON GRATITUDE

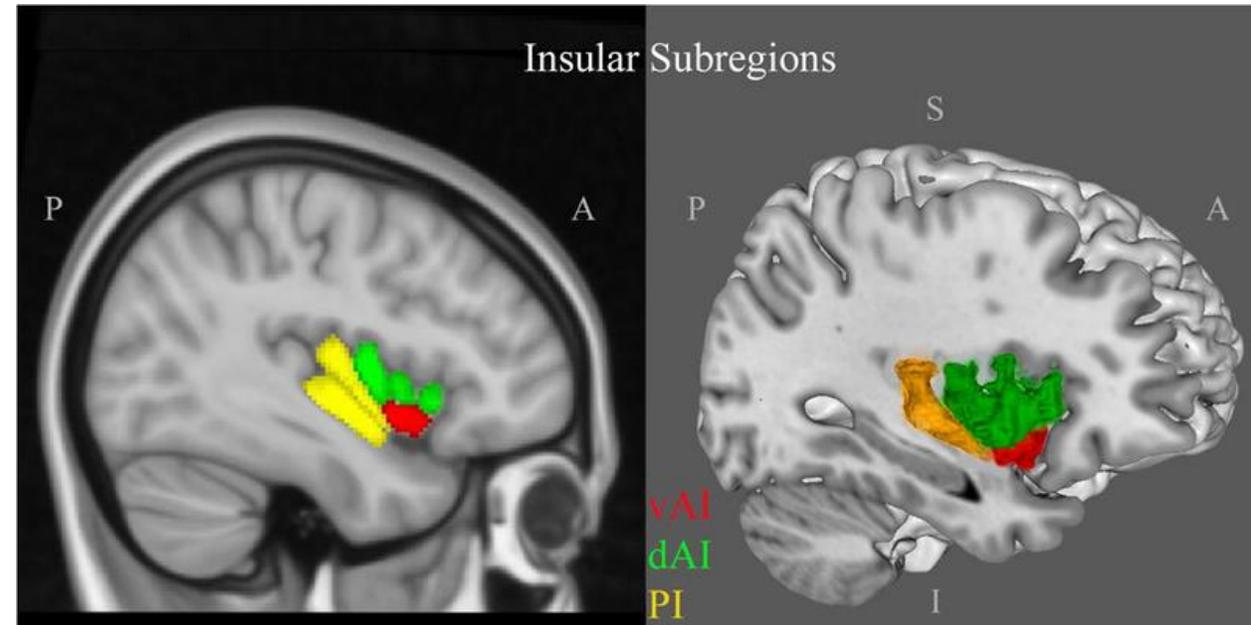


Zahn, R., J. Moll, M. Paiva, G. Garrido, F. Kreuger, E. D. Huey, and J. Grafman. "The Neural Basis of Human Social Values: Evidence from Functional MRI." *Cerebral Cortex*, vol. 19, 2009, 276–83.

Zahn et al. used fMRI to examine the neural correlates of gratitude. They determined that the neural firing pattern associated with the virtue of gratitude involved the coactivation of three areas of the brain: the superior anterior temporal lobe, the mesolimbic region, and the basal forebrain.

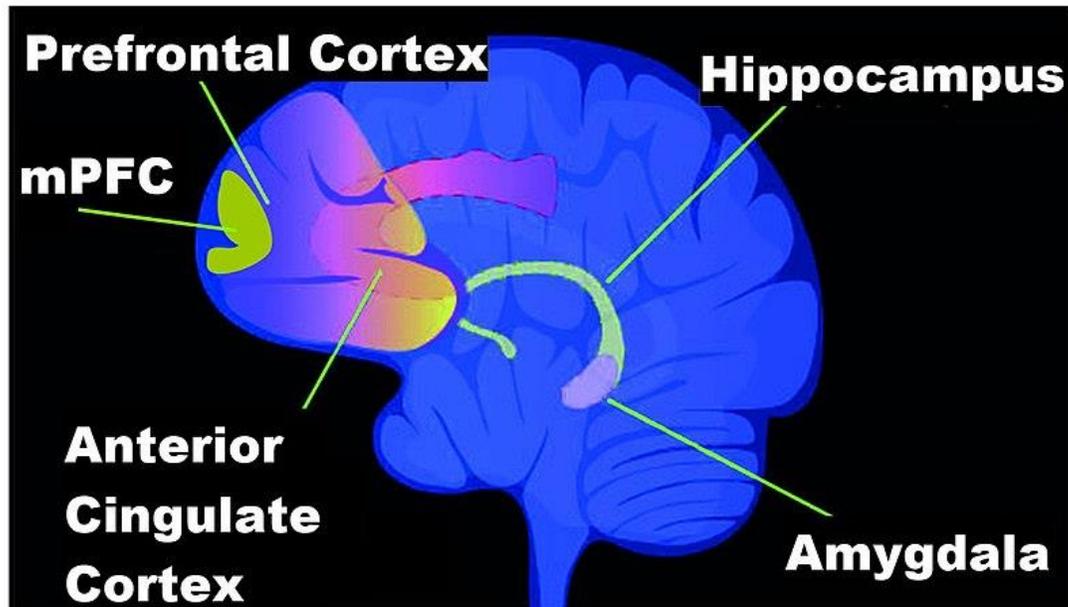
YOUR BRAIN ON COMPASSION

- Using fMRI, Mary Helen Immodino-Yang et al., investigated the neural firing patterns associated with compassion for those suffering psychosocial or physical pain, and with admiration of virtue. They reported compassion as firing in the **posteromedial cortices** which are involved in self related/consciousness processes (p. 8021). They also found that the **anterior insula** showed a distinct pattern of firing shared by both admiration of virtue and compassion for psychosocial suffering.



Immodino-Yang, Mary Helen, Andrea McColl, Hanna Damasio, and Antonio Damasio. "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, vol. 106, 2009, pp. 8021–26.

YOUR BRAIN ON FAIRNESS/JUSTICE

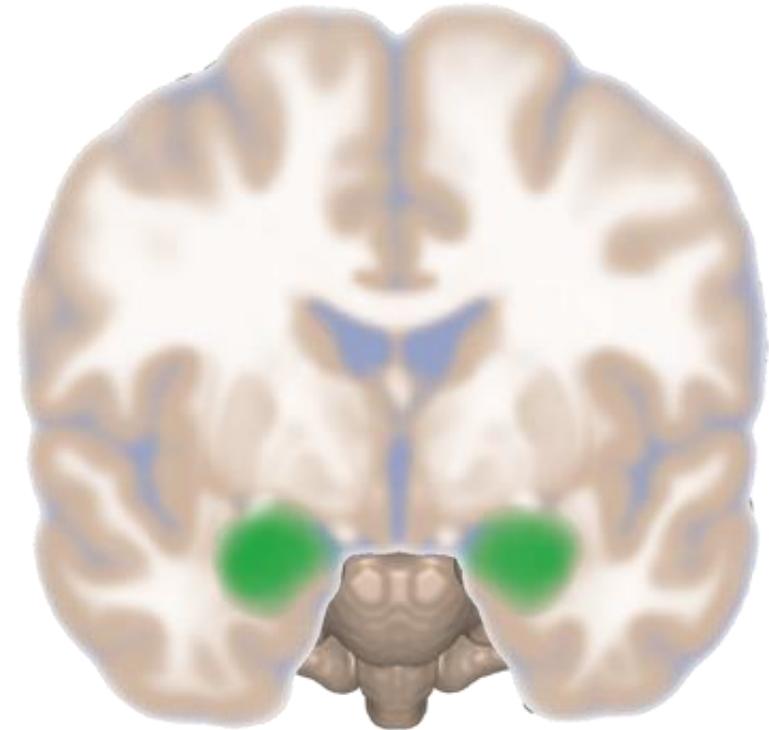


Moll et al., using fMRI to explore the “human natural sense of fairness,” determined that a particular pattern of neural firing “in the orbital and medial sectors of the **prefrontal cortex** and the superior temporal sulcus region, which are critical regions for social behavior and perception, play a central role in moral appraisals” related to fairness (p. 2730).

Moll, Jorge, Ricardo de Oliveira-Souza, Paul J. Eslinger, Ivanei E. Bramati, Janaína M. Miranda, Pedro Angelo Andreiuolo, and Luiz Pessoa. “The Neural Correlates of Moral Sensitivity: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Investigation of Basic and Moral Emotions.” *The Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 22, 2002, 2730–36.

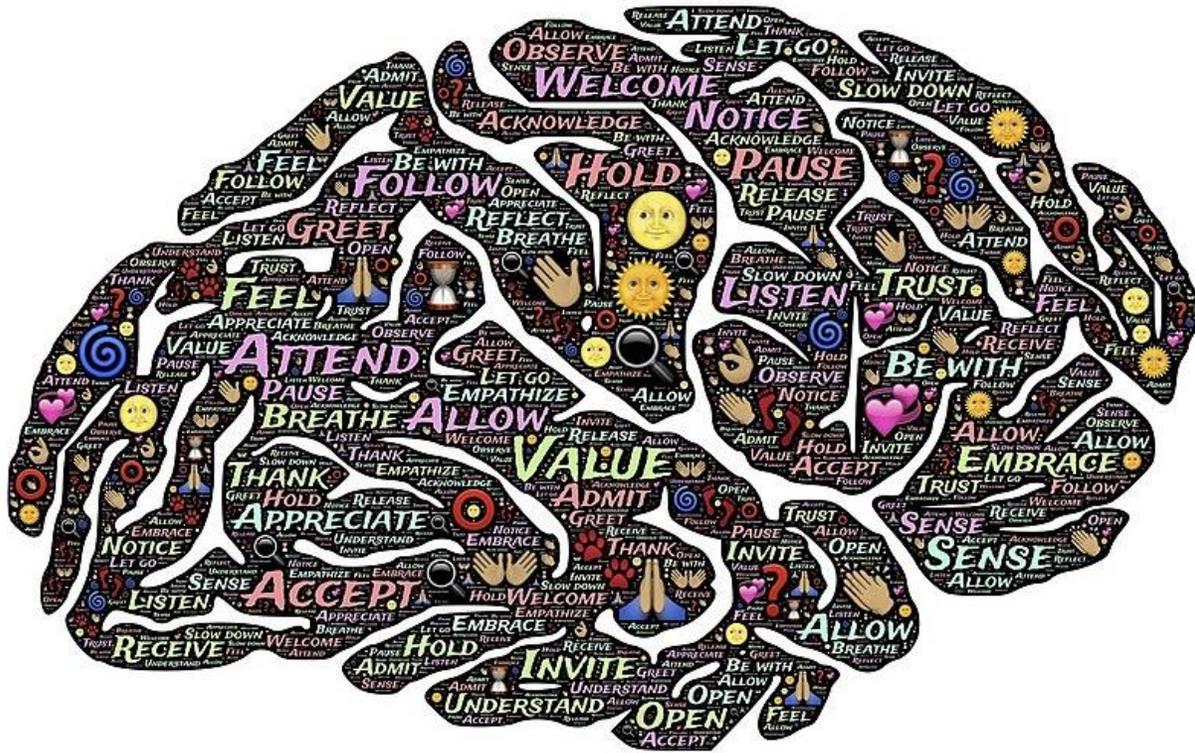
YOUR BRAIN ON TRUSTWORTHINESS

- Giulia Mattavelli and her colleagues used fMRI to investigate neural responses to trustworthiness in the **amygdala** and face-selective regions in the **occipital and temporal lobes** (p. 2205). Their results indicated that the brain has a specific pattern of firing when determining someone's trustworthiness.



Mattavelli, G., T. J. Andrews, A. U. Asghar, J. R. Towler, and A. W. Young. "Response of Face-Selective Brain Regions to Trustworthiness and Gender of Faces." *Neuropsychologia*, vol. 50, 2012, pp. 2205–11.

Brain Patterns of Virtues



Obviously, brain science is in its infancy. However, the above slides give us a taste of how various virtues may appear when dancing with your brain's neurons.

Perhaps those neural correlates are a sign of communication from the mirror of the soul, through the mind, and into the body...

The **Love** Connection

Many philosophers, including Socrates and Plato, have stated that the object of all love is beauty. That is, when we love, it is beauty that we love. And when we love virtue, it is “moral beauty” that we love.

Empirical research findings support the love X beauty connection



The Death of Socrates - by Jacques Louis David

A Beautiful Prayer

- “O God! If I worship Thee in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, **withhold not Thine Everlasting Beauty** (p. 115)!”
- Rabiah quoted in Nicholson, R. A. (1963). *The mystics of Islam*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.



Rabi'a al Basri, Sufi Saint, 714 – 801 CE

Coda

- If you would like to explore your moral beauty, take the VIA test. It has high reliability and validity.
- It is free to take (but they will try to sell you analyses of it).
- There is also a 8-17 child/youth version.
- We post our family's results in the kitchen...
- Simply google "VIA test" and it will be the first hit; if not it's the one from the VIA Institute on Character
- They recommend that you only focus on your top strengths, in particular the top 5, called your "signature strengths"

Bonus Slide: Beautiful Soul – Beautiful Music

'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*

"...The art of music is divine and effective. It is the food of the soul and spirit. Through the power of music the spirit of man is uplifted. It has wonderful sway and effect in the hearts of children, for their hearts are pure and melodies have great influence on them. The latent talents with which the hearts of these children are endowed will find expression through the medium of music. Therefore, you must exert yourselves to make them proficient; teach them to sing with excellence and effect. It is incumbent upon each child to know something of music, for without knowledge of this art, the melodies of instrument and voice cannot be rightly enjoyed. Likewise it is necessary that the schools teach it in order that the souls and hearts of the pupils may become vivified and exhilarated and their lives be brightened with enjoyment." (p.52)

- Agrawal, T., Rottman, J., & Schachner, A. (2022). How musicality changes moral consideration: People judge musical entities as more wrong to harm. *Psychology of Music*.
- <https://doi.org/10.1177/03057356221096507>
- Highlights of the literature review on the next slide:

Agrawal, T., Rottman, J., & Schachner, A. (2022) continued...

- “...music can promote prosocial behavior” (p. 1)
- “Engaging in musical activities makes people feel more connected, more helpful, and **less prejudiced**” (p. 1)
- “These positive effects of music on social behavior appear across ages..., across diverse populations..., and across a variety of musical activities...” (p. 2)
- “Shared musical experiences promote coordination and synchrony...”
- “...musical engagement **enhances empathy** in musicians, dancers, and listeners..., and that musicality is a **character-building virtue**...” (p. 2)

Bibliography

- Diessner, R. (2019). *Understanding the beauty appreciation trait: Empirical research on seeking beauty in all things*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Diessner, R. (2007). *Psyche and eros. Bahá'í studies in a spiritual psychology*. George Ronald Publishers.
- Diessner, R. (2016). The beauty of the human psyche: The patterns of the virtues. *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 26, 75-93.
[http://dx.doi.org/10.31581/JBS-26.4.7\(2016\)](http://dx.doi.org/10.31581/JBS-26.4.7(2016))