

Further Explorations in Bahá'í Ontology

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Introduction

In this paper we shall continue the survey of Bahá'í ontology begun in “Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance.”* The subjects to be covered in this paper are becoming and change; substance, soul, self and identity; the nature of being and nothingness; social ontology and dialectic; and the order of knowledge and the order of being. Though some of these topics have been touched on in the “Initial Reconnaissance”, we shall subject them to deeper analysis in order to draw out their more subtle aspects.

Ontology is the study of being and what it means to say that something ‘is’ or ‘exists’. As a branch of metaphysics¹, the study of the most general principles of reality, ontology specifically concerns itself with the most fundamental questions about the nature of existence and existing things. It focuses on such issues as “why is there anything at all rather than nothing?”²; what is ‘being’?; how are ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ related? and the relationship between ‘being’ and ‘nothingness’.

The main value of studying Bahá'í ontology lies in the fact that an ontology operates like a constitution: it is the philosophical frame of reference or context within which various ideas take on meaning. Any exposition of the Writings or any Bahá'í-based philosophizing must be in harmony with this ontological ‘constitution’, or at least, be neutral and not offend against its general principles. Thus, like any other constitution, a Bahá'í ontology provides a particular philosophical identity that distinguishes the Writings from other sacred books or the foundational books of various philosophies and ideologies. Knowing this identity lays the foundations for detailed and in-depth dialogue with religious and secular belief systems from around the world.

One of the tasks of this paper is to show how the ontology embedded in the Writings charts a unique course between various contending philosophical schools.

* “Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance,” in *Lights of 'Irfán Book Six*, 2005.

The Ubiquity of Change

The first topic we shall examine is the issue of change. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

*Divine and all encompassing Wisdom hath ordained that motion be an inseparable concomitant of existence, whether inherently or accidentally, spiritually or materially.*³

It should be noted that “motion” in this statement refers not only to a change in space but also to a change in time, in condition, in relationship, in appearance, constitution or structure, intensity, color, size shape – indeed, any kind of attributional or essential difference between two moments in the existence of an entity. It is important to note that change does not just refer to the material but to the spiritual as well. Even our souls are subject to change, as evident in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that the soul is “*in motion and ever active,*” (TAF) something also apparent in the soul's continued evolution after death. As well, the doctrine of progressive revelation points to the fact that change is part of our collective spiritual existence. The foregoing quote also demonstrate that change is part of things either “*inherently or accidentally.*” (TAF) Change that belongs to something “inherently” belongs to the essence of something, is necessary part or aspect of its natural constitution in being the kind of thing it is. Change is, in that sense ‘internal’ to the thing. Such change is, in the immediate sense, self-caused, though ultimately, of course, all motion must be traced back to God.

Change and Unchangeable Essences

It might be objected that the concept of inherent change contradicts 'Abdul-Bahá's statement that “*It has been proved by exact science that the essence of things does not change.*” (SAQ 100) However, careful reflection shows that no such contradiction exists. If change is inherent in all created things, then it is an aspect of the essence of an entity – and nothing can, therefore, negate the fact of that change. The entity must change; it cannot not-change because it requires change to be itself. This constant change is ineradicably part of its essence. Any living creature is an example of this constancy through change as it moves from birth through growth to maturity to decline and death. The moment it ceases changing, it is no longer what it once was, a living being.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also says the change can be “accidental.” In philosophy, this term is used to indicate that something is not *necessarily* related to the essence of an entity. For example, having

pages is an inherent, essential attribute of a book, but the color of the pages is accidental — they need not necessarily be white. However, it is necessary for the pages to be *some* color. Thus, the necessity of having some color is essential, but the fact of being some particular color is accidental. Accidental features and changes are like the colors of the pages of a book — it is always possible for an alternative color to be chosen and they do not change one kind of thing into another kind of thing. A book with white pages is still a book, even if we change the color of its pages.

For a change to be accidental means that the change is not self-caused (in the immediate sense), but is externally caused by something else. The particular change is not necessary but the fact of some kind of change is, indeed, necessary since everything is in inter-action with its environment. Such change does not constitute the nature of the being as it is-in-itself, but does constitute its nature as it is-with-others, which is to say, how it interacts with others. These inter-actions constitute an entity’s ‘persona’, which is relative insofar as it may vary from one kind of inter-action to another.

Being-with-Others

The development of a ‘persona’ or thing as it with-others is inevitable because nothing in existence can escape the influence of others.

For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. It is confirmed through evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association. (SAQ 178-9)

It is important to note in this passage that the “*help, assistance and interaction*” (SAQ 178-9) refer to the “*properties of things*”, (SAQ 178-9) to their attributes and not their essences. These interactions influence the growth and development of the thing as it is with-others but they cannot change the essence, which is to say, they cannot change one kind of thing into another, though, of course, outward form may be changed as in the case of frogs or butterflies. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us, “*It has been proved by exact science that the essence of things does not change.*” (SAQ 100) From this it follows that the constant interaction among things does not alter the essence, or thing as it is in-itself even though such interaction is required for things to exist. Only their mode of being

with-others changes. The teaching that the human soul is immune to changes caused by illness or disability:

[T]he human spirit is in one condition. It neither becomes ill from the diseases of the body nor cured by its health; it does not become sick, nor weak, nor miserable, nor poor, nor light, nor small – that is to say, it will not be injured because of the infirmities of the body... (SAQ 229)

In other words, it is the body as it is with-others that shows the attributes of illness not the soul as it is in-itself. We may call this inviolability the principle of the integrity of essences – a principle to which there is only one exception, viz. the power of God or the Manifestation. On this score, the Writings say, for example, “*See how powerful is the influence exerted by the Day-Star of the world upon the inner essence of all created things!*” (SWAB 112) We also read how “*the power of the divine make[s] itself effective and the breath of the Holy Spirit penetrate[s] the essence of things.*” (PUP 110) Finally, Bahá'u'lláh says, that “*When He contemplates, however, the bright effulgences He hath been empowered to manifest, lo, that self is transfigured before Him into a sovereign Potency permeating the essence of all things visible and invisible.*” (GWB 102, emphasis added) Only the Divine can access the essence of things.

The Thing-As-It-Is-In-Itself

What this means, of course, is that the Writings implicitly recognise the distinction between a thing-as-it-is in itself and a thing-as-it-is with others, between a thing and its inter-actions. The importance of this distinction is easy to miss at first glance but we soon get a sharp awakening we recall that some philosophies deny the very existence of individuals-as-they-are in themselves and maintain that the individuals are entirely and essentially constituted by nothing but their relationships to the rest of the world. Individual things and humans are simply the nexus of their economic, social or political relationships, which is to say, are nothing in themselves⁴ Such philosophies have a deep ontological bias against individuality – a bias that can have profound, usually negative, social effects when transferred into practical application as we have seen in the various forms of 20th Century totalitarianism. The Bahá'í Writings on the other hand, have an ontological bias in favour of the independence and integrity of the individual essence which is not only a real thing in its own right, but is also safe-guarded against external action from anyone but God or the Manifestation.

A Middle Path Between Substantialism and Nonsubstantialism

At this point, it becomes evident that the Bahá'í Writings promulgate a view of essence — and, by extension, the human self — that falls between or steers a middle path between substantialist and non-substantialist views. According to substantialism, things, or entitative beings are the primary or fundamentally real things, and that they are autonomous and exist before processes. Processes and relationships occur between these real beings and that these ontologically separate, autonomous entities are the source or origin or ground of all mental or material phenomena. Non-substantialism, which is most famously represented by Buddhist philosophy, denies these claims.⁵ Buddhist philosophy denies the entitative nature of the “identity or individuality of the self is seen as a dynamic karmic continuity rather than as an essential ontological substantiality — as an ongoing *process* rather than an underlying *thing*.”⁶ According to this view, we must overcome the illusion of permanent entities to which we can become attached; there is only a series of ‘now’s’ or moments.⁷ Applied to humans, this becomes the teaching of “anatta” or no-self. Supporting these ideas is the doctrine of dependent origination or dependent arising according to which all things are interrelated and interdependent, which is to say, all things

exist in relation to each other; all things exist dependent on determinants; all things have no enduring existence, not even for a moment; all things have no intrinsic entity; all things are without First Cause, or Genesis.⁸

Reflection on this passage calls to mind ‘Abdul-Bahá’s assertion that

all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. (SAQ 178-9)

This passage asserts that “*all beings*” (SAQ 178-9) depend immediately on their interactions for their “*existence, development and growth,*” (SAQ 178-9) all beings are “interrelated and interdependent”⁹ — which is in agreement with Buddhist philosophy. However, Buddhist philosophy also claims that that things have “no enduring existence,”¹⁰ an idea that bears obvious similarities to Bahá'u'lláh's statement that the world of creation is “*being renewed and regenerated at all times.*” (TB 141) If things are being continuously “renewed and regenerated,” it follows that they have “no enduring existence” *in their old forms*, which is to say that their existence is “momentary,”¹¹ and that what we call ‘identity’ is the linking of these moments “not only in serial order [and] each

condition contiguous to the next, but each condition [] involved with the immediate past and present in a mutually penetrative sense.”¹² Close analysis reveals that Bahá'u'lláh's statement says much the same thing, albeit in a very concise manner. When things are “renewed”, *the old is reconstituted in a new form*, which means there is continuity not just in serial order but in condition, as the old is carried forward into or penetrates the new. In other words, entities – including the self – are “karmic,” they inherit from previous conditions and thereby ensure some form of continuity. This continuity or “continuum”¹³ among the members of a series of momentary ‘nows’ becomes the basis for the concept of a stable identity and is, according to Buddhism, falsely reified into a substantial entity or ‘self’. As the foregoing discussion shows, both the Bahá'í Writings and Buddhist philosophy view all ‘entities’ including the self as dynamic, as processes rather than as entities in the substantive sense. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*nothing which exists remains in a state of repose.*” (BWF 330)

Two Interpretations of the Continuum

Already at this point we can discern two possible interpretations of the continuity or continuum in a series of momentary ‘nows’, in what is being “*renewed and regenerated at all times.*” (TB 141) We may, like Buddhist philosophy, emphasise the ‘nows’, the moments, and conclude that “all things have no intrinsic entity”¹⁴ since “all things have no enduring existence even for a moment.”¹⁵ On the other hand, we may choose to emphasise the continuity and the continuum, and conclude that something real does endure after all, a process connected by “karmic inheritance”¹⁶ from one moment to the next. While no single entity or moment endures, the karmically connected process does continue and when we refer to an entity or a self, we are really referring to this on-going process or pattern exemplified by the process. It is the contention of this paper that the ontology embedded in the Bahá'í Writings suggest this latter view which is not fully substantialist because it does not admit changeless particular things in creation, and which is not fully non-substantialist because it allows that there are enduring, i.e. continuing patterned processes. The continuity or repetition in each process functions like a traditional substance insofar as each process possesses particularising attributes. The continuum may be compared to a fractal in which self-similarity persists through seemingly infinite change.

Resolving an Apparent Contradiction

At this point a crucial question arises: what about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s claim that “*It has been proved by exact science that the essence of*

things does not change? (SAQ 100) Does this not contradict his own claim that “*nothing which exists remains in a state of repose*” (BWF 330) and Bahá'u'lláh's assertion that the contingent world of creation is “*being renewed and regenerated at all times*”? (TB 330) One way to resolve this apparent contradiction is to say that “the essence of things” is that which is karmically inherited and is apparent in the continuity or pattern of the process. Insofar as each process is particular and continues as that particular process, it has an unchanging essence, that is, an essence that is constantly “renewed and regenerated.” Thus, we may conclude that when 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that “the essence of things does not change,” he can be understood to mean that the nature of a particular process cannot change into a different kind of process. The process has integrity, and inasmuch as it cannot change into something else, it has ontological independence from other created things. An example of these beliefs at work is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's insistence that appearances notwithstanding, humankind's “*species and essence undergo no change*.” (SAQ 184; cf. 177) 'Abdu'l-Bahá admits that we have been in a process of evolution but rejects the notion that alterations of outward form reflect any change in essence – which persists as a pattern of “karmic inheritance.”

Dependent Origination and the Writings

Let us now examine the issue of substantialist and non-substantialist views from the perspective of dependent origination. In the process of dependent origination, all entities are constituted and formed by the reciprocal influence of other entities, for which reason, they are compounded or mutually conditioned.¹⁷ Indeed, according to Alan Sponberg, “In the Buddhist view, [even] the self is nothing more or less than the dynamic aggregation [compounding] of a bundle of interrelated causal processes.”¹⁸ The compounded nature of created entities is – albeit with one exception – accepted by the Bahá'í Writings. It is implicit in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's claim that the world of being is a chain of mutual interactions which cause things to come into existence, grow and develop. (SAQ 178-9) It also underlies His statement that

Each organism is a compound; each object is an expression of elemental affinity...Existence or the expression of being is, therefore, composition; and nonexistence is decomposition, division, disintegration. When elements have been brought together in a certain plan of combination, the result is the human organism; when these elements separate and disperse, the outcome is death and nonexistence. (PUP 56)

It is worth pointing out that Abdul-Bahá says that both organisms and non-living objects are compounds, and exist by virtue of “*elemental affinity*” (PUP 56) among the parts and, as noted above, by virtue of the dynamic inter-action among various entities. In other words, things do not have existence solely in and of themselves but arise dependently. In Buddhism, according to Alan Sponberg,

Perhaps the single most distinctive and radical of the Buddha's teachings was the notion of the non-substantiality of the self, the doctrine referred to in the Pali scriptures as *anatta* (Sanskrit: *anaatman*) and usually rendered in English as the view of “no-self” or “non-self.” [6] As a corollary of the principle of conditionality (*pratiity samutpaada*) [dependent origination] . . . the nonsubsantiality of the self lies at the very of heart of the Dharma.¹⁹

The preceding passage makes clear that Buddhist philosophers interpret the dynamic, process nature of the self, its impermanence and inter-dependence, as a sign that it has no substantial existence, existence of its own. The question is, whether the Bahá'í Writings can support such a view and the answer is that it all depends on how we interpret the term ‘substance.’ Substance is usually defined as an absolutely changeless substratum that is present in all things. Aristotle defines what he calls “first substance”²⁰ as that which possesses attributes but is not an attribute of anything else. It is also individual. His substance seems to be static.

A Dynamic Interpretation of Substance

If we interpret substance dynamically, that is, as a continuum or pattern of endlessly self-repeating ‘moments’ which are being “*renewed and regenerated at all times*,” (TB 141) then we have, in fact, a dynamic, process concept of substance that is impermanent in its continuous re-birth and passing away and at the same time permanent inasmuch as it is part of a particular and specific series or continuum or pattern. Such an interpretation of ‘substance’ in regards to creation harmonizes well with the Writings because it provides for both dynamic change and continuity; indeed, it provides for continuity *through* dynamic change. Furthermore, in this view, the continuity, continuum or pattern that persists through the individual moments of change functions as the substance, that is, as the bearer of attributes by which we may distinguish one ‘substance-pattern’ from another. It is vital to note that we did not claim that the continuum or pattern *is* a substance but rather that it

actively *functions* like one. It is a substance only in terms of function. It is not some kind of mysterious material.

Thus, from the point of view of process or dependent origination, it is clear that Bahá'í ontology is neither a pure ontology of substance, such as that of Spinoza, nor a purely non-substantial ontology such as we find in most understandings of Buddhism. For there can be no doubt that most Buddhist philosophers would reject the notion that the continuum or patterns caused by the process of dependent origination *functions* like a substance; nor, in the case of humankind, would they accept it as a self since that would violate the doctrine of anatta or no-self. However, as we have seen, the Bahá'í Writings seem to steer between the two alternatives by saying that the self is non-substantial inasmuch as it is a process but is substantial inasmuch it is a persisting pattern exhibited by a process.

We are left with a final question, namely, does an entity or self exist independently in its own right? According to Buddhist monk and philosopher P.A. Payuto,

if there were some real intrinsic self within that continuum there could be no true interdependent cause and effect process. The continuum of cause and effect which enables all things to exist as they do can only operate because such things are transient, ephemeral, constantly arising and ceasing and having no intrinsic entity of their own.²¹

The gist of this passage is clear: things have “no intrinsic entity,” that is, no independent existence and exist purely as functions or products of the process of independent arising. They have no other source or ground of being than the process of dependent origination. Payuto makes this clear when he says that because they are “so interrelated and interdependent ...they have no First Cause.”²²

Dependence and Independence

However, according to the Bahá'í Writings, things are both dependent on and independent from other created things. The changeless essence is obviously independent but the manifestation of that essence, the properties it exhibits while appearing are dependent on the relationship to other entities. Up to this point we have a substantialist view with a stable, that is, unchanging independent essence which needs nothing else to exist. (We shall deal with the issue of God shortly.) However, the Writings do not leave matters there since they tell us that “*nothing which exists remains in a state of repose, that is to say, all things are in motion.*” (BWF 330) How, then, can we resolve this apparent contradiction between changeless essences and all things being in motion? Non-substantialists achieve this can be done by getting rid of the enduring essence and retaining

the ever-changing properties.²³ The Bahá'í Writings refuse to carry out such an amputation and clearly recognise the existence of persisting essences. At the same time they recognise the ubiquity of change.

One way to resolve this apparent contradiction is to say that the essences exist by virtue of the changing properties they manifest. An essence is real only if it manifests or exhibits itself, that is to say, an essence is real only if it engages in inter-action with its environment. Paradoxically, the changeless requires change to exist: being and becoming are absolute correlates, like two sides of a coin. This position is substantialist insofar as it recognizes the existence of enduring essences and non-substantialist insofar as the existence of these essences (persisting patterns) depends on the manifestation of changing properties.

To show how this is possible, we must re-examine 'Abdu'l-Bahá's quote about the chain of being:

For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. (SAQ 178-9)

The interactions belong to "the properties of things," to their manifested qualities, not to their essence. Without these interactions and changes, the essence could not exist, for which reason 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that interaction causes "the existence" as well as the "development and growth" of things. The essence needs the interactions and, on the other hand, the interactions need the essence since nothing can exist without an essence or nature. Another way of expressing this is to say that the essence or self or soul has an independent existence formally but not actually. A formal distinction is an objectively real difference between things that cannot, in actuality, be separated from each other.²⁴ For example, we may formally distinguish one side of a coin from another, but we cannot actually separate them. The difference between the two sides is objectively real though we cannot separate the two. Similarly, we may formally distinguish the soul, self or essence from its interactions, but cannot actually separate them from their relationships to other entities. Both are always present, being absolutely correlated.

Having "Intrinsic Entity"

Thus, if we ask whether a self, soul or essence has "intrinsic entity," which is to say, whether it has any existence apart from its supporting factors in the process of dependent origination²⁵, the Bahá'í Writings would seem to answer both yes and no. Insofar as

the soul, essence or self is formally distinct, which is to say, insofar as it is formally objective and real, it possesses “intrinsic entity.” It is, in Aristotelian terms, a ‘substance’, something which does not exist as an attribute of something else, though in keeping with our process perspective, we would rather say the self, soul or essence act or function like a substance. On the other hand, insofar as it cannot actually be separated from its inter-actions, the self, soul or essence lacks “intrinsic entity.” Once again, we observe how the Bahá’í Writings carve out a middle way between substantialism and non-substantialism.

In contrast to Buddhist non-substantialism, we must also note that even though the soul or self exists by virtue of relating to others, it is, therefore, not compounded from what some Buddhists call their “supporting factors.”²⁶ As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*The soul, not being a composition of elements, is, in character, as a simple element.*” (PT 91; cf. PUP 260) The fact that the soul is simple and not compounded lays the foundation for the soul’s ontological integrity, that is, for the fact that the soul is not entirely determined, shaped or governed by its “supporting factors.” In other words, it has free will, as noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He says,

Some things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions; it is evident and clear that these actions are, for the most part, left to the will of man. But there are certain things to which man is forced and compelled, such as sleep, death, sickness, decline of power, injuries and misfortunes; these are not subject to the will of man. . .
(SAQ 248)

Here, too, we see the Bahá’í Writings taking a middle path between absolute determinism and absolute free will which recognizes no limitations on the human will. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, humankind is morally free, that is, morally and spiritually free and undetermined vis-à-vis the conditions of existence but determined by external life circumstances be they cultural, economic or political, or by internal circumstances such as physiological condition and general health. In non-substantialist philosophies such as many of the philosophies that grow out of the Buddha’s revelation, the issue of free will is not so clear. On one hand, if each momentary self is only a compound of its “supporting factors” – as the doctrine dependent origination teaches – then it is difficult to see how the momentarily existing self can be free, i.e. undetermined by others, or conversely, self-determined. At least some Buddhist are willing to accept this consequence: “Free will, in terms of an undetermined, unrelated, uncaused factor in human actions, cannot be admitted.”²⁷ On the other hand, this conflicts with the self-evident need for us to

be self-determined, that is, make choices conducive to our salvation. How these two positions can be reconciled is not entirely clear. Interestingly enough, some Buddhists argue that the whole problem of individual free will is a chimera, because no such stable entities as 'a man' and 'will' even exist.²⁸ Therefore, nothing contradictory can be said about them.

It might be objected that, given 'Abdu'l-Bahá's support for the idea of "*elemental atoms*," (PUP 284) the Bahá'í Writings clearly espouse substantialism. Such atoms may be understood as stable substances - but then we must remember that "*The elemental atoms which constitute all phenomenal existence and being in this illimitable universe are in perpetual motion, undergoing continuous degrees of progression.*" (FWU 57) Without motion, the atoms could not exist; their existence and motion are correlates and the atom only exists by virtue of its motion and change or "progression." As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*Creation is the expression of motion*" (PUP 140) which is obviously an essential attribute of everything created by God. Because the "elemental atoms" have motion as an essential, ontologically constitutive attribute, it is untenable to argue that the Writings are purely substantialist. On the other hand, the belief that something such as a persistent pattern, (called an "elemental atom") endures through the cosmic process indicates that the view embedded in the Writings cannot be identified with non-substantialism either. Yet again we observe how the Writings take a middle path between these two positions.

The Aristotelian Substratum

Before passing on to our next subject, we must deal with an important question of interpretation, viz., does not this understanding of a middle path between substantialism and non-substantialism contradict the Aristotelian substratum of the Bahá'í Writings?²⁹ It might appear so, especially in regards to the concept of 'substance.' Rather than say that the Writings contradict or reject the notion of substance, it should be said that they keep the concept albeit in a new form, which is to say, they keep the essential meaning of a continuity and a bearer of attributes persisting through change. In other words, the Writings give their revised concept of substance all the meanings that have been associated with Aristotle's concept of substance.³⁰ Succinctly put, the Writings expand and up-date Aristotle's concept of substance into the direction of modern process philosophy.

Change and Order

Because everything in the created realm is in a state of essential motion or change, being and becoming are correlates, formally distinguishable but not actually separable. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*This state of motion is said to be essential — that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement, as it is the essential requirement of fire to burn.*" (SAQ 233) Furthermore, motion cannot be separated from being because "*an essential requirement cannot be separated from the thing itself.*" (SAQ 171) Thus, motion and being are "inseparable concomitants of existence,"³¹ each of the two existing by virtue of the other as we have already seen above.

As the Writings make clear, there is, however, more to change than mere endless alteration without any direction or purpose, pushed this way and that like a ship hopelessly adrift on the sea. Both at the microscopic level and the macroscopic level, becoming is teleological, it has direction: it is, in a word, teleological which means that change is orderly in regard to future developments. This means that change must be guided or restrained at both the macroscopic and microscopic level. At the macro level, the non-random nature of becoming is evident in the hierarchical structure of creation with the simple mineral kingdom at the bottom and the highly complex human kingdom as the fruit of creation at the top.³² It is also evident in the psychological, cultural and spiritual evolution of humankind under the guidance of successive Manifestations of God Who prevent us from merely changing aimlessly without direction. At both the macroscopic and microscopic level the non-random nature of change is evident in causality and the principle of sufficient reason (PSR), according to which "*we must realize that everything which happens is due to some wisdom and that nothing happens without a reason.*" (PUP 46) 'Abdu'l-Bahá implicitly asserts the PSR in His use of the First Mover argument to prove the existence of God. This argument says that physical motion requires a first cause that is sufficient to set universal motion into action and that if we follow any sequence of change to its source, we come to "*Him who is the Ever-Living, the All-Powerful, who is Self-Dependent and the Ultimate Cause.*" (BWF 343) The non-random nature of change is also evident in the Writings' insistence on the principle of causality. Bahá'u'lláh says that "*All that is created, however, is preceded by a cause,*" (GWB 162) to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds that "*the existence of everything depends upon four causes.*" (SAQ 162³³) It only take a little reflection to realise that if events and things are preceded by a cause, then random, uncaused 'spontaneous' unprompted, action is not possible. If it were, the universe could not be an orderly place as the Writings assert it is.³⁴

There is one further source of order in the ubiquity of change and that is the potentials that exist in all things. These potentials limit the development or change in each thing or process to a certain range or spectrum of possibilities which can be realized, thereby keeping change orderly. A raincoat does not change into a living crocodile because it lacks the potentials to develop lungs and other organs. The Writings clearly affirm the existence of potentials, speaking of the virtues "*potential in the seed*," (PUP 91) of the sun awakening "*all that is potential in the earth*," (PUP 74) of the "*virtues potential in mankind*", (PUP 70) of the inventions "*potential in the world of nature*"³⁵ and of the embryo progressing until "*that which was potential in it – namely, the human image – appears*." (PUP 359) Of similar import are the passages referring to the "*mysteries latent in nature*" (PUP 51) which are actualized by humankind, the "*latent talents*" (PUP 52) hidden in human beings, the "*divine perfections latent in the heart of man*," (PUP 53) the "*latent realities within the bosom of the earth*," (FWU 70) and the "*the greater world, the macrocosm...latent and miniature in the lesser world, or microcosm, of man*." (PUP 69-70) The same idea is implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that we are to "[r]egard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value," (GWB 260) which is to say that humankind possesses invaluable potentials that must be actualized through education.

The Existence of Potentials

The ontological necessity for the existence of potentials is supported by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertion that "*nonexistence is only relative and absolute nonexistence inconceivable*" (PUP 88) and that "*no sign can come from a nonexisting thing*" (SAQ 255) lead to the conclusion that in Bahá'í ontology there is another kind of non-being – 'being-not-yet.' If "*[a] thing which does not exist, can... give no sign of its existence*," (PT 91) then it follows that everything which has come into existence must have existed as a potential, as a 'being-not-yet' or potential before it is actualized. Otherwise it would have come from absolute nothing – and that is not allowed.

The existence of potentials within all things (processes) has a number of significant implications for Bahá'í ontology. First, it suggests that there is a conceptual distinction between a thing or process and its potentials which are the aspects of an entity that express both possibilities and limitations to which it is subject. They define it, both in relationship to itself and in relationship to others. However, albeit it only conceptually and not actually, the reality of potentials also suggests that every entity or process is di-polar in regards to its present state of actualized potentials and its future state of unactualized potentials. Moreover, insofar as all things

strive to actualize their future potentials, all things are subject to a dynamic tension, which, in effect, defines them as they entity they are. This dynamic tension reflects the fact that

Everything is either growing or declining, all things are either coming from non-existence into being, or going from existence into non-existence. (BWF 330)

Both in growing and declining things are actualizing new, hitherto unrealised, possibilities. (Lest there be any confusion, it should be noted that “non-existence” and “existence” are relative terms and must not be understood as absolutes. (PUP 88)) It is worth noting that inasmuch as all things strive to actualise their potentials, they strive, in effect, to be more, which is to say, they endeavour to be other or not-themselves as they currently are. They seek self-transcendence. This, too, creates, tensions within them because they are always involved, to one extent or another, in a struggle against themselves as they are. In short, they are making themselves new at all times. This leads to the conclusion that they are characterized by what Hegel calls an “inherent unrest”³⁶; in other words, self-dissatisfaction is a universal metaphysical principle inherent in all things, although only humankind is consciously aware of it.

The Ultimate “Object of Desire”

It should be noted however, that potentials, the future identity, is only the proximate motive for an entity to struggle forward. The ultimate motive is, of course, the return to God, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes clear in the following quotation: “*From this same God all creation sprang into existence, and He is the one goal, towards which everything in nature yearns.*” (PT 51) God, as Aristotle said, God is “the object of desire”³⁷ of all things. Insofar as God is the ultimate motive for cosmic restlessness, we cannot help but conclude that return to God which all things desire is one of the principles according to which the cosmos is organised.

To emphasise the ubiquitous influence of this motive principle, we draw attention to the fact that even matter is not exempt from it. Although apparently ‘dead’ or unchanging to us, such is not really the case as noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

As to the existence of spirit in the mineral, it is indubitable that minerals are endowed with a spirit and life according to the requirements of that stage. (TAF)

Elsewhere He says,

This world is full of seeming contradictions; in each of these kingdoms [mineral, vegetable and animal] life exists

in its degree; though when compared to the life in a man, the earth appears to be dead, yet she, too, lives and has a life of her own. (PT 66)

The fact that all things are alive to their own degree supports the view that all things without exception strive to actualize their potentials and to return to God.

Hegel, Dialectic and the Writings

One more aspect of the nature of change needs to be covered, namely whether or not the process undergone by every thing or process is a dialectic in the Hegelian sense. In other words, we must determine whether or not the transformative process which constitutes the being of every thing and process, is driven by the power of negation or contradiction. As Hegel says, "Contradiction is the moving principle of the world."³⁸ According to Hegel, negation or contradiction is the means by which the static identity of things is dissolved and they take on a new identity as a dynamic entities striving towards completion or 'wholeness.' As Hegel writes,

by Dialectic is meant the indwelling tendency outwards by which the one-sidedness and limitation of the predicates of understanding is seen in its true light, and shown to be the negation of them. For anything to be finite is just to suppress itself and put itself aside.³⁹

In other words, by means of dialectic, things or our understanding of things overcome their own limitations or "one-sidedness," as they struggle to become more complete or comprehensive. In Hegel's view, nothing that can be grasped by human understanding is exempt from this dialectical process: "Dialectic is the very nature and essence of everything predicated by mere understanding – the law of things and of the finite as a whole."⁴⁰ As Hegel puts it, "Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there Dialectic is at work."⁴¹ This means that nothing is exempt from dialectic and that dialectic occurs in every moment so that there is, in fact, no time at which a thing is not involved in dialectical change in which it strives to complete and transcend itself. (One might think of this self-transcending as the 'return' to God mentioned in the Writings.) The dissolution of the static identity of things is inevitable because each thing contains its own 'contradictory', that is, its own 'other', opposite or differentiation or antithesis within itself, thereby continuously undermining or negating its identity. In the words of Hegel,

Everything finite, instead of being stable and ultimate, is rather changeable and transient; and this is exactly what we mean by that Dialectic of the finite, by which the finite, as implicitly other than what it is, is forced beyond its own immediate or natural being to turn suddenly into its opposite.⁴²

Each thing strives to overcome this opposition by including the opposite in a new, more expansive version of itself — a process often described as the triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.⁴³ In this change an entity becomes something new, that is, something that it was not, or as Hegel says, “its opposite.” Consequently, identity is never something static but rather dynamic:

Identity, instead of being in its own self-truth and absolute truth is consequently they very opposite: instead of being the unmoved simple, *it is the passage beyond itself* into the dissolution of itself.⁴⁴

However, this transcendence or “passage beyond itself” does not mean that an entity ceases to be or loses itself; indeed, the exact opposite is the case according to Hegel who writes, “the finite in its ceasing-to-be, in this negation of itself has attained its being-in-itself, is *united with itself* . . . in going beyond itself, therefore, it equally unites with itself.”⁴⁵

Dialectic in the Writings

Let us now examine which aspects of Hegel’s work are confirmed by the Bahá’í Writings, which contradict the Writings and which can be harmonized with them and to what degree. The key to understanding any possible similarity is the concept of potentials, which, as we have already seen, are inherent in all things. We may permit ourselves one quotation to refresh our memories: “*But the whole of the great tree is potentially latent and hidden in the little seed. When this seed is planted and cultivated, the tree is revealed.*” (PUP 69) What this means is that when the potentials are actualized — “planted and cultivated” — the tree comes into existence or is “revealed” to the world. In other words, there is a transition from potential to actual, a view with which Aristotle and Hegel would also agree.

Actuality and Potentiality

This means in effect, that according to the Writings, all things are constituted by a formal distinction between an entity’s actuality and its potentiality. The difference between actuality and potentiality is objectively real, but the two cannot really be separated from one another: they are absolute correlates which is to say that

wherever we find one, we find the other as with two sides of a coin. The formal distinction between an entity's present actuality or state and its potentials suggests that according to the Writings, all entities have a complementary nature, with two real, but absolutely correlated aspects. They are wholes, but differentiated wholes, not undifferentiated wholes. From this it follows that only God is a perfect unity or one, which is perhaps why 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to God as the "*Lord of Unity*." (SAQ 146) Only God is, ontologically speaking, really and completely one. In other words, God has no potentials for future development because the possession of such potentials indicates the imperfection of incompleteness. This cannot be because "*God is pure perfection*." (SAQ 113)

Self-Transcendence

Let us now examine the concept of potentials more closely. To say that a thing has a particular potential is, in effect, to say that it is, relative to what it could be, incomplete and unfinished, that it has a transitional perfection but no final perfection. It is not yet fully itself inasmuch as there is, in Hegel's language, an internal contradiction between its actual existence and its essence which is all of its potentials. The fact that human evolution is endless and continues after death suggests that this internal contradiction is constitutional: as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*human perfections are infinite*." (BWF 333) However, from the perspective of the Writings, all things are in the condition of changing, growing and declining, so that in effect, this internal contradiction between what they are and what they could be constitutes all things. They are all striving to transcend themselves. However, only humankind is conscious of this fact as a part of its experience of existence.

Potentials and Contradiction

In any case, the infinity of potentials or possible perfections means that neither humankind nor any other entities can ever actualise all their potentials; unrealised potentials will always remain and this means that no thing is ever completely and fully itself although it continuously struggles to attain this completed state. Actualising one potential means only to be confronted by another, which is to say, that all entities, including humankind, are constantly confronted by a new possibility, an 'other', a negation of themselves as they currently are, a not-self or antithesis.⁴⁶ By virtue of their potentials, things are not self-identical relative to what — theoretically or ideally — they could be. In Hegel's terminology, all entities including humankind are constitutionally alienated or estranged from themselves, suffering an internal contradiction which they must strive to overcome. In the case of humankind,

Hegel calls this condition the “Unhappy Consciousness [which] is the consciousness of self as a dual natured, merely contradictory being.”⁴⁷ Because it desires to more than a “merely contradictory being”, the unhappy consciousness seeks to overcome this situation. Once again we see how “Contradiction is the very moving principle of the world.”⁴⁸

Hegel, the Unhappy Consciousness and Manifestations

Of particular interest to Bahá'í ontology is that according to Hegel, the Unhappy Consciousness can only overcome its alienated condition by surrendering its will to an intermediary with God, that is, a minister or priest. For Bahá'ís, of course, this is impossible since the Faith has no clergy of any sort, but no great effort is required to replace a clergyman with the Manifestation of God. Once this change is made, what Hegel writes harmonizes well with the Writings. For example, before the Manifestation, the self “renounces its will.”⁴⁹

Through these moments of surrender, first of its right to decide for itself, then of its property [sacrificial giving] and enjoyment, and finally of practicing what it does not understand, it truly and completely deprives itself of the consciousness of inner and outer freedom, of the actuality in which consciousness exists for itself. It has the certainty of having truly divested itself of its ‘I’...Only through this *actual* sacrifice could it demonstrate this self-renunciation.⁵⁰

Only with such complete renunciation of everything pertaining to self and the illusion of independence from God can the self “obtain[] relief from its misery”⁵¹ because it has positively put its will at the disposal of the “universal will.”⁵² What this renunciation demonstrates is that the individual understands that, in the words of the Writings, “*the existence of beings in comparison with the existence of God is but illusion and nothingness.*” (SAQ 278)

At this point it is important to draw special attention to an important difference between the Bahá'í Writings and Hegel: the Writings could never agree to such a complete surrender of self to anyone but a Manifestation of God and certainly not to any clergyman, priest, monk, mulláh or rabbi. This concern for our dignity before other human beings is reflected in the prohibition of confession of sins either to a priest or in public because “*such confession before people results in one's humiliation and abasement.*” (KA 194) This surrender of self can be made only to God.

How, it may be asked, can the surrender of one's will to God alleviate the "unhappy consciousness"? Certainly it will not suddenly lose all its inherent potentials and thus will still suffer contradiction and alienation. However, at least from the Bahá'í perspective, those contradictions will be re-contextualised as a "healing medicine":

O Thou Whose tests are a healing medicine to such as are nigh unto Thee, Whose sword is the ardent desire of all them that love Thee, Whose dart is the dearest wish of those hearts that yearn after Thee, Whose decree is the sole hope of them that have recognized Thy Truth! (PM 220-1)

By re-contextualizing the challenges of alienation and internal contradictions as part of our healing or becoming whole, the Bahá'í Writings show us that these contradictions need not necessarily be emiserating since they are necessary to our healing. Seen in this way, the Writings put a positive light on Hegel's theory of alienation because alienation is necessary for growth and development.

The Nature of Things

Let us now take time for further reflection on what the Writings explicitly say and suggest about the nature of 'things' that make up the world. In studying this question, we must first differentiate between perceptual and conceptual things, in other words, objects of perception and objects of conception or thought because perceptual objects exist independently of human perception and conceptual objects do not.⁵³ It is obvious that unicorns require a thinker in order to be but that roan stallions do not. Our discussion will concern itself with perceptual objects or things. This is not to say that we are only concerned with material things or substances, since the Writings recognise the existence of non-material substances such as the soul, whose existence is evident through their effects. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that "*the rational soul is the substance and the body depends upon it*" (SAQ 239) and that "*the soul . . . [is] one indivisible substance.*" (PT 91) Now, we cannot perceive the soul directly but we can observe its effects and deduce its existence from them.

A thing or substance must satisfy several requirements. In the first place, it must have qualities by which it acquires ontological existence; it must, as Aristotle says, be a bearer of attributes. These attributes may be their particular effects upon other things. There are two subgroups of these qualities: essential attributes which it absolutely requires to be the thing and kind of thing it is and accidental attributes which may be different from one instantiation of a substance to the next. Second, any substance or thing must have

differentia, that is, it must have attributes that distinguish it from other kinds and from other members of its own kind. No thing is merely a complete duplicate of another, a principle alluded to when 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of "*the law of creation in its endless forms and infinite variety of expression.*" (PUP 56) Finally, it must have relationship to other things that exist, a view explicitly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá when He says "*For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction.*" (SAQ 178, emphases added) Anything of which we can say "It is" must be able to meet these three criteria. Even God – *as presented in the Writings* not necessarily as He is in Himself which no one can know – meets these criteria. Consider, for example, the following quotation:

Know that the Reality of Divinity or the substance of the Essence of Oneness is pure sanctity and absolute holiness – that is to say, it is sanctified and exempt from all praise.
(SAQ 146)

We observe that God is described as a substance – obviously not material – that is, as possessing attributes of "pure sanctity and absolute holiness" and being "sanctified and exempt from all praise", and as having differentia, such as those just mentioned. While God has no direct relationship with creation⁵⁴ the fact remains that He does relate to creation through His Manifestations. However, we should not be misled into thinking that God is a 'thing like the others', because it would be difficult if not impossible to conceive of accidental, that is, non-essential attributes in God. In this, and in other ways, God is exceptional.

As we have already seen, the Writings present each thing – except of course God – as having a two fold aspect: the thing as it currently is, and its potentials, or the thing as it could be. The two are correlated and the latter is a contradiction to or negation of the former which must be dissolved in order to actualize its future identity. However, existing in this state of contradiction is not tenable for a thing, which seeks to become fully one with itself by actualizing all of its potentials. In other words, for a thing to actualise a potential is, in effect, for the thing to negate itself as it is, and to find itself again, a new form, by means of uniting with the previously contradictory other whether that 'other' be internal or external. In either case the thing is a being that actively maintains its identity and in that sense *is*, by the paradoxical act of becoming another: it is what it is by always leaving its old identity behind.

The Quest for Unity

It does so because all things seek completion – the only way they can achieve the one-ness or unity which they desire not only because “*disunity and inharmony spell death*” (SWAB 31) but also because they are naturally attracted to God, the universal “object of desire.”⁵⁵ Thus, the evolution of things is impelled or motivated by three reasons: first, the need to change and, thereby, to stay in existence; second, the desire to escape disunity and the ‘death’ of incompleteness and third, the desire to reach the Source of all being. Internal contradiction and alienation are the means by which these three goals – continued existence, actualization of potentials, and closeness to God - are achieved. This, however, marks a departure from Hegel insofar as the Writings do not see contradiction by itself as sufficient to explain motion and change; rather, a transcendent Attractor, or God, is needed to explain why things desire the return to God and therefore, move on the “*arc of ascent.*” (SAQ 284)

As we have seen, focussing on the internal constitution of a thing, reveals that it is always doing two things at once: changing its identity yet maintaining it. To do one requires the other. This means that every thing is constituted by a double-movement that highlights the paradoxical nature of its existence: to be itself it must actively cease being itself. Only by such relentless self-overcoming can a thing be itself, as, indeed, it is written in the Bible: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”⁵⁶ Christ’s statement seems to apply not only to human beings but to all things in creation.

The Nothingness Within

The fact that all things are continuously changing points out another aspect characterizing all created things: they are constituted by mixture of being and nothingness which is to say, they both are and, vis-à-vis their future unactualized potentials, are not. Without this nothingness in their constitution, they could not be because they could not change, and without change or motion, being is not possible according to the Writings. Further analysis permits us to add that since growth and movement are necessary for being, the potentials inherent in a thing, in effect, amount to an internal imperative, an internal “ought” for which it must strive or suffer the consequent diminishment of being. Actualisation is an “inner necessity” for things. We must also note that through these potentials, or ‘oughts’, things transcend their limitations.⁵⁷ This means that all things have a self-transcendent aspect, always ‘desiring’ to be more than they currently are. Paradoxically, in doing so, they become themselves more completely than ever before, or, as Hegel says, “the finite in its ceasing-to-be, in this negation of itself

has attained its being-in-itself, is *united with itself*.”⁵⁸ In this seeking to be more, the finite thing reaches out towards infinity – or, in Bahá’í terms, desires God – and thereby more truly becomes itself. According to Hegel, “In the ought the transcendence of finitude, that is, infinity begins.”⁵⁹ (It is plain at this point that Bahá’í ontology is evolutionary to its very foundations inasmuch as growth and transformation are an integral part of all things.)

The foregoing are some of the paradoxical consequences of the Bahá’í teaching that “*that existence and nonexistence are both relative*.” (SAQ 281) In other words, among created things, they are not absolute, a fact emphasised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He says, “*Therefore non-existence is only relative and absolute non-existence inconceivable*.” (BWF 264) When we inquire as to what non-existence is relative to, we can answer, firstly, relative to its future existence as latent potentials and second, relative to God, the sole possessor of absolute, non-relative existence. All things are as nothing *relative*, or compared, to Him. This too emphasises that created things are a mixture of being (relative to themselves and on their ontological plane) and non-being relative to God. Moreover, it also shows that created things are a paradoxical unity of one and many – one thing with many potential variations and many identities through many phases.

The PSR and Its Idealist Consequences

Another aspect of being a thing concerns the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) according to which everything to which everything that happens or exists does so for a reason.⁶⁰ The PSR is also known as the “final cause” which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says is necessary for all existing things:

for the existence of everything depends upon four causes – the efficient cause, the matter, the form and the final cause. For example, this chair has a maker who is a carpenter, a substance which is wood, a form which is that of a chair, and a purpose... (SAQ 280)

A purpose, of course, is an idea, or, in language more suitable to the PSR, a reason. Now it is important to realise that while in the order of time, the final cause is realized last, in the order of thought it is actually the first: we start by conceiving a thing’s purpose and then we build it to meet that purpose. The final purpose, or sufficient reason is already implicit in the efficient and formal cause and in the selection of the material cause. The ontological significance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement is that it shows the things are grounded in an idea, a thought, a reason, that what we call a ‘thing’ is, in effect, the outer expression of an idea. To generalise, we might say that

reality and reason are not opponents, nor even indifferent to one another, but rather, that reality is grounded in and grows out of or instantiates reason or thought. This is in harmony with the idealist aspects we have already noted in a previous study of Bahá'í ontology.⁶¹ We are, thereby encouraged to conclude that the universe is the expression of a divine concept, a suggestion which complements 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "*The first thing which emanated from God is that universal reality, which the ancient philosophers termed the 'First Mind,' and which the people of Bahá call the 'First Will.'*" (SAQ 203) This statement implies a form of idealism because it indicates that creation – which came into being after the First Mind or First Will – is the product of a thought or act of will. In either case, matter is not ontologically fundamental but is grounded in or dependent on something else that is not material.

(There may be some question as to why 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentions that the "the people of Bahá" refer to the First Mind as the First Will. The difference is one of emphasis rather than content because God is a supreme unity, in Whom no division can be found: "*He, verily, is one and indivisible; one in His essence, one in His attributes.*" (GWB 187) However, putting emphasis on the Will does not deny the mind – since that would be to say that God acts thoughtlessly and capriciously, in effect, denying God's perfection. Thus, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's emphasis on God's Will does not negate the observation that reality is the expression of a divine concept.)

We have now come to a critical juncture in our study of the philosophy embedded in the Bahá'í Writings, namely, how are we to interpret the fact that an idea or concept underlies reality, indeed, that reality as a whole is the outer expression of an idea or concept and that all things are instantiations of a reason? Are we to understand this as evidence that Bahá'í ontology is fundamentally idealist? We have already seen evidence strongly suggesting an affirmative answer and we have even more in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "*Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being.*" (HW #13, 7) In other words, human existence is dependent on "the essence of knowledge," a fact that makes this "essence of knowledge" logically prior to human existence, since the knowledge is the immediate source. The belief that things depend in some way on an idea or knowledge for their existence is a hallmark of philosophical idealism. There is still more evidence suggesting the idealist nature of Bahá'í ontology available, such as the following statement by Bahá'u'lláh:

...From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation

of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God. (GWB 178⁶²)

To see the idealist implications of this statement requires us to ask ourselves a single question: could things (including humankind) exist if they did not “*testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them,*” if things were not “*expressive of the knowledge of God*”? (GWB 178) The answer to this question is given by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, for He states, “*Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation [of God's names, signs and attributes] no being could ever exist.*” (GWB 177, emphasis added) In other words, a thing exists only by virtue of being transmitter or expresser or symbol of knowledge of whichever of God's Names and signs it has the capacity to pass on. It exists as the embodiment or instantiation of an idea or concept, as a concrete symbol of something higher, as the instantiation of an idea – as also indicated by the PSR.

At this point, the evidence from various perspectives strongly suggests that the Bahá'í Writings espouse an idealist ontology. In other words, they promulgate the primacy of spirit over matter and see matter as ultimately grounded in something non-material, variously identified as God, the Absolute, Spirit, Mind, Ideas, divine Names and so on. While the differences in this choice of terms are by no means insignificant, they all share a common feature, namely, that material creation is an outcome, consequence or expression of the non-material which is usually associated with thought and/or a conscious being.

Varieties of Idealism

There are, of course, various kinds of philosophical idealism not all of which are consistent with the Writings. For example, the Writings do not support Berkeley's subjective idealism according to which the seemingly objective world only exists as a phenomenon, appearance or idea within the mind of each individual. There are only mental events and minds to perceive them which means that there is no underlying substance or matter but only clusters of attributes. The ultimate Perceiver is God, Who perceives all the things we cannot and thereby ensures their existence. The Bahá'í Writings cannot agree with Berkeley that things are only conceptions in the mind and that matter does not exist. According to the Writings, matter is only relatively real vis-à-vis God, but is real in its own right, and, we perceive realities that are distinctly different and independent from us as shown by its adherence to the correspondence theory of truth.⁶³

Neither do the Writings espouse a Kantian transcendental idealism by which the categories of human understanding constitute an unknowable 'raw material' (termed the thing-in-itself) and shape it into nature as we experience it. We never, according to Kant, perceive the world as it actually is but only as we have constructed it in accordance with the pre-existing categories in our minds. While there are Kantian elements in the Writings – most notably the idea that we cannot directly know the essence of things – there is nothing in them to suggest that humans actually constitute nature in the manner surmised by Kant. We discover truths and do not invent them. Nor do the Writings accept – despite many Hegelian features – Hegel's absolute idealism in which God or Absolute Consciousness comes to know Itself by means of its creations – and specifically through humankind - which unfold in a fully logical order whose dialectic was laid bare by Hegel's philosophy. It is a monistic philosophy that vitiates the distinction between humankind and God (the Absolute) and even allows direct knowledge of God. Because it denies any ontologically real distinction between thought and absolute reality⁶⁴, even matter is just another idea, albeit an idea of the Absolute. In Bahá'í terms, this means that absolute idealism or at least Hegel's version of it, denies the ontological difference between the station of the mineral or matter, and the station of the rational soul or thought.⁶⁵ This is not tenable because the Bahá'í Writings insist that the various stations of which God has decreed – mineral, vegetable, animal and human – are ontologically real and invested with distinct powers.⁶⁶

The idealism that comes closest to the Writings is that of Plato: both see the material as being grounded in and expressing the non-material, that is, the Divine Names, signs and attributes, or, in Plato's case, Ideas. Reinforcing this conclusion are statements such as the following:

The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven. (PUP 10; cf. ABL 46)

For physical things are signs and imprints of spiritual things; every *lower* thing is an *image* and *counterpart* of a higher thing.⁶⁷

These, combined with statements that "*the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out*" (SWAB 178) and that the Kingdom is a more perfect world, (PUP 4, 90) – much like Plato's world of Ideas – shows that Bahá'í ontology has strong Platonic features.

The First Major Difference with Plato

In what way, we may ask, does Bahá'í ontology distinguish itself from Platonic idealism? There are at least two major differences that are apparent. First, is the fact that Plato never recognized the existence of a personal God, but looked rather to a principle, a supreme Form, the Good, the One as the source of all being.⁶⁸ We hasten to add that Plato's Demiurge who shapes the world — but does not bring creation into being - in the *Timaeus* is a craftsman, supreme artisan or architect, a god if we desire to call him such but he is not God the foundation of all being. Rather, the Demiurge uses pre-existing forms or Ideas and pre-existing but formless matter to impose form on chaos and to create specific 'things.' In other words, the Demiurge is not the ultimate foundation or ground of all being, as is the Good or the One. Still more to the point, however, is that Plato's Good or One does not have a personal aspect whereas God as portrayed in the Bahá'í Writings does. Although we cannot know how God is in His essence, we do know that the Writings describe Him as having many of the attributes of a concerned personality: compassion, (BP 99) a sense of justice, (HW #2) generosity, (BP 99) kindness, (BP 101) and wisdom. (BP 118) He is also a conscious being Who can hear our prayers⁶⁹ and Who can take action of various kinds since He has a will. The ontological significance of God possessing the attributes of personality is readily apparent: it means that the attributes of personality are part of the ontological foundations of all things. These attributes are cosmically foundational. That is why 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

We declare that love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena and that the absence of love is the cause of disintegration or nonexistence. Love is the conscious bestowal of God, the bond of affiliation in all phenomena.
(PUP 255)

As the rest of the passage makes clear, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expects us to read this statement as an ontological truth about the composition of the universe. Love — which expresses itself differently at the various levels of existence — is an actual cosmic force, an “*elemental attraction*” (PUP 255) and “*selective affinity*” (PUP 255) which is grounded in the nature of God. Even stones manifest it in their simple cohesiveness: “*This power of attraction in the mineral world is love, the only expression of love the stone can manifest.*” (PUP 269)

Natural Theology and Natural Law

The fact that the attributes of personality are part of the ontological foundations of all existing things means that we have

another basis for a Bahá'í natural theology⁷⁰ and its concomitant notion of natural law. The fundamental premise of natural theology is that that created universe reflects the perfections of its Creator from which we may conclude that by reasoning about these signs, we can reason our way to from natural phenomena to the existence of God and other spiritual truths. Bahá'u'lláh clearly establishes the first when He says that the things created by God “*can be regarded in no other light except as evidences that proclaim the excellence and perfection of their author.*” (GWB 337) This very statement which establishes the perfection of God by the perfection of His creation is itself an example of natural theological reasoning, as is 'Abdul-Bahá's rhetorical question on the same issue: “*Can the creation be perfect and the creator imperfect? Can a picture be a masterpiece and the painter imperfect in his art?*” (SAQ 5)

There are numerous other examples of natural theological arguments in the Writings. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's contention that we can deduce the existence of God from the existence of motion (BWF 343) and His arguments for the immortality of the soul (SAQ ch. 61), the existence of final causes (SAQ 208) and the principle of sufficient reason (PUP 46⁷¹), the creation of things by emanation (SAQ 202), and the evolution of humankind. (SAQ 183) However, at no point does 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggest that the knowledge of natural theology is sufficient for our complete well-being either as an individual or as a species. Divine revelation from Manifestations is still needed to provide complete knowledge of what we need to know in order to actualize our physical, intellectual and spiritual potentials. It is clear, therefore, that Bahá'í ontology lays the foundation for a Bahá'í natural theology

There is also reason to believe that the idealist ontology embedded in the Writings lays the foundation for a doctrine of natural law according to which at least some standards of behaviour are based on the order of nature in general and/or the specific nature of the creature under discussion. In other words, each kind of creature has its own divinely appointed ends – its principle of sufficient reason or final cause – towards which it acts, or at least, should act. Morals or proper behaviour are not merely a matter of convention and something we should change at will since negative consequences will, sooner or later, follow any violations. Natural law most emphatically does not refer to whatever individual creatures happen to do. Because each kind of being or species has an inherent, essence or nature (ultimately bestowed by God) certain behaviours are – or, are not - appropriate to it. According to the Writings, in the case of man this means that we recognise to “know [God] and to worship Him” as stated in the Noonday prayer. Whatever acts and thoughts are not in harmony with our essential nature, which is to

say, is in violation of what is natural law for human beings. In short, our essential nature obligates us to behave to a higher standard than animals. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

Man is the highest species because he is the possessor of the perfections of all the classes – that is, he has a body which grows and which feels. As well as having the perfections of the mineral, of the vegetable and of the animal, he also possesses an especial excellence which the other beings are without – that is, the intellectual perfections. (SAQ 235)

As a mere matter of interest, we may note that vis-à-vis the importance of the intellect, this statement is not far removed from Aquinas' view that "the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human acts."⁷² However, at this point we cannot delve further into the complexities of natural law theory, except to draw attention once again to the main conclusion which is that Bahá'í ontology supports the concept of natural law.

The Second Major Difference with Plato

A second major difference is that Plato's ontology is static, not only in regards to the Ideas themselves but also in regards to their earthly counter-parts or shadows. While Plato's Ideas do not change, evolve or progress in any way, the earthly images change – but this change is not a progress or development but rather mere change without any final goal or purpose. It is not the "*growing or declining*" (SAQ 233) that 'Abdu'l-Bahá says characterizes all things. Indeed, according to Plato, mutability is the sign of their imperfection. This is precisely the point at which Bahá'í ontology differs significantly from Platonic ontology and confirms an Aristotelian insight, viz. that all things are in process, that all things actualise their various potentials and that all things exist by virtue of their motion or change. Being real and being immutable are no longer inter-changeable concepts as they are for Plato. However, the Writings do not entirely reject Plato because They do confirm his insight that the Ideas are immutable – except that in the Writings, the Platonic Ideas become the Names of God of which all created things are symbols or signs. These Names cannot change – a logical consequence of the fact that "*The Sun of Reality has always been in one condition; it has no change, no alteration, no transformation and no vicissitude*" (SAQ 207) and that God "*is one and indivisible; one in His essence, one in His attributes.*" (GWB 187) If God is one with His attributes and God cannot change, then the attributes cannot change either. Thus, we can see that the Writings confirm part of Plato's ontology and a part of Aristotle's – and, in regards to

the concept of all things desiring to return to God – They confirm part of Plotinus' ontology as well.⁷³

The Unknowability of God

The subject of God as the ultimate “object of desire”⁷⁴ brings us to the important – and very difficult – question about the nature of this ‘object.’ What can we know about it - if anything? For Bahá'ís, what comes to mind first is that according to the Writings, God is, in Himself, unknowable, for as ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says, “*That which we imagine, is not the Reality of God; He, the Unknowable, the Unthinkable, is far beyond the highest conception of man.*” (PT 25) Further, He says,

That Essence of the Divine Entity and the Unseen of the unseen is holy above imagination and is beyond thought. Consciousness doth not reach It. Within the capacity of comprehension of a produced reality that Ancient Reality cannot be contained. (BWF 382)

Still elsewhere He says, “*The way is closed and seeking is forbidden.*” (SAQ 146) According to the Writings, God can only be known about through His Manifestation “*who is the image and likeness of God*” (PUP 70) in a spiritual sense since He reveals the attributes and bounties of the Divine to us. (SAQ 222)

The Nothingness of God

It is clear, therefore, that while we can say nothing about God as He is-in-Himself, we can, however, say something about God as He is to us – which is to say, unknowable. What does that mean in philosophic terms? It means above all that God is beyond any attributes that humans can apply to Him because attributes are determinations that limit whatever they describe. Since God has no limitations, He cannot, logically speaking, have attributes. As ‘Abdu'l-Bahá points out,

The purpose [of ascribing attributes to God] is to show that these attributes and perfections that we recount for that Universal Reality are only in order to deny imperfections, rather than to assert the perfections that the human mind can conceive. Thus we say His attributes are unknowable. (BWF 343)

However, if God's “attributes are unknowable,” it follows that we cannot assign any attributes to God, and, since we cannot reason about or imagine things without any attributes, we are left with nothing. We humans simply cannot think about or imagine anything without attributes. Even if we describe God as ‘pure Being’ the

situation does not change because pure being itself is without attributes and/or limitations, and is, thereby, also nothing. As Hegel says, "Nothing is . . . the same determination, or rather absence of determination, and thus altogether the same as, *pure being*."⁷⁵ To us, there is no distinction between "pure being" and nothingness: both have no attributes that can be ascribed to them; no human intellectual framework is capable of comprehending them. However, this 'nothing' we call God or 'pure being' is – paradoxically – not the same as ontological non-being, but rather a nothing that (somehow) *is*. If to us God has no attributes – or, as is said in Buddhism, "marks"⁷⁶ – then for us, God may also be described as a 'void', as 'emptiness', provided that we remember the Dalai Lama's warning "You might think that emptiness means nothingness, but it does not."⁷⁷ Therefore, from this point of view, it would be correct to say that the ultimate reality in the Bahá'í Writings is describable in terms that are strongly similar used by some Buddhists to describe 'ultimate reality.' It is permanent, which is to say, it is the one 'thing' not dependent on dependent arising, while, at the same time, all other things depend on it. In other words, it is absolutely unconditioned by others while conditioning everything else. This means that the ultimate reality is non-relative, or absolute. Moreover, it is impersonal, supersensuous, extra-temporal, indeterminate and not accessible to reason beyond establishing the fact of its 'presence.'⁷⁸

An important question remains with us: is Hegel's 'nothing' – which is equivalent to pure being – psychological or ontological in nature? In other words, is it an artefact of our limited human point of view for which the lack of all attributes is equivalent to nothing, or is it or does it refer to something real?⁷⁹ The answer for Hegel is that, in the last analysis, there is no ultimate distinction between the psychological and the ontological for the nature of the entire world-process is epistemological, which is to say, the Absolute Spirit comes to recognise itself through evolution and especially through the evolution of human consciousness.⁸⁰ In Bahá'í ontology matters stand differently. From the human station or point of view, this identity of God's 'nothingness' and His 'pure being' is absolutely real: that consequence cannot be logically escaped once we recognise the complete unknowability of God. As the Writings say, even "*existence and non-existence are both relative.*" (SAQ 281) From this we may conclude that things are real or unreal depending on the station from which they are viewed:⁸¹

The existence of beings in comparison with the existence of God is but illusion and nothingness; it is an appearance, like the image reflected in a mirror... Then it is evident that although beings in relation to the existence of God have no

existence, but are like the mirage or the reflections in the mirror, yet in their own degree they exist. (SAQ 278)

Humankind thus has a double nature: vis-à-vis God, humankind is nothingness, but vis-à-vis itself, "in [its] own degree," humankind exists. It is our contention that a similar situation prevails in regards to the 'nothingness' of God in regard to His unknowability. From the human station, God's unknowability logically leads to our understanding of His 'nothingness' or emptiness, voidness, or even open-ness. However, we must remind ourselves that emptiness is not absolutely nothing; rather, it is the condition that allows all other things to exist in the same way that space conditions and allows a sculpture to exist. It permeates all things even as the Writings say, "*No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it.*" (GWB 178) Indeed, He is closer to us than our life-vein though He is at the same time, infinitely far or 'other' from us.⁸² However, the God Who is thus 'perceived' is the God Whose essential unknowability causes human being to perceive Him as an emptiness or nothingness that at the same time, somehow is. Thus, a Hegelian, that is, dialectical analysis of God's unknowability allows us to narrow the distance between God as presented in the Bahá'í Writings and the Buddhist, specifically Mahayana concept of the ultimate reality as emptiness or void.

A Cautionary Note

At this point several remarks are in order. First, a cautionary note that we do not intend to claim that the Bahá'í Writings somehow reflect the entire dialectical ontology of Hegel. They do not. For example, the Bahá'í Writings cannot accept Hegel's belief that God, or Spirit, becomes conscious of Itself through natural and human history. Second, the Writings do not present us with a fully developed dialectical ontology such as we see in Hegel. However, they do, in fact, provide the basis for a dialectical ontology through the philosophy of potentials and the necessity of change and motion. Third, the Writings provide a corrective to Hegel because they see the love of God, not contradiction or negativity, as the ultimate motive power for cosmic evolution. Internal contradiction and alienation are only the means by which the love of God makes itself felt within creation; they are only the conditions that make possible the eternal movement of love towards God. Thus, they are a necessary but not sufficient condition for the evolution of nature and human consciousness. A greater, all-transcendent positive Attractor is needed to motivate things to overcome their internal contradictions in order to reach It. Moreover, by the same token, there must be an innate desire for God in all things – which makes

desire an important aspect of the dialectic. Of course, this desire is only conscious in humankind.

Social Dialectic

There is one other place where a dialectical ontology appears in the Bahá'í Writings. According to Abdu'l-Bahá,

all souls [must] become as one soul, and all hearts as one heart. Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life. (SWAB 76)

Bahá'u'lláh writes,

He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body. (GWB 214)

Here, too, we see the outlines of a dialectical philosophy at work. In this dialectic, the self encounters the other, the stranger, as a negation or contradiction to its own being. In order to overcome this estrangement, the self may 'incorporate' the other in some way such as by having power over it – a strategy which risks unleashing a power struggle – and, according to Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, inevitably does.⁸³ Either by incorporating or being incorporated, either by being a master or a slave, a new synthesis is formed. However, neither Hegel nor the Writings regard this situation as desirable, so there is a third option, which, according to the Writings involves the sacrifice of one's various Attributes or identities "*born of passion and desire*" (SWAB 76) and seek a higher unity – and, through that, a higher identity – in "*their love for God.*" (SWAB 76) In effect, this refocusing on God, short-circuits the earthly dialectic of self and other, of master and slave⁸⁴ or self and contradiction, by setting up the love for God as the catalyst for a spiritual synthesis in which the self would be recontextualised by God's love and sublimated or reconstituted in a higher form.

It is important to emphasise that the individual is not lost in this higher synthesis, but rather maintains his identity in a higher form by overcoming the otherness of his negation, which is to say, by seeing the light of the one-ness of God, or the Manifestation in the other person as suggested by the following:

If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause. (GWB 315)

In this way, the individual also re-discovers himself in the other, he discovers his own spiritual potentials in another and thus, by

uniting with the other in the higher synthesis of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and its community, regains himself in a higher, sublimated form. Paradoxically he retains his identity at a higher level by losing it at a lower level: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."⁸⁵ Because the process we have described is, goes on continuously it also challenges us to take our identity at least in part from this very process of constantly re-discovering ourselves through others in the higher synthesis of the Bahá'í revelation and its community. To put it succinctly, our identity is not a destination but a journey.

This concludes the second instalment of our initial reconnaissance of Bahá'í ontology.

NOTES

- ¹ *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy; Oxford Companion to Philosophy.*
- ² Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 1.
- ³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*. Original Tablet in *Makatib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous Translation. http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih
- ⁴ In the language of the Plato-Aristotle-Plotinus (P-A-P) tradition found throughout the Writings, the individual has no substance. Substance does not refer to matter but to intrinsic identity distinct from an entity's relationship to its surroundings.
- ⁴ In regards to the non-substantialist nature of Buddhism, see for example "A Review of Pali Buddhism", ed. by Hoffmann and Mahinda, reviewed by Anne Blackburn in "The Journal of Buddhist Ethics" Vol. 5, 1998 at <http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/5/blackburn1.html>; David Edward Shaner see also the "Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism: A Phenomenological Study of Kuukai and Doogen", in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.39 (1989.01) <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/ew033311.htm>
- ⁶ Alan Sponberg, "The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self," in *The Western Buddhist Review*, Vol. 2, http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol2/ecological_self.html
- ⁷ Inada, "The Range of Buddhist Ontology," in *Philosophy East and West*, 38:3 (7/1988), p. 264. <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-PHIL/inada4.htm>
- ⁸ P.A Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*, <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9280/coarise.htm>
- ⁹ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ¹⁰ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ¹¹ Inada, "The Range of Buddhist Ontology."
- ¹² Inada, "The Range of Buddhist Ontology."
- ¹³ Sponberg, "The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self,"
- ¹⁴ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.

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- ¹⁵ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ¹⁶ Jones, "Buddhism and Social Action: An Exploration" in "The Wheel", No. 285/286 1981 available at <http://accesstoinight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel285.html>
- ¹⁷ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ¹⁸ Sponberg, "The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self."
- ¹⁹ Sponberg, "The Buddhist Conception of an Ecological Self."
- ²⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VII, I, 1028a-b.
- ²¹ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ²² Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ²³ This often leads to phenomenalism, the position that all we can know are phenomena or appearances.
- ²⁴ By contrast we have (a) a real distinction, between two separable things – such as the two parts of a scissor and (b) a purely mental or conceptual distinction such as between Socrates' animality and his humanity, or between a painting as a formal arrangement of color and as a social document reflecting its time. Some see mental distinctions as applying only to objects of thought such as the moral, economic and psychological aspects of money. There is a long-standing controversy about the formal distinction.
- ²⁵ "Intrinsic identity" in Aristotelian terms is 'substance,' that is, an object with "intrinsic identity" possesses attributes but is not itself a property of anything else.
- ²⁶ Payuto, *Dependent Origination: The Buddhist Law of Conditionality*.
- ²⁷ "Rebirth," by Percy Nanayakkara <http://sibv.org/bv15.htm>. Cf. "Lastly a word about 'free will': will is not something static. It is not a positive entity, or a self-existent thing. Will is quite momentary like any other mental state; there is, therefore, no 'will' as a 'thing' to be either free or not free. The truth is that 'will' is conditioned and a passing phenomenon" in Piyadassi Thera, "The Law of Cause and Effect." http://buddhistinformation.com/law_of_cause_and_effect.htm
- ²⁸ "Paticcasamuppada" in Nyanatiloka, *A Buddhist Dictionary*, http://palikanon.com/english/wtb/n_r/paticca_samuppaada.htm
- ²⁹ See my "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings" in "Lights of Irfan IV."
- ³⁰ A similar situation exists with Whitehead's Aristotle-based process philosophy. See William A Christian *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics* 115-116.
- ³¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*.
- ³² *Some Answered Questions* 69, 201; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 77; *Paris Talks* 17.
- ³³ *Some Answered Questions* 162. The four causes given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirm Aristotle's material, efficient, final and formal cause.
- ³⁴ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 79; *Some Answered Questions* 129; *Bahá'í World Faith* 344.

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- ³⁵ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 309.
- ³⁶ Hegel, *Encyclopedia* Para.88, (4).
- ³⁷ *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
- ³⁸ Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, Para. 119.
- ³⁹ Hegel, *Encyclopedia* Para.81 (2).
- ⁴⁰ Hegel, *Encyclopedia* Para.81 (2).
- ⁴¹ Hegel, *Encyclopedia* Note to Para.81 (1).
- ⁴² Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, Note to Para 81, (1).
- ⁴³ Although this triad is used to describe Hegel's dialectic, he never actually used 'synthesis' and 'thesis' himself, though he did refer to a triad in the dialectic.
- ⁴⁴ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Bk II, "The Doctrine of Essence", 414; emphasis added.
- ⁴⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Bk I, "The Doctrine of Being", 136-137.
- ⁴⁶ Hegel's term , see for example, *Encyclopedia*, Para. 204.
- ⁴⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 206, p. 126.
- ⁴⁸ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Para.119.
- ⁴⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para.228, p.137.
- ⁵⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 229, 137; emphasis in original.
- ⁵¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 229, 137.
- ⁵² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 229, 138.
- ⁵³ See my "*Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance*" for evidence for the realist nature of the philosophy embedded in the Writings.
- ⁵⁴ *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVII, 66.
- ⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072a, b.
- ⁵⁶ Luke 9:24.
- ⁵⁷ Hegel, *The Science of Logic* 133.
- ⁵⁸ *Science of Logic* 136.
- ⁵⁹ *Science of Logic* 134.
- ⁶⁰ See above page 14 and also my "*Reason and Faith in the Bahá'í Writings*" for a detailed exposition of this topic.
- ⁶¹ See section 10 of "*Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance*" at http://geocities.com/iankluge/ontology_complete.html or *Lights of Irfan, Book Six*.
- ⁶² The last sentence is repeated in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 102.
- ⁶³ See Kluge, "*The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings*" Section 4.2. in "*Lights of Irfan* IV" and at <http://www.geocities.com/iankluge/aristotle.html>
- ⁶⁴ Copelston, SJ, *A History of Philosophy* Vol. 7, Pt. 1, 230.
- ⁶⁵ *Some Answered Questions* 129.
- ⁶⁶ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 240.

- ⁶⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet of the Universe*; emphasis added. Original Tablet in *Makatib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous translation. http://bahai-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih
- ⁶⁸ Plato, *The Republic* VI 507b – 509c.
- ⁶⁹ Otherwise, why would Bahá'u'lláh reveal petitionary prayers? Why bother if God can't hear or answer?
- ⁷⁰ See for example John Cobb Jr.'s *A Christian Natural Theology* based on Whitehead; also Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.
- ⁷¹ *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 46. See my article "Reason and Faith in the Bahá'í Writings."
- ⁷² *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q.90, A.I.
- ⁷³ Plotinus, *The Enneads* VI, 8, Sec.7; see also Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
- ⁷⁴ Plotinus, *The Enneads* VI, 8, Sec.7; see also Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
- ⁷⁵ *Science of Logic* 82.
- ⁷⁶ "Barry D. Smith, "The Philosophical Basis of Mahayana Buddhism," <http://www.abu.nb.ca/Courses/GrPhil/EPhil/Ephind.htm>
- ⁷⁷ "Emptiness and Existence" by Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. <http://www.katinkahesselink.net/tibet/dalai2.html>
- ⁷⁸ See T R V Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* and David Kalupahana *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* for two strong and clear contrasting statements about the idea of ultimate reality in Buddhism.
- ⁷⁹ See again, the Dalai Lama's statement that emptiness is not nothing. See footnote 184.
- ⁸⁰ *A History of Philosophy* 227; 208, 205.
- ⁸¹ This should not be confused with a free-wheeling relativism which mistakes the recognition of various stations or perspectives with the assertion that all viewpoints are equally correct.
- ⁸² *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XCIII 185.
- ⁸³ See the struggle as to who will become master and who is to be slave in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para. 178 ff. Baillie and Miller translate this as the "lordship-bondage" struggle.
- ⁸⁴ *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Para 178ff.
- ⁸⁵ Luke 9:24.

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