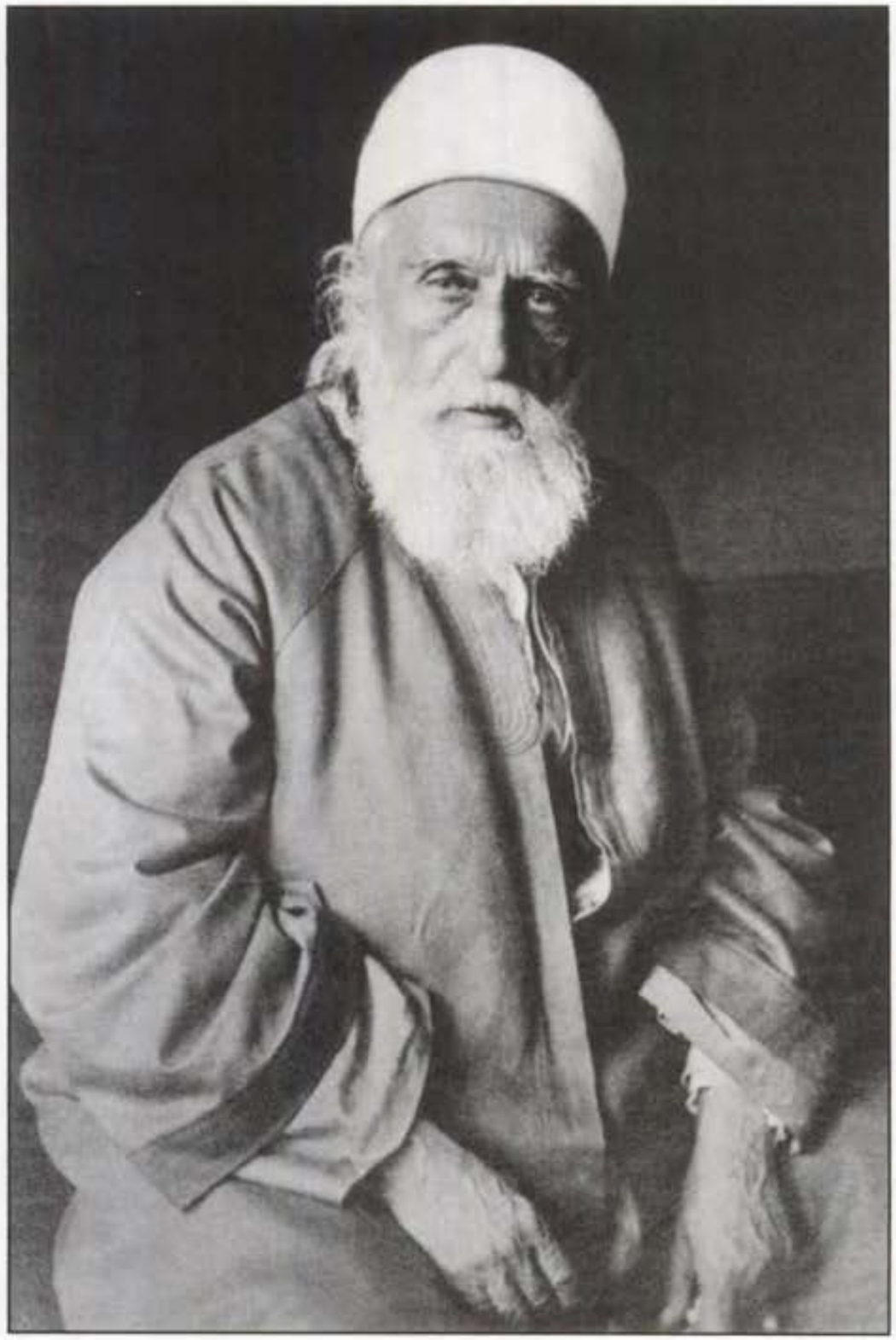

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

Discourses of Knowledge

by Franklin Lewis

This paper first suggests that many statements in the Bahá'í writings are couched in the terms of a particular discourse, or intellectual tradition, of the text's immediate audience. As such, these statements may assume some of the premises of the addressee, passing over them without necessarily seeking to challenge or affirm those premises in an absolute sense, in order to make an argument which the addressee can accept. Such premises may sometimes be factually true, in an empirical sense, while sometimes they may not be propositionally true, but may rather be true in a metaphoric and symbolic sense. This being the case, recovering the nature of the discourse being employed, or the intellectual context of the statement, can help one evaluate whether a given statement is meant to convey a propositional fact or a rhetorical truth. 'Abdu'l-Bahá often adopted the particular parameters of Western modernist discourse about knowledge, specifically in terms of the debate of science versus religion. His statements are, therefore, germane to contemporary questions about academic, or materialist, methodologies and the Bahá'í view toward these modes of knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá often appears to give precedence to logical proofs and scientific method over traditional religious modes or explanations of reality, particularly in questions of fact and information, though not necessarily where ethics and morality are concerned. He would therefore seem to assert the validity of Western academic, or materialist, methodologies.

First we must speak of logical proofs.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá (c. 1905)

Modes of discourse

In this paper, "discourse" refers to a conversation which unfolds over time, one that is governed by a particular set of premises and concepts in the context of which given arguments and inquiries are pursued.[1] A discourse often implies or delimits the type(s) of methodology that will be considered valid in investigating or "proving" questions or problems. In its broadest senses, we might think of the entire intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment as scientific or academic discourse. In a scientific discourse community, when questions are posed or particular data considered, most parties to the discussion will proceed with certain assumptions about the primacy of empirical evidence, the positing of falsifiable hypotheses, and the need to verify data by experimentation. This does not mean that all participants in the discourse will come to the same conclusions about matters under discussion, or that they will necessarily interpret particular sets of data in the same way, or that these methods will be the only factors informing their decisions.[2] It does mean that participants in the discussion will implicitly acknowledge certain premises and certain rules of evidence and argument.

A discourse need not be of a purely scientific nature, however. We might conceive of the Abrahamic religious traditions as belonging to a particular discourse. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith all agree on the divine missions of Abraham and Moses, and acknowledge the general principle of a personal God beyond history who intrudes into history to "reveal" itself to humankind through designated intermediaries. We might distinguish this discourse of the Abrahamic religious traditions from the Buddhist or Hindu traditions, which conceive of salvation history and of the numinous in substantially different ways from the Abrahamic traditions, and look to an entirely different line of enlightened ones as guides to the ultimate nature of reality.

The manifestation (*mazhar*) of God, in Bahá'í parlance, participates in a human discourse by communicating transcendent truth into a human language bound by culture and history, which nevertheless is able to transcend time and place. As Bahá'u'lláh alludes, in the Hidden Words:

> By My spirit and by My favor! By My mercy and by My beauty! All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice.[3]

Bahá'u'lláh spoke to the capacity and understanding of various correspondents, and thus addressed himself to more than one discourse tradition, as defined above. For example in communicating with Shiites or Babis, who expected an Eschaton in which the return of the twelfth Imam figured prominently, Bahá'u'lláh frequently mentions the Qá'im (*mahdí*), Husayn and 'Alí, etc. He did not begin from the same assumptions, however, in communicating with Zoroastrians, who did not by and large revere Islamic figures and indeed would more likely have been offended by references to them. 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes this rhetorical principle explicit in a work written as a young man, in 1875:

> If for example a spiritually learned Muslim is conducting a debate with a Christian and he knows nothing of the glorious melodies of the Gospel, he will, no matter how much he imparts of the Qur'án and its truths, be unable to convince the Christian, and his words will fall on deaf ears. Should, however, the Christian observe that the Muslim is better versed in the fundamentals of Christianity than the Christian priests themselves, and understands the purport of the Scriptures even better than they, he will gladly accept the Muslim's arguments, and he would indeed have no other recourse.[4]

Later in life, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said, in responding to his retinue's admiration for the effectiveness of his talks in America, that they were effective because he took the exigencies of the time (*eqtezá-ye vaqt*) and the audience's perspective (*mashrab-e hozzár*) into consideration. This report also suggests, however, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá learned from Bahá'u'lláh that this meant not simply respecting the audience by repeating the terms and assumptions of its cherished discourse, but including a quality of transcendental truth:

Bayán báyad be-mashrab-e hozzár va eqtezá-ye vaqt báshad, va hosn-e 'ebárat va e'tedál dar adá'-e ma'áni va kalemát lázem, faqat harf zadan nist. Hamishe dar 'Akká Mirzá Mohammad-e 'Ali bayánáti rá ke az man mi-shenid be-'aynehá dar maváqe'-e digar zekr migard [sic] *vali moltafet nabud ke hezárán hekam va masáleh lázem ast, na tanhá goftan. Dar ayyám-e Baghdád va Solaymániye, Shaykh 'Abd al-Hosayn gofte bud ke Jamál-e Mobárak Kord-há rá be-in vasile jam' o jazb kardand, ke esteláhát-e 'orafá va sufiye rá bayán mi-nemudand. Bicháre Shaykh-e mazkur raft va ketáb-e Futúhát-i Makkíya rá paydá va 'ebárat-e án rá hefz nemude, dar har já zekr kard. Did hichkas gush nemi-dahad. Khayli ta'ajjob kard ke cherá mardom gush nemidahand! Jamál-e Mobárak farmudand: "Be—Shaykh begu'id má Futúhát-i Makkíya rá nemi-khvánim, balke áyát-e madaniye rá elteqá mi-konim. Fosus-e Shaykh rá nemi-gu'im, bal az nosus-e eláhiye harf mi-zanim."*[5]

Discourse (*bayán*, also exposition, explanation, argument) must accord with the taste of the audience (*hozzár*, literally, "those present") and the exigencies of the time. Elegance of expression and temperance is required in presenting (*adá'*) meanings and ideas (*kalemát*, literally "words"), [but] it is not merely speaking [with words]. In Akká, Mirzá Mohammad-e 'Ali always repeated verbatim on other occasions what he heard from me, but he was not aware that great wisdom (*hezárán hekam*, literally thousands of counsels or maxims) and much consideration (*masáleh*, literally the plural of welfare, benefit) are needed, not just talk. Shaykh 'Abd al-Hosayn had said that in the days of Baghdad and Sulaymaniyyih the Blessed Beauty attracted the Kurds by discoursing in the terms of the gnostics and of Sufism. This poor Shaykh went and found a copy of the *Futúhát-i Makkíya*,[6] memorized its terminology, and used it everywhere. He found that no one would listen and was greatly surprised why people did not listen. The Blessed Beauty said, "Tell the Shaykh that we do not read *Futúhát-i Makkíya*, but recite the verses of civilization. We don't speak from the text of the *Fusús* of the Shaykh, rather we speak of the divine texts."[7]

Although obviously informed of and able to participate in several different discourses, Bahá'u'lláh was visited by few Europeans during his lifetime, and does not seem to have been greatly preoccupied with addressing religious and philosophical matters in terms of Western discourse.[8] The Middle East did have, like the West,

experience of newspapers. Bahá'u'lláh described them as "the mirror of the world" (*mer'át-e jahán*) and an "amazing and potent phenomenon" (*zohur-ist 'ajib va amr-ist bozorg*), while at the same time lamenting that most things reported of himself in the newspapers were incorrect. He warned journalists to be free of base or ulterior motivations (*az gharaz-e nafs va havá*) and, instead, aspire to justice (*'adl va ensáf*). In this context, Bahá'u'lláh recommends the following methodology or principle for journalists, which ought to apply equally to historians or those in any discipline seeking to write about the historical truth:

> *Dar omur be-qadr-e maqdur tafahhos namáyad tá haqiqat-e án ágáh shavad va benegárad.*
>
> They should enquire into situations as much as possible and ascertain the facts, then set them down in writing.[9]

Bahá'u'lláh himself also wrote a letter to the *Times* of London, describing the persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran, in which he asks the newspapers and cities of the world to heed the "groan of the downtrodden."[10]

Likewise, many of Bahá'u'lláh's moral exhortations could easily be extended to methodological premises, such as his injunction to the true seeker (*shakhs-e mojáhed*) to cleanse his heart from every remnant of love and hatred so that blind love will not lead him to err, nor will hatred prejudice him against the truth.[11] Likewise, we must not blindly imitate the ways of our forefathers,[12] but must see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears. To do this, and retain our humanity, we must be fair and equitable in our judgment:

> *Qul an ansifú yá úlí al-albáb, man lá insáfa lahu lá insáníya lahu*
>
> Say: Observe equity in your judgment, ye men of understanding heart! He that is unjust in his judgment is destitute of the characteristics that distinguish man's station.[13]

"Knowledge" in Bahá'u'lláh's writings

In the West, the post-Enlightenment discourse of knowledge had on several points contradicted religious dogma, traditional theology, or notions about the authorship of the Bible. Therefore, science was seemingly in combat with religious knowledge, and Western thinkers tended to dichotomize the two domains of knowledge. Since the clash between science and religion did not affect the Islamic world to the same extent it did the Western world,[14] Bahá'u'lláh does not speak extensively of science in apposition or opposition to religion. He viewed the ultimate purpose of knowledge to be the moral improvement of humanity and the physical advance of civilization. Bahá'u'lláh describes the powers of human knowledge as ultimately proceeding from divine revelation or grace. As such, the goal of acquiring knowledge should be to further its possessors' progress toward God, not to veil him from divine truth:

Yá qawm inná qaddarná al-'ulúm li-'irfáni al-ma'lúm

> We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge.[15]

In his later writings, Bahá'u'lláh frequently mentions the importance of acquiring knowledge and stresses the utilitarian and also transcendental value of the arts and sciences. In the sixth Taráz, for example, Bahá'u'lláh declares:

> Knowledge (*dáná'i*) is one of the wondrous gifts of God (*ne'mat-háye eláhí*). It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it. Such arts and material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of His knowledge (*'elm*) and wisdom (*hekmat*) which have been revealed in Epistles and Tablets through His Most Exalted Pen—a Pen out of whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts of the world are brought to light.[16]

In the Third Tajallí, Bahá'u'lláh writes of arts, crafts and sciences (*'olum va fonun va sanáye'*):

> Knowledge (*'elm*) is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent on everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim (*haqq*) of scientists and craftsmen (*sáhebáne 'olum va sanáye'*) on the peoples of the world . . . In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him.[17]

Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

> Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.[18]

These and other writings of Bahá'u'lláh will, no doubt, be mined for further implications about the importance and the limitations of knowledge. Furthermore, reading Bahá'u'lláh's statements about the modes of knowing and the types of knowledge in the context of Islamic philosophical and religious discourse[19] might give us additional insight into the bases of Bahá'í epistemology. However, as mentioned earlier, Bahá'u'lláh does not usually address the problem of knowledge in terms of Western discourse on the conflict of science and religion or the contradictions of faith and reason,[20] a discourse which remains a crucial methodological issue in the Western intellectual tradition. Rather, the notion of the harmony of science and religion, which has come to be thought of as a central principle of the Bahá'í Faith, seems to have been expounded most explicitly by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. During his travels in the West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá came into contact with many Western intellectuals and religious thinkers of various backgrounds. His statements on these occasions extend and amplify his father's teachings by more directly engaging Western discourse and methodology on the question of epistemology (or how we may know things), and the methodologies of investigation and inquiry.

If 'Abdu'l-Bahá did enter into discussions from the frame of reference of his audience (whether Shiite, Babi, Sunni, Christian, or secular Western), then it is necessary to avoid facile conclusions about the propositional truth of each and every premise that he states. When 'Abdu'l-Bahá employs a particular discourse, he may not necessarily intend to validate it, as a "fact," or historical or physical reality, because the logical conclusions of a given discourse do not of necessity point to absolute truths. By analogy, a novel can reveal emotional, spiritual, and social truths though it is entirely fictional: its truths are not therefore propositional, but metaphorical. Zarqáni quotes 'Abdu'l-Bahá as saying that the talks he gave in the churches and gatherings of America were in accordance with the receptivity of souls and the requirements of the age, at which point a poem is cited:

> The father sings *la-la* to lull his babe to sleep
> Although his mind encompasses a world of knowledge.[21]

So, when Bahá'u'lláh adopts a particular discourse—for example the discourse of Islamic philosophy he employs in his Tablet of Wisdom—we need not necessarily conclude that he is thereby validating it as propositionally, factually or absolutely true.[22] Rather than arguing that his audience's basic premises are imprecise or even false (a rhetorical strategy that might well distract listeners and engender resistance), Bahá'u'lláh would seem to let some of his audience's postulates, assumptions, and even prejudices, stand. After all, these premises held by the audience are being used as analogs and metaphors to prove other points, and are, in themselves, of secondary importance. Similarly, the parables of Jesus are not meant to provide his audience with factual details of conversations or situations that actually took place. Rather they are hypothetical or allegorical situations that point to spiritual truth. Likewise, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of "ether" or refers to the Native Americans as "the savages of America,"[23] we might examine these statements as prevailing rhetorical assumptions, incidental elements of a particular discourse, rather than as absolute propositions about physical reality or historical truth.

So, in the remarks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that follow, he is arguing within a particular discourse. Therefore, some of the points made might variously be understood either as axiomatically true, relatively true, or metaphorically true. His comments on the types of knowledge and modes of acquiring them might intend a metaphorical reality, rather than a factual, scientific, or propositionally exclusive mode of understanding ultimate reality. Indeed, even if some of these statements are meant to contain postulates of physics, chemistry, biology, history, etc., they may be simultaneously true with their apparent logical contraries (much as light can be understood both as a wave or as photon particles). In any case, according to the principle of the harmony of science and religion which these statements themselves expound, theological statements must be understood and construed in the light of scientific discoveries which may have some bearing on the same questions. Therefore, though they are certainly probative, I do not propose that we necessarily understand the following comments of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as exclusive and absolute ways, valid in every conceivable frame of reference, of understanding the problem of truth and how human beings know things.

Consequently, I do not read the passages that follow from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings as the basis for a Bahá'í methodology or epistemology that should be advocated in a doctrinaire or dogmatic fashion. Rather, I would incline to see them as parables and guides to how Bahá'ís ought to think through the modern discourse on the conflict between science and religion, and more especially, the question of methodology in the study of the Bahá'í Faith (or any other object of investigation, for that matter). Since academic methodologies still operate largely within the discourse of the Western empirical tradition and the enlightenment confrontation between science and tradition, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's framing of comments in this context ensures that they remain directly relevant to contemporary discourse.

A note on sources

As most of the passages in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings relevant to the question of epistemology considered in this paper come from *Some Answered Questions* or *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, some remarks are in order about these sources. *Some Answered Questions* (*Mofávazát*), a record of the responses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a range of questions put to him by Laura Clifford Barney (later Dreyfus-Barney) in Akka during the years 1904-1906, offers one of the most systematic expositions of Bahá'í beliefs about the human soul. It also addresses, both implicitly (by its insistent practice of logical philosophical argumentation) and explicitly (in theory), how we may know and discover the nature of reality, both physical and spiritual. *Some Answered Questions* was first published in London in 1908, with 'Abdu'l-Bahá listed as author and Barney as collector and translator of the Persian text. The Persian text was recorded by individuals accustomed to working as secretaries for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, since Barney did not wish to trust her personal notes. Barney gives the names of these secretaries as Myrza Hadi, Myrza Mohseinne, Nourideen, and Moneer.[24] Their transcription of these talks was read line-by-line by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who occasionally corrected a word or a line with his reed pen, and then signed each lesson and stamped it with his seal, as he did with the tablets which he wrote or dictated himself. There are reportedly at least three copies of manuscripts extant, all of which contain corrections by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, himself.[25] The Persian text of the work was printed during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's lifetime, with the second edition published in Cairo by Faraj Alláh Zaki al-Kordi as *Al-nur al-abhá fi Mofávazát-e 'Abd al-Bahá* in 1920 (1329 A.H.).[26] *Some Answered Questions* is therefore considered as part of the authoritative scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith.

The talks that 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave while in North America are recorded in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, a compilation of stenographic records of speeches which 'Abdu'l-Bahá delivered in the United States and Canada. These records reflect what the note-takers understood from simultaneous English interpretations made by various Persians in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's entourage as he spoke in Persian. Comparison with the Persian originals of the talks reveals the English interpretations to be generally accurate, though not always precise.

The notes taken in English during some of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks were first published in the journal *Star of the West*. These articles, along with the notes from other talks, were later compiled by Howard MacNutt who sought 'Abdu'l-Bahá's permission to publish them in book form. Though 'Abdu'l-Bahá was aware that there had been errors by the interpreters, he gave permission for the compilation to be completed, charging Mr. MacNutt with the responsibility of taking care to ensure that the exact text of the talks be accurately reproduced without error and deviation.[27] The resulting book, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, was first published in two volumes, appearing in 1922 and 1925, respectively. It was subsequently reissued in a one-volume edition in 1939, and again in 1943. A new edition of this book appeared in 1982. It included a new translation by Amin Banani, made directly from the Persian text of the talk delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on 23 April 1912 at Howard University.

This particular talk at Howard University, because it is translated from the transcript of the original Persian, can be considered an accurate record of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá said. However, most of the talks in *Promulgation of Universal Peace* consist of the English notes recorded by various individuals, not of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, of course, but of the words of an interpreter. The English text, then, cannot be considered a verbatim record of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, and as such, it is not considered Bahá'í scripture. However, according to Zarqáni,[28] the Persian texts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks, as recorded by the Persian members of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's entourage, were generally presented to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for his approval and correction before publication. As such, "the verbatim record in Persian of His talks would of course be more reliable than one in English, because he was not always accurately interpreted," as indicated in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 24 October 1947. A letter from the Universal House of Justice, dated 24 June 1980, indicates that where the "original authenticated text" of the Persian talk has not been found, the existing English texts in *Promulgation of*

Universal Peace and *Paris Talks* would have to be "clearly distinguished from those which form a part of Bahá'í Scripture." These English notes of talks are not, therefore, Bahá'í scripture. They may nevertheless be used by the Bahá'í community as long as these distinctions are maintained and "the degree of authenticity of every document" is known and understood. The original authenticated Persian transcription of the talks would, by contrast, seem to qualify as Bahá'í scripture. The Persian text of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks in Europe, America and Egypt has fortunately been published, and it contains most, though by no means all, of the talks appearing in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*.[29] For this reason, we will consider the transliterated Persian text in conjunction with the English wherever possible.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on epistemology

'Abdu'l-Bahá draws a distinction in some passages of *Some Answered Questions* between "logical" and "spiritual" proofs:

> The proofs which we have adduced relative to the origin of the human species were logical proofs. Now we will give the spiritual proofs, which are essential. For, as we have proved Divinity by logical arguments, and have also proved logically that man exists from his origin and foundation as man, and that his species has existed from all eternity, now we will establish spiritual proofs that human existence—that is the species of man—is a necessary existence, and that without man the perfections of Divinity would not appear. But these are spiritual proofs, not logical proofs . . .[30]

The reader will remark that neither the logical proofs (the word used in Persian for "logical" being *'aqli*, with a semantic range of rational, reasonable, logical, mental), nor the spiritual proofs (the word here translated as spiritual being *eláhi*, meaning divine, Lordly, belonging to the realm of God), is considered superior. Both are presented as valid ways of establishing truth, effective in certain contexts.

When we come to the end of this same section, however, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that not everyone will accept the spiritual proofs (*adalle-ye eláhiye*), and he has therefore begun with logical argumentation (*adalle-ye 'aqliye*), which is a self-evident mode of discourse, one open to discussion on shared premises and capable of acceptance or rejection by people of various beliefs on the common ground of logic:

> This is a spiritual truth, but one which we cannot at the beginning put forth for the benefit of the materialists. First we must speak of the logical proofs, afterward the spiritual proofs.[31]

Indeed, there are passages in the talks and writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá where he appears to privilege the logical mode of discourse as a means of understanding apparent contradictions between science and religion:

> That which science and reason cannot support must be rejected as imitation and not reality. Then differences of belief will disappear.[32]

The authenticated Persian original of this is even more emphatic in the primacy it gives to science and reason. It might be rendered provisionally as follows:

> If one of the religious questions is contrary to reason, contrary to science, it is pure fancy . . . that which science does not verify, reason does not accept, is not the truth.

The Persian text reads:

> *agar mas'ale-i az masá'el-e dini mokhálef-e 'aql báshad, mokhálef-e 'elm báshad, vahm-e mahz ast...ánche 'elm tasdiq nemi-konad, 'aql qabul nemi-konad, haqiqat nist*[33]

Bahá'ís themselves probably do not think of the harmony of science and religion in such stark terms of privileging science over scripture, but let's consider another passage from a talk given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Church of the Messiah in Montreal, which, according to the Persian text of the talk, was a Unitarian church (*kelisá-ye movaheddin*):[34]

> Bahá'u'lláh has declared that religion must be in accord with science and reason. If it does not correspond with scientific principles and the

processes of reason, it is superstition. For God has endowed us with faculties by which we may comprehend the realities of things, contemplate reality itself. If religion is opposed to reason and science, faith is impossible . . .

Din báyad motábeq-e 'elm va 'aql báshad. Agar motábeq-e 'elm va 'aql na-báshad, owhám ast, zirá khodá 'aql be ensán dáde tá edrák-e haqá'eq-e ashyá' konad, haqiqat be-parastad. Agar din mokhálef-e 'elm va 'aql báshad, momken nist sabab-e etminán-e qalb shavad; chun sabab-e etminán nist, owhám ast...leházá, báyad masá'el-e diniye rá bá 'aql va 'elm tatbiq nemud, tá qalb etminán yábad va sabab-e sorur-e ensán shavad.

'Abdu'l-Bahá several times repeated in almost identical words this idea that religion must conform to science, not the other way around. For example, the following passage:[35]

The fourth teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the agreement of religion and science. God has endowed man with intelligence and reason, whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions. If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance, and the child of ignorance is superstition. Unquestionably there must be agreement between true religion and science. If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation.

Ta'lim-e chahárom-e Hazrat-e Bahá' Alláh ánke din báyad motábeq-e 'elm báshad zirá khodá 'aql be-ensán dáde tá haqá'eq-e ashyá' rá tahqiq namáyad. Agar masá'el-e diniye mokhálef-e 'aql va 'elm báshad, vahm ast, zirá moqábel-e 'elm, jahl ast. Lá bodd din báyad motábeq-e 'aql báshad tá az baráye ensán etminán hásel shavad. Agar mas'ale'i mokhálef-e 'aql báshad, momken nist az baráye ensán etminán hásel gardad. Hamishe motazalzel ast.

Bahá'ís and the Western academy

If conflicts between science and religion, reason and faith, are to be adjudicated according to rational standards, such inquiries obviously

cannot be carried out upon denominational lines. If the origins of the world, for example, are to be determined on the basis of scriptural accounts and theological traditions, then evangelical Christians would have one reality, Native Americans another, liberal Christians yet another, Buddhists yet again another, and so forth. There is no way to adjudicate between competing faith claims, which rest on the authority of scriptures or traditions considered divinely inspired. Rational, scientific methodology, however, creates a common ground upon which the various faith communities can meet and discuss evidence according to experimentally or logically verifiable standards, for all can participate in a shared discussion using these tools.[36]

Obviously, Bahá'ís, like other people of faith, must pursue such means of debate in the public sphere, following shared methodologies, with people who do not accept many—or even any—of the same faith postulates. To do so, they must leave the comfortable topography of their faith-based mental landscape, and explore the common boundaries of discourse both within and outside the academy, among people of a variety of creeds, with a wide spectrum of beliefs about the ultimate nature of life and whether God is still healthy, ailing or dead. Such "intellectual pioneering" on the part of people of faith is an opportunity for consultation and ecumenical association with people of different faiths and of no faith in the crucial public sphere where civil and secular society is created, and which best fosters multiple approaches to the independent investigation of truth. This does not require any of the parties to jettison their faith or supra-rational beliefs; it merely means that they bracket these beliefs for the sake of discussion with people who do not begin from the same premises. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "first we must speak of logical proofs."

This rationalist mode of discourse is based on a culture of respect for the human mind. It is not completely value-free, nor does it require a purely materialist conception of the cosmos, though it does accomodate such premises. Committed Christians of a certain stripe in the United States sometimes disparagingly refer to this type of intellectual discourse as "secular humanism." Within the Bahá'í

community, there are also those who sometimes look upon intellectuals with scepticism or fear. People who rely overmuch on the intellect, at the expense of the spirit, are perhaps thought to hold and promote a distorted view of truth, or to be blind to the true promptings of the meta-rational or non-material world. There are statements in the Bahá'í writings to the effect that worldly knowledge can act as a veil to blind its possessor to the truth—this not because knowledge, or the pursuit of it, is corrosive, but because knowledge can lead to pride and hubris in those who possess it. However, both Bahá'u'lláh (e.g., in *Seven Valleys*, p. 5; *Kitáb-i Íqán*, pp. 192-93; and the *Javáher al-asrár*), and 'Abdu'l-Bahá (in *Some Answered Questions*), explain that the principle of independent investigation of truth requires that we be fair in our judgment, and not allow our love for or prejudice against particular people, and one presumes ideas, turn us away from the truth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, himself, visited universities and praised their scientific methodologies. At Stanford University on 8 October 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá told 1800 university students and 180 professors that "knowledge" is the greatest of human achievements. He used the word *'elm* (Arabic, *'ilm*), meaning acquired knowledge, or science.[37] This word *'ilm* was traditionally used for the religious sciences, that is to say, the knowledge of hadith and their transmission, of the Qur'an and the Sunna, among other things. Its primary object was knowing the laws of Islam, expounded through established principles of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) which had been worked out and agreed upon as canonical.[38] In the nineteenth century, however, as scientific and technical knowledge began to permeate the Middle East from Europe, the word *'ilm*, especially in its plural (*'ulúm*), was often used to translate "science" or the physical "sciences." It has now come to mean academic methods of study in general (*ravesh-e 'elmi*=scientific method) or bodies of knowledge, as in the academic discipline of political science (*'olum-e siási*) or even more generally, the humanities (*'olum-e ensáni*) and the natural sciences (*'olum-e tabi'i*).

This acquired human knowledge (*'ilm*) is distinct from *'irfán*, the knowledge of spiritual recognition or insight, a word which

among Sufis often has the meaning of esoteric knowledge or gnosis, though it can also more mundanely convey the sense of "cognition." It is actually this type of spiritual insight-knowledge-cognition (Arabic *'irfán*, Persian *'erfán*) of God, along with worship of the Deity, that is the purpose of human life, as Bahá'u'lláh calls upon his followers to confess in their obligatory prayers:

> I testify, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know (*'irfán*) Thee and to worship Thee
>
> *ashhadu yá iláhí bi-annaka khalaqtaní li-'irfánika wa 'ibádatika*

To achieve this knowledge of God or Truth (*ma'refat-e Haqq*), a person must rely upon his own efforts of insight, his heart and his innate character (*be-basar va qalb va fetrat-e khod*). It is insufficient to imitate what one has been told (*che ke taqlid kefáyat nanamáyad*). This kind of knowledge/recognition/insight of God (*'irfán*) is, Bahá'u'lláh says in his Words of Wisdom, the root of the more experiential or logical knowledges, or sciences (*'ulúm*).[39]

> The greatest attainment in the world of humanity has ever been scientific in nature. It is the discovery of the realities of things . . . The highest praise is due to men who devote their energies to science, and the noblest centre is a centre wherein the sciences and arts are taught and studied. Science ever tends to the illumination of the world of humanity. It is the cause of eternal honor to man . . .[40]

The Persian is actually much more forceful, and it uses the word "ulema" (Persian *'olamá*, derived from Arabic), a word that is typically translated from Islamic texts into Western languages as "clergy" or "learned divines," but which means "the learned," people who have studied and mastered the sciences, foremost among which was the science of hadith, the knowledge of the Qur'an, of Islamic law, theology, (eventually also physics and philosophy, etc):

> *A'zam manqabat-e 'álam-e ensáni 'elm ast, zirá kashf-e haqáyeq-e ashyá' ast... Ashraf jami'ati ke dar 'álam tashkil mi-gardad jam'iyat-e 'olamá ast va ashraf markaz dar 'álam-e ensáni markaz-e 'olum va fonun ast, zirá 'elm sabab-e rowshaná'i-ye 'álam ast, sabab-e ráhat va ásáyesh ast, 'elm sabab-e 'ezzat-e 'álam-e ensáni ast.*[41]

On May 23, 1912, at Clark University, in Worcester, Massachusetts, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had used almost identical words. This talk is not included in translation in *Promulgation of Universal Peace*; a provisional rendering therefore follows the transliterated Persian:

> *Pas ma'lum shod ke 'elm a'zam-e manáqeb-e 'álam-e ensani ast. 'Elm 'ezzat-e abadi ast, 'elm hayát-e sarmadi ast . . .*
>
> *Zirá 'elm anvár ast va shakhs-e 'álem mesl-e qendil-e derakhshande va tábán. Jami'-e khalq mayyet-and va 'olamá zende . . .*
>
> *Masháhir-e 'olamá'e salaf rá moláheze konid ke setáre-ye 'ezzat-eshán az ofoq-e abadi derakhshande ast va tá abad al-ábád báqi va bar qarár. Leházá neháyat-e sorur rá dáram ke dar in dár al-fonun házer-am. Omid-am chonán ast ke in markaz 'azim shavad va be-anvár-e 'olum jami'-e áfáq rá rowshan konad, kur há rá biná konad . . . Zirá 'elm nur ast va jahl zolmat*[42]
>
> So it is evident that knowledge is the greatest of the virtues of the human world. Knowledge is eternal might, knowledge is everlasting life . . . for knowledge is rays of light and the learned person is like a bright and shining lamp. All creatures are as dead, and the learned (*'olamá*) alive . . . Consider the famous learned ones of the past and how the star of their might shines from the horizon of eternity and will remain fixed and undying from the beginning to the end of eternity. Therefore, I am extremely happy to be in this academy (*dár al-fonun*).[43] My hope is that this center will become great and illumine all horizons with the lights of knowledge (*'olum*), give sight to the blind . . . for knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness . . .

During the course of this same talk, 'Abdu'l-Bahá praised the academic institutions of the United States, colleges and technical universities (*madáres-e dár al-fonun-há*). He expressed the hope that other countries would follow this example and establish schools for the training of children, and raise the banner of knowledge so that the world of humanity would be illuminated and the realities and mysteries of all beings become apparent and prejudices be dispelled.[44] Since these same institutions were champions of academic methodologies (sometimes considered materialist methodologies)

and upheld theories, such as evolution, that were opposed by religious orthodoxy, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments, in the context of those days, suggest support for such methodologies.

At the Bethel Literary Society in Washington, D.C., 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically praised the technique of "inductive reasoning and research," through the process of which man is "informed of all that appertains to humanity." A scientific man using these principles "studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization." Indeed, science is the "very foundation of all individual and national development. Without the basis of investigation development is impossible." He even puts it this way:

> All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research . . . All other blessings are temporary, this is an everlasting possession.[45]

Bahá'u'lláh confirms the importance of this blessing, in the Lawh-i Hikmat, where he enjoins upon us respect for the learned (the *'ulamá'*, the possessors of *'ilm*, the same who are denounced in the Kitáb-i Íqán as "the learned divines"):

> Beware O My loved ones, lest ye despise the merits of My learned servants whom God hath graciously chosen to be the exponents of His Name, "The Fashioner" amidst mankind.[46]

In a talk in Minneapolis not regarded as authenticated because the original Persian notes are not extant, 'Abdu'l-Bahá praised the philosophic methods practised by "the philosophers of Greece—such as Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and others," who were "devoted to the investigation of both natural and spiritual phenomena."

> In divine questions we must not depend entirely upon the heritage of tradition and former human experience; nay, rather we must exercise reason, analyze and logically examine the facts presented so that confidence will be inspired and faith attained. Then and then only the reality of things will be revealed to us.
>
> Today the philosophy and logic of Aristotle are known throughout the world. Because they were interested in both natural and divine phi-

losophy, furthering the development of the physical world of mankind as well as the intellectual, they rendered praiseworthy service to humanity. This was the reason of the triumph and survival of their teachings and principles. Man should continue both these lines of research and investigation so that all the human virtues, outer and inner, may become possible. The attainment of these virtues, both material and ideal, is conditioned upon intelligent investigation of reality, by which investigation the sublimity of man and his intellectual progress is accomplished. Forms must be set aside and renounced; reality must be sought. We must discover for ourselves where and what reality is. In religious beliefs nations and peoples today are imitators of ancestors and forefathers . . . The requirement in this day is that man must independently and impartially investigate every form of reality.[47]

Faith itself, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is here quoted as saying, requires the exercise of reason and logic.

Types of knowledge

In a talk to the Theosophists of Paris, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of knowledge (*'elm*) being of two kinds—abstract (*tasavvori*, conceptual or suppositional) and empirical (*tahaqqoqi*)—and he stressed the importance of the latter: "Complete knowledge is the experiential realization of a thing, not the imagination of a thing."[48] In his table talks with Laura Clifford Barney, 'Abdu'l-Bahá also divides knowledge into two types, though these categories differ somewhat from that above:

> A subject that is essential[49] for the comprehension of the questions that we have mentioned, and of others of which we are about to speak, so that the essence of the problems may be understood, is this: that human knowledge is of two kinds. One is the knowledge of things perceptible to the senses (*ma'lumát-e mahsuse*)—that is to say, things which the eye, or ear, or smell, or taste, can perceive, which are called objective, or sensible. So the sun, because it can be seen is said to be objective; and in the same way sounds are sensible because the ear hears them . . .
>
> The other kind of human knowledge is intellectual (*ma'qulát*)—that is to say, it is a reality of the intellect (*haqá'eq-e ma'qule*); it has no outward form and no place and is not perceptible to the senses. For example, the power of intellect (*'aql*) is not sensible; none of the inner qualities of man is a sensible thing; on the contrary they are intellectual realities (*haqá'eq-e ma'qule*). So love is a mental reality and not sensible (*va hamchonin hobb niz haqiqat-e ma'qule ast, mahsuse nist*); for this reality the ear does not hear, the eye does not see, the smell does not perceive . . . In the same way, nature, also, in its essence is an intellectual reality and is not sensible; the human spirit is an intellectual, not sensible reality . . .

This passage is taken from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourse titled "Outward Forms and Symbols Must be Used to Convey Intellectual Conceptions,"[50] which argues that scripture must be understood symbolically, as a metaphor for an intellectual reality that is not perceptible to the senses (*haqá'eq-e ma'qule ast ke surat-e khárejiye nadárad va makán nadárad va ghayr mahsuse ast*).

'Abdu'l-Bahá returns to this theme in another chapter of *Some Answered Questions*, "The Knowledge of the Divine Manifestations." Laura Clifford Barney asks if the knowledge of the divine manifestations is limited, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reply should be noted here in full:

> Knowledge is of two kinds. One is subjective (*'elm-e vojudí*)[51] and the other is objective knowledge (*'elm-e sovari/suri*)—that is to say, an intuitive knowledge (*'elm-e tahaqqoqi*) and a knowledge derived from perception (*'elm-e tasavvori*).
>
> The knowledge of things which men universally have is gained by reflection or by evidence—that is to say, either by the power of the mind the conception of an object is formed, or from beholding an object the form is produced in the mirror of the heart. The circle of this knowledge is very limited because it depends upon effort and attainment.
>
> But the second sort of knowledge, which is the knowledge of being, is intuitive (*'elm-e vojudi va tahaqqoqi ast*); it is like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself.
>
> For example, the mind (*'aql*) and the spirit of man are cognizant of the conditions and states of the members and component parts of the body, and are aware of all the physical sensations; in the same way, they are aware of their power, of their feelings, and of their spiritual conditions. This is the knowledge of being which man realizes and

perceives, for the spirit surrounds the body and is aware of its sensations and powers. This knowledge is not the outcome of effort and study. It is an existing thing; it is an absolute gift.[52]

Modes of knowing

'Abdu'l-Bahá outlines four methods of acquiring knowledge, or modes of perception (*mizán-e edrák*) in *Some Answered Questions*: the senses (*mizán-e hess*); reason (*mizán-e 'aql*); religious tradition (*mizán-e naql*; less specifically, whatever human knowledge is known through transmission, oral or written, and not through sense perception or logic); and the comprehension which comes through the bounty of the Holy Spirit (*fayz-e Ruh al-qodos*).[53] The first three methods are fallible: the senses can be mistaken; logic and reason, presumably because they can begin with faulty premises, can lead to conflicting conclusions; religious tradition, because it involves interpretation, which requires the use of reason, is also faulty. These various methods may be used separately, or in conjunction with one another; that is to say they are independent modes of investigation, though they can, and should, be brought to bear simultaneously on certain issues. Reason is the method 'Abdu'l-Bahá associates with the philosophers, and religious tradition with the theologians and clergy. Unfortunately, none of these methods are absolutely reliable. The fourth method, the outpourings of the holy spirit, is the only one that is true and sound (*sahih*), never subject to doubt (*dar án abadan shakk va shobheh'i nist*). However, it apparently comes to us only by divine grace (*fayz*), and not by our own will and effort.[54]

At the Hotel Ansonia in New York on 17 April 1912, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of this fourth mode of knowledge it was translated as "inspiration,"[55] and it was described as an "influx of the human heart." 'Abdu'l-Bahá went on to say, however, the "satanic promptings which afflict mankind" are also an "influx of the heart." 'Abdu'l-Bahá then poses the question, how do we know when our inspiration is divine and when it is "satanic"?

> Briefly, the point is that in the human material world of phenomena these four are the only existing criteria or avenues of knowledge, and all of them are faulty and unreliable. What then remains? How shall we attain the reality of knowledge? By the breath and prompting of the Holy Spirit, which is light and knowledge itself.[56]

Evidently, then, though perception, logic, and tradition are all flawed modes of knowledge, it is necessary sometimes to use reason as the primary or at least initial mode of discourse, because reason is a method that does not require equal stations of spiritual insight between the interlocutors, but provides a common ground, like the physical senses, on which most observers can agree.

Here is the closest we can come to certainty, by involving various modes of knowledge, as 'Abdu'l Bahá, according to the notes taken by Edna McKinney from a simultaneous translation given while he spoke at Green Acre in Maine on 16 August 1912, explains:

> But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and manifest.[57]

Perhaps the reason for this is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the mind (*'aql*) and the spirit (*ruh*) as separate entities, which is, of course, an established discourse of neo-Platonic thought within the Islamic tradition. They are both present at birth, but in an imperfect state, "only when man attains maturity do the mind and the spirit appear and become evident in utmost perfection."[58]

Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá distinguishes between soul (*nafs*), spirit (*ruh*) and mind (*'aql*). Spirit appears to be a quiddity, a kind of essence of an ontological state. There is a vegetable spirit (*ruh-e nabáti*), an animal spirit (*ruh-e hayváni*), a human spirit (*ruh-e ensáni*), a spirit of faith (*ruh-e imáni*) and the holy spirit (*ruh al-qodos*). The vegetable and the animal spirit are subject to composition and decomposition, and hence are not immortal; the human spirit, on the other hand, is defined by the rational soul (*nafs-e náteqe*), which distinguishes it from the animal spirit. The human

spirit and the rational soul are two names for one reality, the "rational soul" being a term used by the philosophers. It is this that allows us to discover the realities of things, but unless assisted by the spirit of faith, our rational soul cannot become apprised of "the divine secrets and heavenly realities" (*mottale' be asrár-e eláhiye va haqá'eq-e láhutiye*). 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares this rational soul to a mirror, which no matter how polished, cannot reflect light until the light of faith shines upon it.[59]

Yet, the power within the human spirit is the mind or intellect (*'aql*). This intellect is like the light shining within the lamp of the rational soul/human spirit, or like the rays of the sun, with the soul/spirit being the sun.[60] The rational soul, which all humans possess alike, whether they are believers or deniers, faithful or wayward, is responsible for the discovery of all the sciences, arts, knowledge, institutions, and discoveries. True, this power of knowledge is limited and makes its discoveries only through the toil of investigation, and it is subject to error. In contrast, the universal divine intellect (*'aql-e kolli-ye eláhi*) is a supernatural power (*má vará'e tabi'at*), which, however, only the holy manifestations and the dawning places of prophecy possess. Human beings are illumined by it only in small measure, as it is reflected by God's intermediaries,[61] and we cannot attain to it through effort; this power to perceive spiritual realities is bestowed by the bounty of God. On the other hand, the power to make earthly discoveries is not bestowed on the basis of faithfulness or belief or any other spiritual quality, but on the basis of the effort of mental investigation.[62] And it is the rational soul/human spirit (*nafs-e náteqe/ruh-e ensáni*) which is the immortal part of the human being, which will live on after our death.[63]

'Abdu'l-Bahá enumerates in *Some Answered Questions* the following "spiritual powers" (*qová-ye ma'naviye*),[64] or faculties of the intellect and rational soul, which are over and above the five senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell), which we have in common with the animal spirit.[65] They are the power of the imagination (*qovve-ye motakhayyele*) which conceives things; the power of thought (*qovve-ye motafakkere*),[66] which reflects on realities; the power of

comprehension (*qovve-ye modreke*) which comprehends realities; and memory (*qovve-ye háfeze*),[67] which retains that which an individual imagines, thinks, or comprehends. There is a further sense, which mediates between the five outward or physical senses and these inward powers of the mind. This faculty 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "the common faculty" (*hess-e moshtarak*).[68] Of these five inward powers, which operate hierarchically, the common faculty is the first, transferring an impression of the physical senses to the imagination, which transfers to thought, which is transformed into comprehension, and is preserved in the memory.[69]

These powers are not possessed in equal capacity by all. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that each person has intelligence and capacity, but in differing degrees. Furthermore, the degree of education affects the intelligence.[70] But, as we have seen above, this power is not dependent on spiritual attainment, belief in God, creed, or any other qualification—other than the innate mental capacity and the degree of education. Of course, we do not gain knowledge of the essence of things, but only of their qualities (*chun ma'rufiyat-e ashyá, va hál ánke khalq-and va mahdud-and, be sefät-ast, nah be zát*).[71] However, the English notes of the words spoken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on 20 September, 1912, at the home of Albert Hall in Minneapolis do equate the acquisition of knowledge and the development of the intellect with the capacity to attain virtue:

> As human creatures fitted and qualified with this dual endowment, we must endeavor through the assistance and grace of God and by the exercise of our ideal power of intellect to attain all lofty virtues, that we may witness the effulgences of the Sun of Reality.[72]

Implications for Bahá'í methodology

Bahá'u'lláh, in presenting his message to Zoroastrians like Ustád Ján Mard or Mánikji Sáhibji, did not emphasize the Shiite teachings or the Islamic tradition with which the Babis were engaged, for it was in fact anathema to the Zoroastrians. In so doing, Bahá'u'lláh did not abandon his belief in the truth of Muhammad or Shiism, he just bracketed those beliefs to participate in a discourse that a

Zoroastrian could "hear" and respect. In similar fashion, the act of bracketing one's spiritual or suprarational beliefs to participate in academic discourse that is believable, that can be heard, by people who do not share the same premises is not an inherently materialist exercise, nor does it presuppose abandoning one's faith convictions. Bahá'ís in academia should, of course, adopt the assumptions of intellectual discourse, not only because this is the only way to engage in a constructive dialogue with non-Bahá'í intellectuals and academics, but because it preserves, employs, and hones sophisticated techniques which help us to better understand, not only the physical world, but the mental universe of the present and past.

If there is such a thing as a distinctively Bahá'í methodology, it cannot be based on essential differences in the modes of perception and evaluation of information. That is to say, somewhat obviously, there is no inherently Bahá'í mode of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, etc. There is likewise no inherent difference among people of different creeds in their ability for logic or rational evaluation. Socrates must be mortal if he is a man, and Bahá'ís are bound by this logic as much as anyone else. Bahá'ís are committed to consultation as a means of arriving at the truth. This consultation should include the clash of differing opinions, including rationalist or even materialist opinions, if the spark of truth is to be produced.

Where a distinctively Bahá'í methodology might emerge, it seems to me, is in the ethical application of knowledge and the creation of equitable access to knowledge and the benefits which ensue from it. This is properly a moral question about the means and ends of acquiring knowledge, and the values which drive a society's acquisition of knowledge, rather than a question about the modes or kinds of knowing. It is here, perhaps, where Bahá'ís have the most original contribution to make to the discourse of academic knowledge—in the ethics of what we do with what we can know, and how we adjudicate conflicting truth claims in consultation.

Notes

Franklin Lewis is Associate Professor of Persian Language and Literature at Emory University in Atlanta.

1. I have in mind not the linguistic term (discourse, discourse analysis), but rather the sense of "discourse" as it appears in theoretical discussions of the sociology of knowledge or the construction of the episteme, especially those informed by the arguments of Foucault. Wittgenstein's "language game," suggesting that a discussion can be true within a certain framework without necessarily pointing to external truths, reflects essentially the same notion, as do various other concepts such as Kuhn's "paradigm," etc. Not surprisingly, "discourse" has now entered academic Persian terminology (where it is variously rendered as *guyesh*, *goftán*). While I suggest below that 'Abdu'l-Bahá discusses ideas that are similar to the concept of discourse as "school of thought" (i.e., Sufi discourse), nevertheless, 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not use the concept or term "discourse" in the technical sense that it is often used today.
2. Different forms of discourse perform better or worse at answering certain kinds of questions. Scientific method, for example, does not do a particularly good job of addressing questions such as the existence or nature of divinity, the meaning of life, or how scientific knowledge should be morally applied.
3. *The Hidden Words*, trans. Shoghi Effendi, "with the assistance of some English friends" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, reprint 1975) pp. 19-20, Arabic #67.
4. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, trans. Marzieh Gail with Ali Kuli Khan (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957; [3rd ed., 1975]) p. 36. My thanks to Will McCants, who read a draft of this paper and pointed out the relevance of this passage here.
5. Mirzá Mahmud-e Zarqáni, *Badáye' al-ásár* (Bombay, 1914; [facsimile reprint, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982]) Vol 1, pp. 175-6. Note that this is Zarqáni's recollection of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá remembered Bahá'u'lláh to have said decades earlier, and as such is not authoritative. For speculation on Bahá'u'lláh's use of Sufi discourse as a bridge or transition between the particularist Shiite discourse of Babism and wider Sunni-based pan-Islamic concerns, see Franklin Lewis, "*Mathnaví-yi Mubárak*: introduction and provisional verse translation" [entitled "Poetry as Revelation" in the table of contents], *Bahá'í Studies Review*, Vol. 9 (1999/2000) pp. 106-16.
6. *Futúhát-i Makkíya* (Meccan Revelations) is the magnum opus of the "Great Shaykh" of theoretical Sufism, Muhyí al-Dín Ibn 'Arabí (d. 1240). Another of his works, *Fusús al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), is also alluded to a few lines further down.
7. Translation by the present writer. This reported speech, which may or may not have been correctly remembered by Zarqáni, would have status in the Bahá'í community as "pilgrim's notes," not scripture.
8. The point has, however, been made, that in Istanbul and other places in the Middle East, political discourse had been greatly influenced in the latter half of the nineteenth century by European political theory. Juan Ricardo Cole in *Moder-*

nity and the Millenium: The Genesis of the Bahá'í Faith in the Nineteenth-century Middle East (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) argues that Bahá'u'lláh sometimes uses political terminology in a modern way that reflects awareness of European political theory. No general consensus has as yet emerged on the extent to which this may be the case.

9. All the preceding statements on journalism come from Bahá'u'lláh's tablet, "Tarázát," in *Majmu'e'i az alváh-e Jamál-e Aqdas-e Abhá ke ba'd az Ketáb-e Aqdas názel shode* (Langenhain: Lajne-ye Nashr-e ásár-e Amri be-lesán-e Fársi va 'Arabi, 137 B.E./1980) p. 21. The official English translation appears in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) pp. 39-40.
10. See Abid Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 4 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987) p. 350.
11. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Íqán*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1931; [2nd ed. 1950]) p. 192.
12. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, trans. Marzieh Gail in consultation with Ali Kuli Khan (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1945, [revised ed., 1975]) p. 5.
13. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939; [2nd revised edition, 1976]) p. 204; Persian/Arabic text in *Montakhabáti az ásár-e Hazrat-e Bahá Alláh* (Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1984) p. 133.
14. While reason (*'aql*) is celebrated by most Islamic thinkers, its limitations in apprehending the ultimate reality and attaining certitude (*yaqin*) are often discussed among Sufis in particular. This theme is repeatedly engaged, for example, by Rumi in his *Masnavi* (see Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000) p. 400ff. 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests in his 1875 *Secrets of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975) p. 12, that the Iranian clergy cynically tried to convince the uneducated that modern Western methods were contrary to religion. However, this was because they came from heathen Europeans, not because science and technology were inherently irreligious.
15. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992; Arabic edition, same place and publisher, 1995) Verse 102. This passage was translated by Shoghi Effendi in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. p. 199 (XCVIII).
16. "Tarázát," in Bahá'u'lláh, *Majmu'e'i az alváh*, p. 21 and in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 39.
17. "Tajalliyát," in Bahá'u'lláh, *Majmu'e'i az alváh*, p. 28 and in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 51-52. Bahá'u'lláh also quotes the passage in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1941; [revised sixth printing, 1979]) pp. 26-27. The Persian text of the latter can be found in Bahá'u'lláh, *Lowh-e mobárak khatáb be Shaykh Mohammad Taqi Mojtahed-e Esfehání, ma'ruf be Najafi* (Langenhain: Lajne-ye Nashr-e ásár-e Amri be-Lesán-e Fársi va 'Arabi, 138 B.E./1982) p. 20. In view of recent concerns in various religious communities about inclusive language in scriptural texts, one might comment that the word "man" in the phrase "man's life" in the first sentence is not literally necessary and might unfortunately be read these days as an exclusive reference to the masculine gender. To avoid misapprehension, one might now render the passage—*'elm be-manzele-ye jenáh ast az baráye vojud*—alternatively and more in tune with the exigencies of the current time as "knowledge is as wings for creation." Likewise, in the final sentence, "knowledge is as a veritable treasure for man," the English predicate might also be prepositioned, as it is in the Persian (*kanz-e haqiqi az baráye ensán 'elm-e u-st*), to render something like "The true treasure for human beings is their knowledge."

18. *Bahá'í Education: a compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í Writings* (London: The Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, [revised 1987]) p. 3.
19. There are, of course, fundamental differences between the traditional religious scholars (*'ulamá*), the gnostics (*'urafá*) or Sufis, and the philosophers (*mutakallimún, hukamá*) in their respective pursuit of the path of law (*shari'a*), the path of interior spirituality (*tariqa*), and *falsafa*. These various approaches diverge in their valorization of *'ilm* (knowledge) and *ma'rifa* (gnosis), *hikma* (wisdom), etc. Above and beyond this, however, different categories of knowledge have been adumbrated by medieval Muslim thinkers, such as al-Farábí and al-Ghazzálí, and the terms they have used might very well contribute to a more precise understanding of the terminology and concepts which 'Abdu'l-Bahá employs. One recent work of the many in English that treats this subject is Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in the Islamic Philosophies of Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1998).
20. It is always dangerous to make statements such as this, since I have read only a small fraction of Bahá'u'lláh's voluminous writings, a great part of which remains as yet unpublished in the original languages. Obviously, our understanding of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh will become fuller as the entire corpus of his correspondence, tablets, and books becomes available.
21. Zarqáni, *Badáye'*, Vol 1, p. 124. Zarqáni seems to imply that the phrase "were in accordance with the receptivity of souls and the requirements of the age" is a direct quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I also infer that it was 'Abdu'l-Bahá who cited this proverbial verse on the occasion mentioned, though it may also be that Zarqáni adduced the verse to strengthen the point. In any case, the theme seems to echo the Hidden Word we saw above, that God reveals truth according to human capacity to understand, not according to divine omniscience.
22. See Juan Ricardo Cole, "Problems of Chronology in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom," *World Order*, Vol. 13, p. 3 (1979), pp. 24-39, which suggests that the discourse of Islamic philosophy that Bahá'u'lláh adopts in this tablet closely follows what medieval Islamic historians presented as historical fact. However, the medieval Islamic historians were mistaken on some points of chronology and fact, at least insofar as we are able to establish with current research. That Bahá'u'lláh repeats these postulates ("facts" or "factoids") is due to his desire to explain things within the frame of reference of Islamic philosophy for the benefit of the addressee, and does not necessarily imply an absolute propositional assertion about the chronological facts of history.
23. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, collected and trans., Laura Clifford Barney, revised edition (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 190, p. 19. The Persian text is in *Mofávazát*, (Cairo, 1920 [facsimile reprint in New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983]) pp. 135 and p. 14 ("ether" renders *mádde-ye asiriye*, and "savages of America" is for *barábare va motavahheshin-e Ámriká*).

24. Letter dated 31 March 1958 from Laura Dreyfus Barney to Horace Holley, cited among the Linard papers, accessed 11/30/00 at: http://www.geocities.com/thlinard/publicat/saq.htm.
25. According to a letter from the Archives Office at the Bahá'í World Centre dated 9 December 1987, a copy of which was sent to the National Assembly of France, there were two copies of the Persian text in the Bahá'í Archives in Paris, one a copy of the secretary's notes of these talks taken at table, with corrections added by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the other a neat copy with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's further corrections. A third and later copy with still further amendments by 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in the Bahá'í World Centre Archives in Haifa. The text of this letter was accessed at www.geocities.com/thlinard/publicat.saq.htm on 11/30/00; a printout is in my possession.
26. I am working from a facsimile offprint published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of India in 1983.
27. See the translation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's letters provided in the introduction to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, compiled by Howard MacNutt, revised edition (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982).
28. Zarqáni, *Badáye'*, Vol. 1 p. 54, also p. 58.
29. 'Abd al-Bahá, *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát-e Hazrat-e 'Abd al-Bahá* (Langenhain: Lajne-ye Melli-ye Nashr-e ásár-e Amri be zabán-há-ye Fársi va 'Arabi, 1984). This is a one volume reprint of separate volumes previously published in Egypt (1340 A.H./1921, and 99 B.E./1942-1943) and in Tehran (127 B.E./1970-1971).
30. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, rev. ed., p. 195. This is from Chapter 50, "Spiritual Proofs of the Origin of Man." For the original Persian, see *Mofávazát*, p. 138.
31. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 197, *Mofávazát*, p. 140.
32. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 175-6.
33. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Majmu'e-ye khetábát*, pp. 439-40 (English pagination at the foot of page). The provisional English translation preceding the transliterated Persian text is my own.
34. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 298-9 and *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*, p. 530. Presumably, the denomination of the church can be checked against historical records.
35. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 181 and *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*, p. 450. Note that the Persian repeats almost verbatim in some parts what we saw in the previous quotation, although the English versions reflect slightly greater variations.
36. As the University of Virginia was about to open, objections were raised over the fact that it had no professorship of divinity. Critics said this was not merely because the university was prohibited by the Constitution from upholding a particular kind of religion, but felt that the university was in fact against all religion. In response, the university trustees offered each religious sect to establish a professorship of its own, each according to its own particular tenets, on the grounds of the campus, so that students could use the library of the University (i.e., the public space of discourse) while still pursuing denominational, parochial studies. Thomas Jefferson explained, "By bringing the sects together, and mixing them with the mass of other students, we shall soften their asperities, liberalize and neutralize their prejudices, and make the general religion a religion of peace, reason and morality" (Thomas Jefferson, *Writings* [Library of America, 1994] p. 1465).

37. In the English translation of the talk, as transcribed by Bijou Straun, this reads "The greatest attainment in the world of humanity has ever been scientific in nature" (*Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 348). The Persian reads "*a'zam manqabat-e 'álam-e ensáni 'elm ast*" (from *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*, p. 570), a phrase which 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have used verbatim elsewhere in his talks, as well. See, for example, *Payám-e Malakút*, ed. A.H. Ishráq-Khávari (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986) p. 82, p. 86, and the many examples from *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát* quoted above.
38. Eventually four schools (*madhhab*) were accepted as canonically valid points of view among the Sunnis. Shiites had their own schools, which have been reduced in modern times to one (Ja'fari) and recognized as canonical among most Sunnis.
39. *Asl-i kull al-'ulúm huwa 'irfán Alláh, jalla jalálahu*. Cited in Fázel-e Mázandaráni, ed., *Amr va Khalq* (Tehran, 111 B.E./1954-5; reprint Langenhain: Lajne-ye Nashr-e ásar-e Amri be-Lesán-e Fársi va 'Arabi, 141 B.E./1985) Vol. 1. pp. 14-15. The original source is not further specified.
40. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 348.
41. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*, p. 570.
42. Ibid., p. 382.
43. Literally, Academy of Arts/Technical Academy. This was the name of the first college established in Tehran along European models in 1851.
44. *Al-hamdo le'lláh dar in eqlim 'elm ruz be ruz be taraqqi ast va madáres-e dár al-fonun-há besyár ta'sis shode ast va dar in madáres talámeze be neháyat-e jahd mi-kushand va kashf-e haqáyeq-e 'álam-e ensáni mi-konand. Omid-am chonán ast ke mamálek-e sáyere eqtedá be in mamlekat namáyand va madáres-e 'adide baráye tarbiyat-e owlád-há-ye khod bar pá dárand va 'alam-e 'elm rá boland konand tá 'álam-e ensáni rowshan gardad va haqá'eq va asrár-e ká'enát záher shavad. In ta'assobát-e jáheliye namánad . . .* ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*, p. 383).
45. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 50.
46. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 150; *Majmu'e-ye alváh*, pp. 51-52.
47. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 327.
48. Cited in Mázandaráni, ed. *Amr va khalq*, Vol 1, p. 67. Provisional translation by the present writer.
49. A footnote appears here in the English text of Some Answered Questions indicating, "Lit., the pivot." The Persian reads "*yek mas'ale ke khayli madár ast*," which could also be translated as "One matter which is pivotal . . ."
50. *Dar bayán-e ánke ma'qulát faqat bevásete-ye ezhár dar qamis-e mahsus báyad bayán shavad.* 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 83, *Mofávazát*, pp. 61-62.
51. One is tempted to translate in more technical terms, but perhaps somewhat anachronistically, as "ontological."
52. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157, *Mofávazát*, p. 111-12.
53. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 297-99, *Mofávazát*, p. 207-208.

54 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 299, *Mofávazát*, p. 208.
55. The original Persian of this talk is not included in *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*, and it cannot therefore be considered as official scripture of the Bahá'í Faith.
56. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pp. 21-22, notes by Howard MacNutt. The Persian original of this talk is apparently not given in *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*.
57. Recorded in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 255. The Persian original of this talk is not given in *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*.
58 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 198, *Mofávazát*, p. 141.
59 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 208-209, *Mofávazát*, p. 148.
60 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 209, *Mofávazát*, p. 148.
61 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, cited in Fázel-e Mázandaráni, ed. *Amr va khalq*, Vol. 1. p. 222.
62. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 217-19.
63. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239, *Mofávazát*, p. 168.
64. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 210, *Mofávazát*, p. 149.
65. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 217, *Mofávazát*, p. 153.
66. These two terms were used a thousand years earlier by al-Fárábi and Avicenna (*Ibn Síná*) and have been rendered in English as the faculty of "compositive imagination" or the "sensitive imagination" (*mutakhayyala*), and the "cogitative faculty" or "rational imagination" (*mutafakkira*), where they apply respectively to animals (*mutakhayyala*) and humans (*mutafakkira*). See Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (*Ibn Síná*) (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) pp. 62-63 and p. 82 and Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge*, pp. 51-53.
67. This term is also used by Avicenna and al-Fárábi; see Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy*, p. 63 and Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge*, p. 51.
68. Avicenna uses this term, too (*al-hiss al-mushtarak*), which he sometimes seems to equate with "fantasy" (*banúásiyá*), and locates in the front ventricle of the brain. In Avicenna's view, this faculty organizes the perceptions of the five senses in the brain and makes them relational and intelligible. Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy*, p. 62, translates the phrase as "common sense."
69. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 210-11, *Mofávazát*, p. 149.
70. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 212ff, *Mofávazát*, p. 150ff.
71. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 220, *Mofávazát*, p. 155.
72. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, from the notes taken by Ellen T. Pursell, p. 328. Mahmud-e Zarqáni in *Badáye' al-ásár* indicates that this talk took place in the evening of 19 September, after a return by motorcar from the talk delivered in St. Paul. Such discrepancies in the dates given in the Persian and English sources are quite common, and no cause for great concern. However, no Persian original for this talk appears in *Majmu'e-ye Khetábát*, so the English notes of this talk are not verified by any transcription of the original Persian words.