

Lights of 'Irfán

Papers Presented
at the 'Irfán Colloquia
and Seminars

Book IV

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‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars



Book Four

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Four

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Lights of ‘Irfán
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Book Four

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Sponsored by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund
160 B.E. 2003 C.E.

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Design and Artwork by Trey and Lynne Yancy
Typeset by Jonah Winters, winterswebworks.com

The existence of authoritative interpretations does not preclude the individual from engaging in the study of the Teachings and thereby arriving at a personal interpretation or understanding. A clear distinction is, however, drawn in the Bahá'í Writings between authoritative interpretation and the understanding that each individual arrives at from a study of its Teachings. Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the Teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a greater comprehension of the Faith. Such views, nevertheless, lack authority. In presenting their personal ideas, individuals are cautioned not to discard the authority of the revealed words, not to deny or contend with the authoritative interpretation, and not to engage in controversy; rather they should offer their thoughts as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that their views are merely their own.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Notes, p. 221-222

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Preface

LIGHTS OF 'IRFÁN, Book Four, concludes the first decade of the 'Irfán Colloquium's activities. It ushers in a new decade that will hopefully witness the inauguration of the 'Irfán Colloquia in more major languages of the world and expansion of its sphere of activities beyond North America and Europe. 'Irfán Colloquium that started in Europe, in New Castle, England in late 1993 and was conducted in English, soon found its way into North America and embarked on conducting annual sessions in both English and Persian. In July 2003 the Colloquium in German language will be launched in Tambach-Diethartz which will mark the fiftieth session of the 'Irfán Colloquium.

Presentation of studies in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh has been the main focus of the activities of the Irfan Colloquium since 1995. In 2002 a new project was launched for presentation of the studies in the Writings of Báb and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A further development is the formation of the "Bábí-Shaykhí Studies Interest Group." The 'Irfán Colloquium that was held at the Louhelen Bahá'í School in 2002 included an extensive seminar on *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá*, "the first, the greatest, and the mightiest of all books in the Bábí Dispensation." It was a unique occasion for the presentation of a series of scholarly papers all of them focused on various parts or aspects of that book.

The 'Irfán Colloquium established and mainly supported by Háj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund is a project devoted to the promotion of scholarly studies in the scriptures and in the fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs. Selections of the papers, in English, presented at the Colloquium are regularly published in the volumes of *The Lights of 'Irfán* and *Scripture and Revelation*. *Lights of 'Irfán* also contains items not presented at the Colloquia but contributed for the benefit of the participants at the 'Irfán Colloquia.

The current volume of *The Lights of 'Irfán* presents a wide range of articles presented during the Colloquia in English language conducted in 2002. A provisional translation of the historic Epistle of the Báb to Sultan Abdulmecid of Ottoman Empire is presented with some introductory information. From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh the provisional translations of the following Tablets together with their historical background are included in this volume: Tablet of Maqsd, Tablet of Náqús (*the Bell*), first Tablet to Napoleon III, and the Tablet to the Templer Leader Georg David Hardegg are presented. This volume also opens a new line of inquiry through the comprehensive study of the Aristotelian philosophy from the perspective of Bahá'í belief, followed by an article on Bahá'í Existentialism. It is hoped that these two papers will encourage further philosophical studies in the Bahá'í Writings and conceptual principles. The article on genealogy focuses on yet another line of studies by examining certain historical references in the Bahá'í Writings. Finally, the section on ELUCIDATIONS contains four enlightening items. The two memorandums of the Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre on "Letters of Quranic Dispensation" and "Inmates of the Celestial Pavilion" are published here with permission granted by the Universal House of Justice. And two very enlightening items related to the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf which shed light on a delicate point in the translation of that Epistle and offer original and valuable research on the source of the 'Akká traditions (hadiths) quoted in that book.

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Four

All papers in this volume present the views and understandings of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors, without further editing. The writing styles and scholarly approaches are therefore different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the authors’ surnames. Abstracts of all the presentations made at the ‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars are published in a series of separate booklets.

Iraj Ayman
Chicago, April 2003

An Epistle of Sayyid ‘Alí Muḥammad ‘the Báb’ to Sultan Abdulmecid

Some Notes on Early Bábís in the Ottoman Empire

introduced and translated by Necati Alkan

Introduction

In its first days the Bábí community encountered a combined opposition from the Iranian and Ottoman authorities. Sayyid ‘Alí Muḥammad Shírází (1819-1850) ‘the Báb,’ the founder of the Bábí Religion, commenced the proclamation of His mission to eighteen disciples from among the followers of the Shaykhí school. He then directed them to go out and spread the tidings of the advent of the forerunner or gate (*Báb*) of the Hidden 12th Imam, al-Mahdi, in His person, without disclosing His real name. The new movement constituted a real danger to the Shi‘i clerics in an atmosphere of growing social and economic hardships in times of decline and the intrusion of Europe in the Middle East. Furthermore, the completion of thousand *hijr* years since the Great Occultation of Muḥammad al-Mahdi in 1260 (1844-1845) served as a basis for messianic movements, in particular the Shaykhiyya school, in the Shi‘i holy cities of Najaf and Karbala in Ottoman Iraq. The triangle of the Ottoman Empire, Iran and the Sunni/Shi‘i ‘ulama, is important in this context. This paper deals with the rise of the Bábí religion and the reactions it received from the secular and religious powers vis-à-vis developments, mainly the religious policy during the *Tanzimat* (‘reordering period’) in the Ottoman Empire during early years of Sultan Abdulmecid’s reign (1839-1861) and in particular in the *vilâyet* (province) of Iraq ruled by Necib Paḫa, followers have in turn responded to the challenges they faced.

The Historical Context

1.1. Sultan Abdulmecid

Abdulmecid (1823-1861) was the son of Sultan Mahmud II. (r. 1808-1839) and only sixteen years old when he ascended the throne. We are told about his personality that he had a graceful ‘girlish’ face, his stature being fragile and slender,¹ and that he hated violence and bloodshed to the extent that he changed the death penalty passed on some of his adversaries who wanted to kill him, to life-long imprisonment in a citadel. His reign from 1839 until 1861 is described as an ‘enlightened absolutism’ during the *Tanzimat*, which was between the rulers before him and the *Birinci Meḫrutiyyet*, the ‘First Constitutional period’ (1876-1908) which comprises the rules of his brother Abdulaziz and his son Abdulhamid II.² Ten prime ministers under Abdulmecid formed twenty-two cabinets, and Mustafa Reḫid Paḫa, ‘father of Tanzimat,’ who drafted the first reform edict, held six times the office of *Sadrâzam* (prime minister).

Abdulmecid, who became sultan and caliph at a very young age, was a decent and polite person. Academic literature usually emphasises that he sincerely wanted to carry on his father’s reforms with the same resolution, yet his gentle but weak character obstructed the management of affairs and his reformist efforts. It was during his reign that imitation of European ways was

introduced and luxury and wasteful extravagancy, the building of new palaces and the court's expenses resulted in the financial ruin of the state.³ On the whole, he is presented as 'young and inexperienced'.⁴ He had, however, won the sympathy of the majority of his subjects and, moreover, the appreciation of particularly Britain and France, basically thanks to the drafting of the first (*Gülhâne Hatt-ı Hümayûn*, 1839) and the second Tanzimat decrees (*Islâhat Fermânı*, 1856) and their propagation.⁵

As to the first reform edict, modern historiography stresses that it was written under Western influence, its ideas were borrowed from Western political theory and attribute the drafting of the Gülhane Rescript mainly to Mustafa Reşid Paşa, Sultan Abdulmecid being not involved. A recent study by Butrus Abu-Manneh, however, provides ample evidence that contradicts this classical view in that it shows the impact of orthodox Islamic principles of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi order on Sultan Abdulmecid, taught by his mother Bezmiâlem, and the contribution of several high ranking political and mostly religious leaders in its drafting. In sum, this rescript was composed in order to respond to the disregard of the *sharî'a* in governmental and juridical levels, the prevailing misconduct and injustice by local governors and the sultans themselves since the 18th century. Furthermore, it appears that not only members of the royal family were influenced by the teachings of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya but also several Palace functionaries at the *Bâb-ı Âli*, the Sublime Porte.⁶

At the closing years of Abdulmecid's reign, however, the Empire had a huge amount of debts which it could pay only by means of more debts, and the tendencies of more and more ethnic groups towards autonomy was a proof for its physical disintegration.⁷ While in the 1840s the *sharî'a* had played an important role in measures for reform, after 1850 they took less and less account of it, as Ottoman statesmen increasingly borrowed Western secular ideals and ideologies. During those years Abdulmecid appears too weak as to participate in the decisions of daily politics and was in the grasp of his grand vizier Mustafa Reşid Paşa. It is reported that the sultan was found slamming his head on the wall while praying to God to liberate him from Reşid's clutches.⁸ The same was the case with Âli Paşa and Fu'âd Paşa who in his and later in the reign of Abdulaziz held the reins of state affairs in their hands: the sultan had almost no right of decision in political affairs and seemed to have been a slave of his Paşas. Thus the 'Young Ottoman' reformers' critique in the 1860s was not directed against the sultan but mainly the two pillars of the Porte, the 'well-liked' Âli and Fu'âd who are remembered by historians as reform-minded precursors of modern Turkey.⁹ From the outset of Abdulmecid's time in power, he was surrounded by inexperienced wily bureaucrats who involved the unconscious Sultan in their schemes.¹⁰ In the time of Abdulaziz those 'little despots' shot out branches into other governmental institutions and had achieved unrestrained influence whereby they usurped much power, interfering in all administrative details.¹¹

For our purpose here, we may look at Abdulmecid's religious policy. Be it through pressure from Europe or not, he wanted to unite all of his subjects regardless of race and religion, into one people as a rampart against nationalism; 'in one word to nationalize all these fragments of nations who cover the soil of Turkey, by so much impartiality, gentleness, equality and tolerance that each other finds its honour, its conscience in a sort of monarchical confederation under the auspices of the Sultan.'¹² Before the proclamation of the first imperial reform edict, Abdulmecid announced that 'because God had entrusted to our care the lands and the people (*memâlik ve 'ibâd*), we have to depend upon divine support and upon the spiritual aid of the Prophet. Consequently it is our wish to see that the exalted *ferî'at* is applied in all matters and that "all the inhabitants" (*kâffeyi ehâli . . . ve beri'ya*) should enjoy tranquility and peace.'¹³ It is noteworthy that the sultan's addresses such as this to his ministers to follow 'the law of jus-

tice and equity in all matters,' to be upright and honest, to eschew bribery and the like were read in a council meeting and were not concerned with general principles of conduct.¹⁴ Still later, Abdulmecid's subsequent *Islâhat Fermânı* underlined the 'attainment of full happiness for all classes of our imperial subjects who are bound to one another by the heartfelt bonds of a common patriotism and are equal in our equitable compassionate view.'¹⁵ Encouraged by the atmosphere of religious liberty, Sufi *tarîqas* flourished again, like the Mevlevi and Bektaflî, and new ones like the Naqshbandi were established in Istanbul.¹⁶

1.2. The Rule of Necib Pafla in Ottoman Iraq and the Relationship with Iran

Despite this atmosphere of religious tolerance in the Ottoman capital, the situation in the problematic territory of Baghdad was at odds. The conflict between the Sunni Ottomans and Shi'i Iranians was aggravated by Shi'i 'ulama who during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were driven by a missionary zeal to convert as many tribes. This can be attributed to several reasons. An important factor was the religious and psychological motives of the Shi'i clergymen with their mentality of a minor sect, which had suffered persecution and restriction to proclaim their faith due to the dominance of the majority group. In the 19th century the 'ulama in Iraq were engaged in missionary activity on many levels. The Shi'i among them frequently engaged their Sunni counterparts and Ottoman officials and even Jewish rabbis in polemical debates so as to prove the superiority of their sect. And as stated by Shi'i sources, they always controlled the situation, which led to the conversion of the Sunnis to Shi'a Islam. Shi'i 'ulama were actively proselytising among the ranks of the Ottoman Sixth Army and the police force in Iraq, as well.¹⁷

From 1831 the Ottomans tried to restore direct central rule in Iraq, superseding Mamluk rule, which had enjoyed local autonomy since 1747. In 1842 the conservative Gürcü ('the Georgian') Necib Pafla,¹⁸ the *vâli* (governor general) of the Baghdad district came to power and embarked upon the task of centralising Ottoman rule there, 'by force if necessary.' He was also known for opposing religious minorities. Necib Pafla was granted complete powers and rights and assigned 'the implementation of the Tanzimat' of direct and centralised rule. Early in his career he became a follower of the Mujaddidiyya, a branch of the religious order of the Naqshbandiyya, founded by Shaykh Khalid. Necib was a deeply believing Sunni, and the concept of Islam he favoured was Sufism. Thus, in his seven years as governor general in Baghdad he not only promoted his own Khalidiyya order but also the Qadiriyya. On the other hand, he neglected traditional Islamic institutions like mosques and madrasas. His disrespectful treatment of the mufti Shaykh Mahmud al-Alusi shows Necib's religious inclinations. A similar policy towards regarding Sufism can be seen later in the reign of Abdulhamid II, when Mahmud Nedim Pafla—son of Necib—was advisor to the sultan.¹⁹

Necib's appointment as *vâli* was in the eyes of the sultan 'acceptable to reason.'²⁰ And when Necib demanded for Karbala to be an Ottoman stronghold, and in view of the hostilities between the Empire and Iran, he was not willing to 'leave in his rear a populous town, containing many Persians, and governed by a set of lawless vagabonds . . . [who] defied the Sultan's authority, with a powerful tribe of Arabs close at hand ready to assist them in case of emergency.'²¹ He decided to put an end to Iranian 'oppression' because Karbala belonged to the Sultan by virtue of hereditary right, and that the sanctity of the city was no reason for Iranians to live there in great numbers. Following some clashes with tribal and gang leaders, the Ottomans violently took Karbala in January 1843.²²

1.3. The Rise of the Bábí Faith

In addition to the hostility between Sunnis and Shi'is and the disregard of especially the Shi'i

'ulama of Ottoman rule, the intensified messianic expectations at the beginning of the millennium of Imam Mahdī's occultation in the year 1260/1844 worsened the Ottoman-Iranian crisis. Necib Pafla was labelled as 'Yazid,' thus equating him with the much-hated Umayyad caliph who had instigated Imam Husayn's death at Karbala. Shi'i poets begged the Hidden Imam to return and liberate his people from Ottoman oppression who were the usurpers:²³ '[T]he modern Karbala tragedy was seen by many Shi'is as cataclysmic events preceding the awaited appearance of the Mahdi. It heightened messianic expectations in Shi'ism, which were already rising due to the approaching millennium of the Occultation of the 12th Imam, and apparently facilitated the appearance of the Bábí claims at least within the Shaykhí community.'²⁴ The Bábí Religion with its roots in the messianic Shaykhi movement within Shi'a Islam, was a threat to the Sunni officials who were traumatised by the conversions of not only Sunni tribes but also Ottoman officials to Shi'ism; so they wanted to prevent further rebellions.

After Sayyid Kázim-i Rashtí's (Shaykh Aḥmad's successor) refusal to designate a successor, the Shaykhís split in different groups, one headed by Mullá Ḥusayn Bushrú'í. He refused all candidates for succession and decided to retire for fasting and devotional acts with his friends in order to seek guidance, as was customary for seminary students. It was Mullá Ḥusayn who first accepted the Báb's claim to be the Promised One at a meeting in the Báb's house in Shiraz (22 May 1844). Before going Himself to the *hajj* and His intended visit to the Shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala to announce His appearance (*zuhúr*) and proclaim His mission, the Báb dispatched Mullá Ḥusayn to Tehran and Khorasan. Another disciple, Mullá 'Alí Baṣṭámí, was sent as an emissary to the holy land,²⁵ the 'Atabat, with the purpose of spreading the Báb's message before His arrival there. Baṣṭámí's task was to win over the Shaykhís and Shi'i mujtahids for the Báb's cause.

1.4. The Trial of Mullá 'Alí Baṣṭámí, the Báb's messenger

In mid-summer the same year Mullá 'Alí arrived in Iraq. The Báb had entrusted him with a message to the Shaykhi community, which was in the middle of an unsettled dispute over leadership after Rashtí. Baṣṭámí could convince a significant number of Shaykhis. In Najaf Baṣṭámí met Muḥammad Ḥasan Najafí,²⁶ then the highest Shi'i cleric, and gave him portions of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, one of the earliest and most important writings of the Báb. In Najafí's assembly Mullá 'Alí declared that the Promised One had appeared in Shiraz and should be accepted as the only legitimate religious source of authority in Islam and that His book supersedes all former holy books. Baṣṭámí's statements caused an uproar among those present and Najafí, being an enemy of heterodoxies and heresies, instantly pronounced Baṣṭámí a heretic. This was a serious challenge to the orthodoxy and authority of the 'ulama. Headed by Najafí, the mujtahids of Najaf and Karbala condemned the message Baṣṭámí had delivered as a blasphemy. The Báb's envoy was captured and a letter was sent to the government in Baghdad where he was charged with stirring up mischief and uttering slanders against Islam and Muḥammad.²⁷ This decision was agreed upon also to lessen the impact of messianic tensions in the Shi'i holy land as manifested by a considerable number of pilgrims. Otherwise this could lead to another conflict and defeat by the Ottoman authorities.²⁸

Baṣṭámí was transferred to Baghdad. The governor Necib Pafla put him on trial by a special commission consisting of high-ranking Sunni and Shi'i 'ulama, headed by the mufti Shaykh Maḥmúd al-Alúsí. This was apparently the first of its kind in Ottoman history, for it is not recorded that 'ulama of the two factions had gathered in a joint assembly to try somebody. One account of the trial states that this meant that the Ottoman government officially acknowledged the Shi'a.²⁹ But although non-Muslim communities were given legal autonomy as part of their *millet*-system, in fact the Ottomans refused to confer the Shi'is the status of a separate *millet*

(‘religious nation’), as the Shi‘is were not a protected minority (*dhimmi*) according to Sunni law, but sinning Muslims. And granting them an independent *millet* status would be the same as their exclusion from Islam and a separate religion like the Christian and Jewish *millets*.³⁰ Consequently the Baṣṭāmí affair was a welcome opportunity for Iran to complain about the Ottoman’s infringement upon the rights of Shi‘i subjects in Iraq.³¹

Despite Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭāmí’s rejection by the Shi‘i ‘ulama around Najafí, he had success in disseminating his call among theological students who struggled with the strenuous orthodox Islamic learning. Whereas the Shi‘i ‘ulama denounced him as a heretic and wanted him to be expelled to Iran and his writings destroyed, the Sunni clerics sanctioned this and accused Baṣṭāmí of blasphemy. He should be punished by death penalty. The accounts of the trial differ from each other.³² On the other hand, as Abbas Amanat puts it, the ‘new heresy’ provided a consensus despite the traditional enmities between the Sunni Ottomans and Shi‘i Iranians. The joint *fatwá* condemned it, and as a turning point in their relations demonstrated that longstanding doctrinal disputes could be temporarily settled in view of a threat that could cause a new schism among Muslims, and to a certain extent reduced the ‘already dim prospects of a Bábí mass success’ in the holy cities in Iraq and stood for the imminent enmities the new creed would face.³³

In Necib Pafla’s report to the Sublime Porte we read that a certain Mullá ‘Alí from Baṣṭám in Khorasan, pupil of the late dissident mujtahid Sayyid Kázim in Karbala who led people astray, came ‘two months ago’ (end of November 1844) to Najaf and showed to some people a book composed of verses from the Qur’án which were blended with certain kinds of heretical fabrications. Baṣṭāmí had stated, ‘This book is divine revelation. It is incumbent upon us to act according to its laws. On the tenth day in the month of Muḥarram the Mahdi will come from Mecca to Karbala and manifest Himself. Await his coming.’ He proceeded to Karbala and repeated his comments and showed his book to all sorts of people. Baṣṭāmí thereby secretly won over some hundred heretics (*mülhed*), and the book was copied. Necib points out that unless this situation, which entails unprecedented mischief (*fesâdât-ı azîme*) and is harmful to the Ottoman Empire and the Islamic world, is noticed; it will change the minds of many ignorant persons from among diverse people (*mîl-i muhtelif ve çehele*) and in particular mostly heretical tribes (*aflâir-i vükerâ*), and mislead them from the straight path. Necib Pafla then cites what Baṣṭāmí said at the interrogation:

When I was about to return from my native land [Iran] to here, a man from among the sayyids [i.e., the Báb] ordered me and entrusted me [with the message]: “You are going to Baghdad; take this book and give it to the mujtahids in Najaf and Karbala. Tell them that I am the ná’ib [deputy] of the Mahdi. I will go to ḥajj this year and from the ḥajj I will go to Karbala. The Mahdi will manifest Himself in [the month of] Muḥarram in Karbala.” I directly went to Najaf. All the ‘ulama were assembled in one place. I took the book and gave it to them and conveyed what the sayyid had said. They opened the book; each of them read one or two sheets of it and then threw it away. They did not treat me with courtesy. Two days later I came to Karbala. The aforesaid book was circulated, and they sent [me] to Karbala. The sheets were brought together there, and the kâ’im-makâm [the local governor] arrested me and sent me to you.

Upon asking Baṣṭāmí who sent this book and what his name was and if he had the whole book with him, he responded, ‘The book I took with me should consist of approximately sixteen, seventeen portions. But I do not know the sayyid’s name or the content of the book.’ Necib says that this was a manifest lie (*kezb-i sarîh*), and every time Baṣṭāmí was tried, he gave contradictory answers. In addition, according to people possessed of information, the book in

question was evidently the composition of his master Sayyid Kázim, and Baṣṭámí one of his rebellious followers. Even in prison when two ostensibly uninformed men from among the local people were imprisoned in order to befriend him and come around to an opinion during their conversations, asked Baṣṭámí why he was imprisoned; he recounted his aforementioned statements to them and added that he will not recant his beliefs even if he were killed. Considering Baṣṭámí's repeated denials and because the writings he had with him could be dispersed among all kinds of people and result in an unpleasant situation, the heretics (Shaykhis?) in Najaf, Karbala and Kazimayn who profess to be mujtahids, were transferred to an assembly comprising several 'ulama and the Iranian consul. There the confiscated writings were read and examined. It was concluded that those contained sheer blasphemies and the author is an infidel. Necib Pafla finally adds that he cautioned the people that should anyone read those texts and consent with its contents, he will be punished according to *sharí'a* regulations and that he is willing to enact whatever is decreed by the Sultan regarding Baṣṭámí's fate.³⁴

In a second report Necib Pafla notes that although Baṣṭámí is detained in prison in Baghdad following the verdict passed on him, it was proposed that it would be more appropriate to send Baṣṭámí to Istanbul in order to prevent mischief because of the manifest blasphemies (*küfriyyât-ı saríha*) in the writings he was carrying. It was anticipated that if he were set free, his presence in Baghdad would cause rumour among the people and the 'ulama would be disturbed by his grievous and infamous crime (*fazíha-yı azíme*).³⁵

Later, in a memorandum from the *Sadrâzam* (prime minister) Rauf Pafla³⁶ to Sultan Abdulmecid it was stated that it was understood in a recent consultation that if the messenger of the Mahdi remains imprisoned in Baghdad this will cause a dispute and provoke remarkable annoyance; he therefore should be send to Mosul and afterwards be dealt with. However, because the situation in Mosul was not much different from Baghdad and the 'ulama's rebellion there had manifested itself at another instance, it was more appropriate that he be send to the town of Bolu.³⁷ And from there he may be send further 'to one of the islands (*adalardan birine*)' where he can be further dealt with. It has been suggested that the word for 'island' reads *jazíra* or *cezíre* in Ottoman Turkish and could have meant Cyprus, Crete or Rhodes,³⁸ or even Algeria.³⁹ While it is true that those islands were traditional places of exile, it is not likely that Algeria is meant here because in Turkish it is *Cezayir*. Moreover, the original text does not say *cezíre*, but *ada*, being the Turkish word for 'island'.⁴⁰

In the same memorandum mention is made that the local governor of Bolu was informed of the danger the book constitutes and is not to be exposed to the public, but should be burned and destroyed. Abdulmecid approved the report of the Prime Minister.⁴¹ Yet obviously the decision was altered. After the arrival of Mullá 'Alí Baṣṭámí to Istanbul, the Sublime Porte referred his case again to Abdulmecid. This time it was suggested that if Baṣṭámí was send to an island, his activities could not be controlled; he might not keep his tongue and could convert the people to his false ideas. Hence he should be put to hard labour imprisonment with exile, or *kürek*, literally condemnation to the 'galleys,' in the imperial naval yard. Again, the Sultan approved this decision.⁴²

A report in Persian, probably written by the then Persian charge d'affairs in Istanbul, throws some light on Baṣṭámí's fate. We learn that the Ottoman authorities had 'summoned him to a gathering and inquired about certain matters, and he, without practicing *taqíyya*, made certain verbal confessions. Therefore according to the declaration of the 'ulama of Baghdad and in view of his own confessions, for a while he was sent for forced labor (*kürek*).' And that on his way to Istanbul 'he was held for a while in Búlí [Bolu], before being removed to the capital.' One month after Baṣṭámí's confinement at the imperial dockyard, the Persian representative in the

Ottoman capital protested at this decision, saying that he must be sent back to Iran, since he was a Persian subject and 'if he is found guilty of any charges, he will be punished by the exalted Persian government.' But the Ottoman authorities 'first denied that he was a Persian subject by claiming that he had been a citizen of Baghdad, but after long persistence they gave way.' About his tragic end it is said: 'When they sent orders to lift his chains and release him from forced labor, he had already passed away a few days earlier and come to the mercy of God.' As Amanat points out, we do not know the exact cause of his death.⁴³

Baṣṭāmí's appearance and the incidents associated with him not only caused an uproar among Shī'ī and Sunni 'ulama circles but also led to the acceptance of his message by large numbers, especially among the Shaykhis. This was the first conflict between 'ulama in Bahá'í history, and the religious and secular opposition which Baṣṭāmí had met changed the Báb's own plans to go to the holy cities of Iraq after His *ḥajj*, and thus changed the course of events in early Bábí history.⁴⁴

The Báb's Epistle to Sultan Abdulmecid

2.1 Circumstances and Response to the Ottomans

The Báb heard of Baṣṭāmí's arrest while He was still in the Arabian Peninsula performing the *ḥajj*. According to Abu'l-Qásim Afnán's account of the Báb,⁴⁵ the Báb asked Mullá Ḥasan Gawhar (who saw himself as the leader of the Shaykhī school and successor of Sayyid Kázim) to deliver an epistle to the Caliph-Sultan Abdulmecid via Necib Paḡla and to arrange for the release of Mullá 'Alí Baṣṭāmí. Unfortunately the initiatives did not take place, and instead Gawhar signed the death warrant and condemnation (*takfír*) of the Báb and His disciple in the joint Sunni-Shī'ī *fatwá*. In addition, we do not know whether the Báb's letter in which He pleaded for justice, ever reached Abdulmecid.

Afnan does moreover say that according to Báb's *Khuṭbatu'l-Jidda*⁴⁶ He returned from Mecca to Masqat around Rabi' al-Awwal 1261/ca. 10 March 1845. He stayed in Mosqat for a while to proclaim His mission to some local 'ulama and arranged for the release of His disciple from the hands of the *váli* of Baghdad and the 'ulama.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Afnan writes, after His return from Mecca the Báb sent letters to Muḥammad Sháh, the Iranian prime minister Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí, Sultan Abdulmecid and Gawhar from Bushihr in Iran and Masqat in present Oman (March/April 1845) to bring about the release of Baṣṭāmí from the prison of Necib Paḡla.⁴⁸

The Tablet the Báb intended to send to Sultan Abdulmecid is one of His early works.⁴⁹ Shoghi Effendi makes a note of the 'Tablets to Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-Majíd and to Najíb Páshá, the Váli of Baghdád'.⁵⁰ Whereas Denis MacEoin mentions this in his bibliography of the Báb's early works and was not aware of the original Tablets or copies,⁵¹ the Tablet to Abdulmecid is extant at the Bahá'í World Centre.⁵² There is no copy among the documents related to Baṣṭāmí's trial at the Baḡbakanlık Arḡlivi in Istanbul.⁵³ We may assume that the Tablets neither reached Abdulmecid nor Necib Paḡla. As to the Tablet to the latter, the Bahá'í World Centre could not locate It in its archives.

Overall, there are some addresses of the Báb to kings. In an epistle to Muḥammad Sháh (written some time in mid-May 1845, after His pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina), the Báb summons him to gather 'the believers in God's oneness' (the 'ulama?) to His presence and to deliver them a letter which He has received from the 'Remembrance of God' and to bring forward a single verse as He did. Then, speaking of Mullá 'Alí Baṣṭāmí's trial in Baghdad, the Báb asks the Sháh to send 'the letter of your Lord' to Sultan Abdulmecid and all other kings.⁵⁴ Elsewhere

the Báb commands the kings to '[d]eliver with truth and in all haste the verses sent down by Us to the peoples of Turkey and of India, and beyond them, with power and with truth, to lands in both the East and the West . . .'.⁵⁵

2.2. The Contents of the Epistle to Abdulmecid

The Báb begins His Tablet to the Ottoman Sultan with the Qur'anic *Bismi'lláhi'r-Raḥmání'r-Raḥím*, the glorification of God. He says that 'this Book is the decree of God' (*ḥukmu'lláh*) for those on earth, sent down (*nuzzila*) from His 'Servant 'Alí, the All-Wise' (*min ladun 'abdihi 'alí ḥakím*), i.e. the Báb, Who is the 'path of God in the heavens and on earth' (*ṣiráṭu'lláh fí's-samáwát wa'l-arḍ*).⁵⁶ He advises the people to come forth for the Covenant of *Baqiyyatu'lláh* ('Remnant of God'),⁵⁷ the 'living, undoubted Leader' (*imám ḥayy mubín*), Who is the 'Book wherein there is no doubt' (*kitáb lá rayba fih*) and calls men to the 'straight path' (*ṣirát qawím*). The Báb identifies Himself as the 'Mystery in the heavens' (*as-sirr fí's-samáwát*), conveying the 'Cause from the presence of the Remnant of God' who is the 'light from the right side of the Mount [Sinai]' (*an-núr 'an yamín aṭ-ṭúr*).

The Báb then addresses Abdulmecid:

Read the Book of thy Lord, O Majíd, through the command of thy Lord in the preserved Book (kitáb ḥafíz). Know thou that God hath knowledge of all things in the heavens and on earth, and that thou art concerning the verdict passed on the messenger (rasúl, i.e. Baṣṭámí), the lord of great oppression (wa má kunta fí ḥukmí'r-rasúl la-dhú zulm 'azím). Fear God, O thou man (rajul), for today there is no escape for anyone (fa-inna'l-yawma lá mafarr li-aḥad) except he believeth in the signs of thy Lord and is accounted among those who prostrate [before Him].

Likewise, the Book was sent down for the kings (*al-mulúk*) that they might learn of the command of a new creation (*bad'*) from the Remnant of God.

After commanding the Sultan to read this Epistle, the Báb asks him to assemble the people of learning (*úlú'l-'ilm*, 'ulama) in his presence and to deliver them on behalf of the 'Remembrance of God' (*Dhikru'lláh*), to read His Book with justice and to be fair in their judgment. For God has knowledge of all things and 'He ordaineth the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-qiyáma*) among all with equity (*qist*)'.⁵⁸ One single verse of 'this Book,' the Báb says, is sufficient and equals the verses that were previously sent down to Muḥammad's heart (*qalb*), and through it the 'testimony of God' (*ḥujjatu'lláh*) has been completed. 'We make no distinction between the Messengers of God, and to them do we bow our will' (*Inná naḥnu lá nufarriqu bayna aḥadín min rusulí'lláhi wa-inná la-hum muslimún*).⁵⁹

Among the addressees in this Tablet are also the inhabitants of Istanbul (*mala' min ahl ar-Rúm*). They are warned to fear God and not to follow the command of *ṭághút* lest they be reckoned as the 'people of the fire' (*úlá'ika hum aṣḥáb an-nár*). The Qur'anic *ṭághút*⁶⁰ is usually translated as 'the evil,' 'the one who exceeds all bounds,' 'transgressor,' 'the Satan' or 'false deities/gods'. Those who disbelieve in *ṭághút* and believe in God hold the 'sure handle' (*al-'urwatu'l-wuthqá*). But those who disbelieve, their patrons are *ṭághút*; they are led from light to darkness and will be the companions of the fire wherein they abide (*úlá'ika hum aṣḥáb an-nár fihá khálidún*), while the believers' patron is God who leads them from darkness to light.⁶¹ The people of *ṭághút* whom God has cursed and left without a helper, say that the disbelievers are better guided than the believers. Those misguided are so greedy that they do not give their fellow men even a speck in a date stone.⁶² Outwardly they speak of their belief in God's prophets but in reality they resort to the judgment of *ṭághút*, although they are forbidden to do so. Thus Satan misleads them.⁶³ The believers in God who fight in the way of God are asked to fight 'the friends of Satan' (*awliyá' ash-shayṭán*).⁶⁴

The Báb also states that God bears witness to ‘His Servant ‘Alí in the Qur’án’ and that He is ‘the path of God in the heavens and on earth . . . He verily is the heir of the Messenger of God (*waṣíy rasúli’lláh*) in the lucid Book (*kitáb mubín*).’ The following verse, ‘And on this day the dominion belongeth to one from His progeny,’ again refers to Himself, as He was a descendant of Muḥammad. These statements are crucial in that the Báb establishes the fulfilment of prophecies for the establishment of the Hidden Imam, the Mahdi. The Báb challenges the accepted reading of the phrase *ṣirátá ‘alayya mustaqím*, ‘This is a straight path incumbent upon me,’ in Q. 15:41. The Báb renders it as *ṣirát ‘alí mustaqím*, which means ‘the straight path of ‘Alí.’⁶⁵ The beauty and interpretation of this verse is also echoed in other instances: ‘Verily God is My Lord and your true Lord, therefore worship Him, while this Path from ‘Alí [the Báb] is none but the straight Path in the estimation of your Lord.’⁶⁶ And further, ‘Verily God hath revealed unto Me that the Path of the Remembrance which is set forth by Me is, in the very truth, the straight Path of God. . . .’⁶⁷

The Báb then asks the people to bring forward a proof from the Qur’án if they have doubts regarding this command. His verses are the same as those of the Qur’án which were revealed to the Seal of the Prophets (*khátam an-nabiyyín*), and that He is ‘the One who leadeth aright to the path of God’ or the ‘Mahdi of the path of God’ (*mahdí ṣirát Alláh*). One verse revealed by the Báb equals the verses previously revealed by the Prophets. ‘We have delivered the decree of God in the Mother of the cities (*ummu’l-qurá*) [Mecca] and its surroundings in three Books,’ thereby probably alluding to *Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’*, *Ṣaḥífa Bayna’l-Ḥaramayn* and another book. Hence the people must follow the Cause of God in order to attain happiness. And should one of them die disregarding God’s command, he is accounted of the people of the fire on the Day of Judgment. ‘And whosoever repudiath Our verses and leaveth not his home emigrating to the city of the Remembrance (*muhájiran ilá balad adh-Dhikr*), We will send down his judgment in the Book, like We have done in the Qur’án regarding Abu Lahab,’ a reference to Muḥammad’s uncle, titled ‘father of the flame,’ and His fiery enemy, mentioned in Sura 111.

Once more, the Báb castigates Abdulmecid:

O thou man (rajul)! Thou hast followed Satan (shayṭán)⁶⁵ regarding the verdict to imprison the messenger of the Remembrance (rasúl adh-Dhikr). Fear God after thou hast read a single wondrous letter (ḥarfán badí’an) from Our Book. Do not repudiate the command of God and send the messenger in accordance with the command We have send down in the Book addressed to thee . . . Thou art not aware of the matter of the caliphate (khiláfa). The messenger is a weak servant in those lands. Yet know full well that it is We that sent him . . . Know thou God’s decree and send him after [thou hast read] this Book. . . . Follow God’s command, O Majíd, and not thine idle imaginings that lead thee astray from the path of God (sabíl).

Would Sultan Abdulmecid have acted in favour of Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭámí if he had received the Báb’s epistle? We do not know, but it is known that he later pursued favourable policies towards the Bábís on two subsequent occasions. The first is regarding Fáṭima Baraghání or ‘Ṭáhirih,’ the noted and only female disciple of the Báb;⁶⁹ the second is the respectful manner in which Abdulmecid approached Bahá’u’lláh during His exile in Baghdad.

Ṭáhirih was a famous poetess and scholar, well-versed and eloquent in Islamic theology and very successful in the proclamation of the new Bábí creed both in Iran and in Ottoman Iraq, especially in Najaf and Karbala. Her success in converting many to Bábism in Karbala provoked the jealousy and anger of the Shi’i ‘ulama, to such an extent that guards had to be placed at her house for protection. In order to prevent further annoyance she was granted permission by the Ottoman government to leave for Baghdad.⁷⁰

In Baghdad Ṭāhirih was hosted in the house of the chief mufti Mahmud al-Alusi, the same individual who a short time earlier had been the leading mulla who issued a *fatwá* condemning Mullá ‘Alí Baṣṭāmí and the Báb. Al-Alusi seems to have later changed his attitude towards Bábism because, according to a Bahá’í source,⁷¹ in his seminal work *Rúh al-Ma‘ání* he wrote positively of conversations he had with Ṭāhirih. In these unconfirmed references al-Alusi states that he shares her beliefs but, because of the fear of being punished by the Ottomans, he was not able to utter this publicly.⁷² In Baghdad, Ṭāhirih continued spreading the Bábí Faith freely, which caused a great outcry among the divines. The issue was taken to the governor general Necib Paṣlá who asked Istanbul whether Ṭāhirih was allowed to continue spreading Bábí teachings. Three months later, an order was received from Sultan Abdulmecid to release her under the condition that she stop advocating the Bábí Faith and leave the Ottoman empire.⁷³

About a decade later, when Bahá’u’lláh was in exile in Baghdad, Sultan Abdulmecid seems to have received positive reports about Him from various governors:

*So struck, indeed, had the Sulṭán ‘Abdu’l-Majíd been by the favorable reports received about Bahá’u’lláh from successive governors of Baghdád (this is the personal testimony given by the Governor’s deputy to Bahá’u’lláh Himself) that he consistently refused to countenance the requests of the Persian government either to deliver Him to their representative or to order His expulsion from Turkish territory.*⁷⁴

In Kurdistan Bahá’u’lláh had personal contacts with distinguished Sufi shaykhs, among whom He had won the heart of Shaykh ‘Uthman, the leader of the Naqshbandiyya Order. As noted previously, Sultan Abdulmecid was a follower of that order, and we are told by Shoghi Effendi that Abdulmecid was an adherent of Shaykh ‘Uthman.⁷⁵ It is quite possible that the Sultan’s high regard of Bahá’u’lláh was increased through this relationship.

Epistle of Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad 'the Báb' to Sultan Abdulmecid*

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Praise be to Him Who hath sent the Book unto whosoever He willeth among His servants. Verily, there is none other God beside Him, the All-Possessing, the All-Praised. In His grasp He holdeth the kingdom of all things. Nothing escapeth His knowledge. There is none other God beside Him. Say: Him do all worship. Verily, this Book is a command from God unto all who are on earth. Issue forth from your cities for the Covenant of the Remnant of God, the living, the undoubted Leader [Imám]. He is indeed the Book wherein there is no doubt,⁷⁶ sent down from the presence of His Servant 'Alí, the All-Wise. And He, verily, is 'Alí, the All-Wise, the Path of God⁷⁷ in the heavens and on the earth. He calls the people to the Straight Path at the bidding of thy Lord. He verily is the Mystery of the heavens, Who commands from the Presence of the Remnant of God, the true and undoubted Leader. He, verily, is the Light from the right side of the Mount Sinai in the Book of thy Lord. There is no God but Me. Say: Him do they all fear.

Read the Book of thy Lord, O Majíd, through the command of thy Lord in the preserved Book. Know thou that God hath knowledge of all things in the heavens and on the earth, and that thou art concerning the verdict passed on the messenger [Baṣṭámí], possessed of great wrongdoing. Fear God, O thou man! For today no place is there for anyone to flee except he believeth in the signs of God and is accounted among those who worship Him. We have sent down a Book unto the kings that they learn of the command of the new creation from the presence of the Remnant of God, the just and true Leader. Thus was sent down the Book. Gather them that are possessed of knowledge [‘ulama] in thy presence, and say unto them on behalf of the Remembrance of God: Read ye the Book of God with justice and be ye fair in the presence of God in what it ordaineth. God, verily, ordaineth the Day of Judgment among all with equity. He in truth is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful. O concourse [of ‘ulama?]?! Bear ye witness that the Testimony of God is completed for you after reading the verses of this Book. God, verily, is the omniscient Witness. O concourse! Fear ye God and judge fairly: Is there any distinction in the sovereignty of God, whether one verse or several verses were to be revealed? Nay, by the Qur’án! We make no distinction between the Messengers of God, and to God do we bow our will.⁷⁸ If the Qur’án was sent down as a single verse, how could anyone be able to fathom the matter and say something with respect to it and utter such words? Sanctified be God from those who join partners with Him. Sufficient is the Book for this as a witness to all in the heavens and the earth, and God is the omniscient Witness. Were men to gather in order to read a Book like this, which We have sent down now unto thee, they shall not and never will be able to do this, even if the Jinn were to assist them⁷⁹ despite their weakness. God is the All-Informed, the All-Knowing. And We have sent down a Book aforetime; in it are evident verses from Our presence to a people with hearing ears. Verily those who follow the verses of God in truth, they are the rightly guided; and those who follow their vain imaginings, they are the transgressors. O concourse of the people of Istanbul! Fear God, thy Lord, the Compassionate, regarding this decree. He verily is the Truth, even as ye have believed in the Covenant of God.⁸⁰ Those who have joined partners with God have followed the command of the Evil One (*ṭághút*) after [some words missing in text], such are rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein,⁸¹ according to the Book of God.

* This is a provisional translation for presentation and discussion at 'Irfán Colloquia. It is not to be reproduced or further distributed in any form or medium. Translation revised with assistance of Khazeh Fananapazir.

God beareth witness to His Servant 'Alí in the Qur'án. He, verily, is the Path of God in the heavens and on earth.⁸² Nothing escapeth His knowledge. He is verily the heir of the Messenger of God [Muḥammad] in a lucid Book. The heir of the dominion today is someone from His progeny and a true Leader. He is the One in Whose hand is the kingdom of all creation and all are powerless before His might. And at the behest of the Book all creatures are submissive to Him. If ye have any doubts concerning this Command then depart from the command of the Qur'án. God hath verily sent down these verses, as He hath sent down the Qur'án to the heart of the Apostle of God, the Seal of the Prophets. And with the permission of God He hath sent down to the heart of Him Whom He hath made the Proof for those in the heavens and on earth. Verily, He is the One who leadeth aright to the Path of God in a lucid Book. I, verily, am a Servant and have believed in God and His verses and what He hath sent down in the Qur'án from One, mighty and wise. Say: I verily do deliver the Cause with the permission of God from the true and mighty Leader. He is in truth the Mystery in the Mother Book upon an ancient Edifice.⁸³ Know ye, O people of the earth, that on this day nobody can escape the Cause of God. All will return to God on the Day of Resurrection. One verse, which We sent down unto you, now equals the verses of the Prophets in accordance with the Book of God. Afterwards, all the people will ask about the proofs of God.

We have delivered the Command of your Lord in the Mother of the Cities [Mecca] and to those in her vicinity, in three Books of verses of truth. Say: Follow the Cause of God that perchance ye may be of them with whom it shall be well. If someone amongst you should die rejecting this Command, verily he is among the people of Fire on the Day of Resurrection and will be amongst those who are gathered [in God's Presence]. Send thou a Book like unto this Book to the King in that land in golden ink that perchance ye may be among the helpers. He who disbelieveth in our verses and doth not leave his house emigrating to the City of the Remembrance, We shall send down his verdict in the Book, the like of which hath been sent with regard to Abu Lahab in the Qur'án.⁸⁴ Fear God, O concourse, and have mercy on yourselves. And bring not shame upon yourselves should ye have fear of that which hath been revealed unto after God's decree hath come to and these verses have been recited.

O thou man! Thou hast followed Satan regarding the verdict to imprison the messenger of the Remembrance. Fear God after thou hast read a single wondrous letter from Our Book. Do not repudiate the command of God and send the messenger [back] in accordance with the command We have sent down in the Book addressed to thee according to a mighty and wondrous command. Thou art not aware of the matter of the caliphate. The messenger is a weak servant in those lands. Yet know thou full well that it is We that sent him. We, verily, art potent over all things. We, verily, bear witness unto everything. We, verily, art powerful over all things with the permission of God. Know thou God's decree and send him after [thou hast read] this Letter. Verily do We write the decree of thy death at thine own hands, and We art aware of what We accomplish. Follow God's command, O Majíd, and not thine idle imaginings that mislead thee from the path of God. God's decree is naught but a manifest announcement. Exalted is God, thy Lord, the Lord of might, from what they do ascribe unto Him. Peace be unto the emigrants and praised be God, the Lord of all worlds!

Notes

* I should like to thank the participants of the 42nd 'Irfán Colloquium, London 19-21 July 2002, for their comments. Iraj Ayman, Armin Eschraghi, Stephen Lambden, Moojan Momen, and Sholeh Quinn, in particular have contributed to this paper. Sholeh and Stephen, thank you very much for your part during our stay in Istanbul.

1) 'He loved wine, women and reform' is a historian's plain summary of Abdulmecid's personality; Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire* (Penguin Books: London 1997), 265.

- 2) On Abdulmecid, see e.g. A.H. Ongunsu, *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul 1941-), I:92-94; *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul 1958 ff), vol. 1, s.v. 'Abdulmecid'; Jean Deny, *El²* (Encyclopedia of Islam, Leiden 1960 ff), 1:74-75; Cevdet Küçük, *Türk Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul 1988 ff), 1:259-63.
- 3) For a vivid description of this, see Mansel, 272.
- 4) C. Baysun, 'Mustafa Reflid Pafla' in *Tanzimat* (İstanbul 1940), 734.
- 5) Ongunsu, 94.
- 6) Butrus Abu-Manneh, 'The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript', *Die Welt des Islams* 34 (1994), 173-203.
- 7) fierif Mardin, *Yeni Osmanlı Düşüncesinin Doğuflu* (İletiflim: İstanbul 1996), 123. This book is a translation of *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*.
- 8) Abdurrahman fierif, *Tarih Musâhabeleri* (Matbaa-i Âmire: İstanbul 1339/1920-1921), 106.
- 9) For a critique of their ministries with regard to internal and external affairs and an account of their faults, see Baflbakanlık Osmanlı Arflivi (Prime Ministry's Ottoman Archive/Istanbul; henceforth BOA), *Yıldız Esas Evrakı* 32/1 (lengthy letter in French), no date but probably written in the 1870's after their deaths in 1869 and 1871.
- 10) Edouard Engelhardt, *La Turquie et le Tanzimat* (Cotillon: Paris 1882-1884), I:158.
- 11) Frederick Millingen, *La Turquie sous le Règne d'Abdul Aziz 1862 [sic] - 1867* (Libr. Internationale: Paris 1868) 255. For the whole question, see Mardin, *Yeni Osmanlı* 128-29.
- 12) Cited in Mansel, *Constantinople* 265.
- 13) Cited in Abu-Manneh, 'Islamic Roots' 189.
- 14) Ibid. 190.
- 15) Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton University Press 1963), 3-4. He moreover passed a verdict on slavery and abolished it by saying that it is a shameful and barbarous practice to buy and sell fellow creatures, and that though they were treated better in the Empire than else where, they were ill-treated. Still, slavery was not abolished until the end of the Ottoman Empire. The best example was the buying of slave women for his harem; Mansel, 264.
- 16) Thierry Zarcone, *Mystiques, philosophes et franc-masons en Islam* (Jean Maisonneuve: Paris 1993), 31, 117, 317.
- 17) Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'ulama' of Najaf and Karbala'* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 128-34, 140-42.
- 18) Butrus Abu-Manneh, 'The Wâli Nejîb Pâshâ and the Qâdirî Order in Iraq,' *Journal of the History of Sufism* (Simurg Press: İstanbul, 2000), no. 1-2, 115-122. My thanks to Mr. Abu-Manneh for sending me a copy of his article.
- 19) Idem. 'Sultan Abdulhamid II and Shaikh Abulhuda Al-Sayyadî', *Middle East Studies* 15, no. 2 (May 1979), 131-53.
- 20) BOA, *İradeler-Dahiliye*, no. 2749; cited in Abu-Manneh, 'Nejîb Pâshâ', 115.
- 21) FO 78/518 Baghdad, no. 4, Farrant to Canning, 22 April 1843; cited in Litvak, 138.
- 22) Juan Cole/Moojan Momen, 'Mafia, Mob and Shi'ism in Iraq: The Rebellion of Ottoman Karbala', 1824-1843', *Past and Present* 112 (1986), 118-30. For the Ottoman tribal policy, see also Stephen H. Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Clarendon: Oxford 1925), 288-92.
- 23) Ibid. 138-43 (esp. 143).
- 24) Ibid. 144.
- 25) Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, London 1989), 211.
- 26) On Najafi, see Litvak, 61-72.
- 27) Nabil-i Zarandi, *The Dawn-Breakers* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette 1974), 90-91.
- 28) Litvak, 145.
- 29) Al-Wardî, *Lamaḥât Ijtimâ'yya min Ta'rîkh al-'Iraq* (3 vols. Baghdad 1969), 2:138-39.
- 30) Litvak, 152.
- 31) Ibid. 146.
- 32) Moojan Momen, 'The Trial of Mullâ 'Alî Bastâmi: A Combined Sunnî-Shî'î Fatwâ Against the Báb' (*Iran* 20, 1982; British Institute of Persian Studies), 117-18.
- 33) Amanat, 238.
- 34) BOA, *İradeler-Dahiliye*, no. 5067, 15 Muḥarram 1261/24 January 1845, sealed: Mehmed Necib; document no. 1 in the addendum in Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bábî and Bahá'î Religions: Some Contemporary Western Accounts, 1844-1944* (George Ronald: Oxford 1981), 89-90; henceforth *BBR*.

- 35) BOA, *İradeler-Dahiliye*, no. 5067, shorter letter of Necib Pafla, same date; cf. Momen, *BBR* 90, document no. 2.
- 36) Mehmed Emin Rauf Pafla held the office of Sadrâzam from 30 August 1842 to 28 September 1846 under Abdulmecid; see Ibrahim A. Gövsa, *Türk Meşhurları Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara 1946), 316; *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, 1:128.
- 37) Ca. 260 km east of Istanbul.
- 38) Momen, ‘Trial’ 140; Amanat, 236, n. 189.
- 39) Momen, *ibid.*; Denis MacEoin, ‘The Fate of Mullá ‘Alí Bastamí’ (*Bahá’í Studies Bulletin* 2, June 1983), 77; Amanat, *ibid.*
- 40) BOA, *İradeler-Dahiliye*, no. 5067, no date but it should be later than January 1845 since it stated here that the reports of Necib Pafla were received.
- 41) *Ibid.* and document no. 4 in the addendum in Momen, *BBR* 90, though no mention of Bolu is made here. Momen, ‘Trial’ (140, n. 36) mentions a letter of the Governor of Bolu but no document in the file in question indicates this. Another document (BOA, *İradeler-Hariciye*, no. 1340, 14 Rabi‘ al-Awwal 1261/23 March 1845) in which Bolu is mentioned and the present author has come across in a catalogue, could not be found in the Archive; see also no. 5 in *ibid.*: ‘Letter from the Sublime Porte to the Sultán . . .’
- 42) Momen, *BBR* 90; letter of Sami Doktoroğlu, dated 14 July 1978, to Moojan Momen, making references to documents the present author could not get hold of. My thanks to Mr. Momen for sharing this information.
- 43) This letter in Persian is to be found in Faḍil Mázandarání, *Kitáb-i Żuhúr al-Ḥaqq*, vol. 3 (Tehran, n.d. [1323/1944?]), 109; cited in Amanat, 236.
- 44) Moojan Momen, ‘Mulla ‘Alí Bastamí’, draft article for the *Encyclopedia of the Bahá’í Faith*, online at www.bahai-library.org/encyclopedia/alibast.html (accessed on 3 April 2002).
- 45) *‘Ahd-i Haḍrat-i Báb* (Oneworld: Oxford 2000).
- 46) Cited in ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamid Isḥráq-Khávarí, *Muḥáḍirát* (Bahá’í-Verlag: Hofheim 19943), 729-31; see also Amanat, 238, n. 198.
- 47) Afnan, 80.
- 48) *Ibid.* 157.
- 49) The Báb lists it in His *Kitáb al-Fihrist*; see Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Brill: Leiden et al. 1992), 51.
- 50) *God Passes By* (Wilmette 1974), 24.
- 51) Denis MacEoin, *Sources* 58.
- 52) I am grateful for sending me a copy of this Tablet.
- 53) Since most of the documents in this Archive are still not catalogued, these Tablets or other important documents related to Bábi-Bahá’í history will possibly be discovered.
- 54) Cited in MacEoin, *Sources* 64.
- 55) *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (trans. Habib Taherzadeh, Haifa 1976), 43.
- 56) See the details below.
- 57) Qur‘án (Q) 11:86: ‘ . . . ’ (transl. Yusuf Ali); Baqiyyatu’lláh is one of the titles of the Hidden Imam of Shi‘a Islam; see Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam* (George Ronald: Oxford 1985), 165.
- 58) Cf. Q. 5:42.
- 59) The Báb cites Q. 2:285 and 3:84, though in different wording.
- 60) Occurs eight times.
- 61) 2:256-57.
- 62) 4:51.
- 63) 4:60.
- 64) 4:76.
- 65) I am most grateful to Khazeh Fananapazir for sharing this insight with me.
- 66) *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 45; the ‘straight Path’ refers to Q. 3:50.
- 67) *Ibid.* 63.
- 68) Cf. Q. 4:60.
- 66) Cf. Q. 10:37, 32:2.
- 67) Cf. Q. 2:285.
- 68) Cf. Q. 7:201.

An Epistle of the Báb to Sultan Abdulmecid

- 69) See the section on her in Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1989).
- 70) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail; Bahá’í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Ill, 1971), 182; Zarandi, *Dawn-Breakers* 272.
- 71) *Kashf al-Ghitá’* is a refutation by Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl Gulpáygání of the Azali work *Kitáb-i Nuṣṣatu’l-Káf*, a so-called early history of the Bábí religion. Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl died before he could finish it. His nephew Sayyid Mahdi did it in his stead, and it was published in Ashqabad. But because Sayyid Mahdi had stepped beyond the limits of modesty and the book contained some factual errors, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stopped its circulation.
- 72) Cited in Zarandi, *Dawn-Breakers* 272.
- 73) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *A Traveller’s Narrative* (trans. E.G. Browne), 310 (Note Q); idem. *Memorials* 196. The present author could not locate documents relating to this episode in the Ottoman Archive.
- 74) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 132. The present author was not able to discover these reports or Abdulmecid’s edict with regard to Ṭáhirih in the Ottoman Archive.
- 75) Ibid. 122. No references could be found on this in non-Bahá’í sources.
- 76) Cf. Q. 10:37, 32:2.
- 77) See footnote 65.
- 78) Cf. Q. 2:285.
- 79) Cf. Q. 7:201.
- 80) Cf. Q. 51:23.
- 81) Cf. Q. 2:39.
- 82) See footnote 65.
- 83) It is not clear what this refers to.
- 84) Sura 111.

The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings

Ian Kluge

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1) Introduction

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the Bahá’í Writings re-affirm many of the philosophical insights first developed by Aristotle. Although a paper of this length can only be a survey of the evidence, it will at least provide an idea of the enormous wealth of material available on this subject. The pervasive and far-reaching congruence of Aristotle and the Bahá’í Writings can be seen in seven main areas: physics; the analysis of reality; epistemology; ethics; theology; statecraft and anthropology or the study of humankind. The Aristotelian substratum not only makes it possible to resolve many apparent paradoxes in the Writings, but also to explicate the Writings in a way that harmonizes with common human experience and common sense. On this basis it is possible to develop a systematic and rational apologetics that can be linked with several developments in modern philosophy.

In order to prevent any initial misunderstandings, it is important to clarify what our thesis does *not* mean. Certainly there is no intention of suggesting that the Bahá’í Writings are nothing but a permutation of Aristotle or crudely reducible to his thought. Rather, I would emphasize that the Bahá’í Writings *re-affirm* many—though by no means all—of Aristotle’s philosophical ideas and methods of studying reality and adapt and develop them to their own unique purpose of laying the philosophical foundations for a Bahá’u’lláh’s new world order. This Aristotelian substratum links the Bahá’í Writings with an intellectual heritage that, in the persons of Maimonides, Avicenna, Averroes, St. Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, not only unites thinkers from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian traditions but also shows itself sufficiently versatile to accommodate fresh re-formulations in light of new discoveries and intellectual developments especially in relationship to Heidegger’s existentialism and Whitehead’s process philosophy. Indeed, once we recognize substances as *activities*, this tradition is also capable of harmonizing itself with other, non-western process philosophies such as Buddhism’s doctrine of dependent arising. In other words, the Aristotelian substratum provides a highly flexible, far-reaching yet orderly way for us to develop our understanding of the Bahá’í Writings and see their connection to a variety of other traditions. I believe that the Writings re-affirm much of Aristotle’s philosophy precisely because it allows enormous flexibility and capacity for growth in new directions.

1.1) Using Aristotle

At this point it would be natural to ask whether the Bahá'í Writings do not simply use Aristotle as a vehicle for expressing certain ideas in a form more easily comprehensible to modern and specifically western audiences. Does this use really imply any systematic intellectual continuity with Aristotle's philosophy? I believe so, for reasons the body of my paper shall make clear. For now, it suffices to make three points. First, if the use of this philosophy was an attempted adaptation to modern and especially western audiences, it was a remarkably infelicitous and short-sighted thing to do. Even in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's time, in the mind of the western public and certainly in the minds of most scientists, Aristotelian philosophy and analysis had been discredited scientifically since Galileo and philosophically since Descartes. If cultural adaptation is the reason for the choice of terminology, it is hard to see how any worthwhile advantage could be derived therefrom. This is even more true now than in Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's time. Moreover, how such a putative cultural adaptation to the west could help teach the Cause among the non-western cultures that form the majority of humankind, is also hard to fathom. A far more likely reason, aside from the fact that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá lived in an intellectual culture heavily influenced by Aristotelian thought, is that Aristotle's analysis of reality is common sense and accessible in principle by anyone. A curious mind and probing thoughtfulness but no specialized equipment and no specialized experimental experiences are needed to verify the value of Aristotle's analysis of reality. We shall touch on this issue again later.

This brings us to our second reason for rejecting the notion that the Aristotelian terminology was used only for illustrative or other pedagogical purposes. Not only do the Writings make pervasive and continuous use of this terminology, they usually use it precisely as Aristotle did. The terminology and the associated concepts are not merely employed for illustrative purposes but to develop, expound and prove particular conclusions, as for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's employment of Aristotle's Prime Mover argument. 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly expects the logical processes on which He builds His argument to be accepted—and inherent in those processes are the concepts and premises derived from Aristotle's analysis of reality. If we do not accept them, neither can we accept the argument based on them. However, to reject the argument is to reject 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teaching—and that is obviously not what 'Abdu'l-Bahá expects us to do. He clearly presents these arguments in the belief that they reflect reality and that the arguments are, therefore, true, or, at least reflect one reasonable view of reality.

With this consideration in mind, we can see a third reason to reject the argument of cultural adaptation and pedagogical uses: one cannot simply make use of, let alone make extensive use of a philosophical terminology without committing oneself to a considerable degree to the ideas embodied in these terms especially if one employs those terms in their original way. The pervasive use of any particular terminology lays a foundation which has logical implications, and sets certain limitations, on the nature of what one can build on it. For example, as we shall see, the Writings are clearly committed to Aristotle's theory of causation and this commitment not only rules out acceptance of absolute chaos but also implies a particular theory of 'chance' and the fortuitous. This, in turn, affects Bahá'í views on evolution not to mention autopoiesis and self-organization.

A related question might be whether or not we are possibly being misled by a series of mere coincidences which in turn leads one to question to what degree these coincidences are meaningful. I think the best way to answer is to point out that the congruencies between Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings are not merely numerous and superficial, but rather, are numerous and deep, that is, related to a set of fundamental issues in physics, metaphysics, epistemology,

anthropology, ethics and statecraft. In other words, these congruencies reflect essential agreements in underlying premises and attitudes. They show that Aristotle, of whom Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá thought very highly,¹ was at least beginning to think along the same lines and from the same and/or similar premises and axioms. Conversely, one might say that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá regarded Aristotle with enough esteem to adopt his philosophy as the best philosophical vehicle for expressing the new revelation. Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá lavished special praise on Plato and Aristotle for exploring natural and supernatural phenomena, and then adds,

*Today the philosophy and logic of Aristotle are known throughout the world. Because they were interested in both natural and divine philosophy, furthering the development of the physical world of mankind as well as the intellectual, they rendered praiseworthy service to humanity.*²

Some might argue that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had no choice given that the Bahá'í Faith arose in a culture whose philosophical tradition was heavily imbued with Aristotelian influence. However, this argument fails for two reasons. First, nothing in the cultural environment could force anyone, let alone a Manifestation of God, to make such extensive, deep and far-reaching use of the tradition. He could have used it strictly for illustrative purposes but the fact remains, He did not, nor did His official interpreter. The inescapable conclusion is that the Manifestation found the Aristotelian philosophy especially useful in leading us to the truth on a wide variety of important issues. This suggests that Aristotle's philosophy and its associated modes of thought are especially apt for discovering truth and understanding the Writings. Second, for theological reasons, it is doubtful that any human factors, even cultural milieu, could constrain the Divine to act in a certain way. God could, for example, have anointed the Manifestation in places other than Persia, but instead, chose a cultural locale heavily imbued with Aristotelianism.

1.2) Plato and Neo-Platonism

Finally in this introduction, I need to say that I certainly do not mean to deny or diminish the obvious neo-Platonic aspects of the Bahá'í Writing though I do wish to point out that neo-Platonism itself is heavily influenced by Aristotle. Even such an author as Keven Brown, whose article in *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief* inclines to see heavy Platonic influences, cannot help but wage his pro-Platonic arguments with concepts, terms and arguments originating in Aristotle. Thus, the presence of neo-Platonic elements in the Bahá'í Writings tends to support rather than deny my assertions about the Aristotelian substratum insofar as neo-Platonism itself resulted at least in part from Aristotle's effect on Platonism. The neo-Platonists accepted such key Aristotelian concepts as essence, substance, actuality and actualization, potential, the transcendentals and the Unmoved Mover.

One of the reasons Platonism needed to be recast was precisely because thinkers such as Plotinus took Aristotle's critique of Plato's independent world of ideas as decisive and final. They tried to answer Aristotle's critique while maintaining the existence of Ideas or exemplars by placing them in the First Mind or First Will or what Bahá'u'lláh calls "the Kingdom of Names."³ Moreover, we must recall that emanationism itself does not necessarily make one a neo-Platonist as can be seen in the case of St Thomas, an Aristotelian who also espouses emanationism.⁴ Indeed, the concept of emanationism, is already logically implicit in Aristotle's doctrine of God as the Divine thinking Itself. In this situation, we have God the thinker and God, the object of God's thought; the object is obviously dependent upon the thinking subject, and this relationship of dependence is precisely the relationship between God and His emanations. Without question, Plotinus and the neo-Platonists developed this idea to a far

greater extent than Aristotle ever did, but it is important to recognize that even this neo-Platonic doctrine has some Aristotelian roots.

The issue concerning Plato's forms or Ideas is, of course, vital in this debate. The bottom line is that the Bahá'í Writings are clearly Platonic insofar as they present a variation of Plato's forms or Ideas, called the "Names of God"⁵ as residing as independent substances in a separate realm called "the Kingdom of Names"⁶ which is itself identified with the First Mind.⁶ For Aristotle, the forms, essences, ideas or universals do not reside as independent substances in a separate realm but rather are found in particular things. In short, Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings differ on the issue of *where and how the original essences or forms reside*, an issue on which the Writings take a decidedly Platonic turn. However, it must be noted that Aristotle's view is not entirely excluded, since the Writings tell us that the Names of God are reflected in every created thing, and so, in that sense, formally or virtually present in every particular.⁷ This means that while the Writings take a Platonic view about the original essences, exemplars or Names, they do not entirely abandon the Aristotelian view that these are present in all created things. From this perspective, the Writings may be seen as synthesizing Plato's and Aristotle's views, a project of great importance to the neo-Platonists.

2) Physics

I shall begin my survey of the Aristotelian substratum of the Bahá'í Writings with an examination of physics. To put it plainly, the foundations of 'Bahá'í physics' are Aristotelian, by which I mean that there is a pervasive and systematic overlap between Aristotle's book *Physics* and the Bahá'í Teachings. Although this may at first sight seem, at best, an academic curiosity, it does in fact have profound consequences for any future Bahá'í metaphysics and epistemology and has a serious impact on our understanding of the unity of science and religion. It also requires a logical commitment to some metaphysical and epistemological views and the rejection of others.

2.1) The Co-eternity of Matter or Creation

One of the key issues on which Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings also agree is the eternity of the world or creation. According to Aristotle, prime matter, which is the capacity or potential to receive form, has always existed along with the Unmoved Mover since a mover without something to move or affect is logically impossible.⁸ In other words, Aristotle's matter is co-eternal although logically dependent on the Unmoved Mover. There was no moment at which matter was suddenly created after a period of non-existence, because the nature of the Unmoved Mover required its existence. This, of course, is precisely the Bahá'í doctrine that creation has always existed because "a creator without a creature is impossible."⁹ In other words, both Aristotle and the Writings hold that creation is co-eternal or co-existent insofar as it has existed with God since the "beginning that hath no beginning."¹⁰

Unfortunately, this is misunderstood in *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*. Keven Brown claims that Aristotle recognized "no transcendent cause for the existence of things, saw the universe as self-existent"¹¹, a belief that would clearly separate Aristotle from the Writings. However, Brown ignores the fact that the nature of God as Unmoved Mover, is logically prior to its consequence, the existence of matter, so that in a logical sense, God is, indeed, the cause, the necessary prior condition, of matter.

As already noted, the Unmoved Mover requires something to move. Furthermore, if by "self-existent"¹² Brown means 'self-created,' then he is mistaken about Aristotle's doctrine. According to Aristotle, matter did not create itself; instead, matter has always existed though

dependent upon the eternal Unmoved Mover; that is, Aristotle's matter is co-eternal which is exactly what the Writings teach.

If by there being "no transcendent cause for the existence of things"¹³ Brown means that matter is independent of God, he is in error from yet another perspective because according to Aristotle, matter also depends on God for order and form. Aristotle's God, as we recall, is the universal "the object of desire,"¹⁴ that is the final cause for which all things strive. However, by being the final cause of all motion, the Divine is also the efficient cause of all motion, that which actually sets things into movement; moreover, by being the final cause, the Divine is also the formal cause.¹⁵ Nor can matter form itself according to Aristotle since it is a fundamental principle of his system that actuality precedes potentiality,¹⁶ which is to say that all potentials must be actualized by an actuality or, in this case, God, who is pure actuality. We must, therefore, reject Brown's effort to erect the co-eternity of matter or creation as a barrier between Aristotle and the Writings.

Indeed, a correct understanding of Aristotle's doctrine not only allows a resolution to the apparent self-contradiction between a creation that is co-eternal with God and the doctrine of a specific moment of creation, but also allows a reconciliation or synthesis with Brown's views about "God's actional Will"¹⁷ and the "first creation"¹⁸ in the world of possibilities. The co-eternity of creation refers to the co-eternity of matter, that is, the capacity or potential to manifest form whereas the specific moment of creation refers to the actualization and manifestation of particular forms. Thus, insofar as the potentials are co-eternal with God, creation is also timeless, whereas the actualization of form is something that occurs at some particular point in time. As we can see, this beginning or actualization of form, has, from the perspective of potentials, no beginning itself: the potentials have always existed. That is why Bahá'u'lláh is able to refer to the "beginning that hath no beginning."¹⁹ Using Aristotle's definition of matter as the potential to receive and manifest form, it becomes obvious that matter in this sense may be identified with "God's actional Will as part of His 'First Creation' of the universe *in potentia*."²⁰ With this in mind, an Aristotelian reading of the Writings can fully agree with Brown when he says "This Will, which corresponds to the possible, manifests the realities of things as a sea manifests itself in the forms of the waves."²¹ Moreover, this actualization is voluntary insofar as the Divine must select which potentials to actualize and which to leave in their potential state at least for the present.

2.2) Motion and Change

Motion or change is the next issue we must explore. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

*There are different degrees of motion. There is motion of transit, that is from place to place . . . Another kind is the motion of inherent growth . . . The third kind is the motion of condition—the sick man passes from the stage of sickness to the state of health. The fourth kind is that of spirit. For instance, the child while in the mother's womb has all the potential qualities of the spirit, but those qualities begin to unfold little by little, as the child is born and grows and develops and finally manifests all the attributes and qualities of the spirit. The fifth is the motion of the intellect, whereby the ignorant become wise . . . the carnally minded spiritual . . . the sixth is that of the eternal essence. That is to say, all phenomena either step from the arena of non-existence into the court of objectivity, or from existence to non-existence. Just as being in motion is the test of life, so being stationary is the test of death . . .*²²

This passage reveals its Aristotelian nature in various ways. First of all, we see the nature of change as being from one thing to its contrary or contradictory, that is, from one place or con-

dition to its opposite.²³ Next, we see that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explicitly adopted Aristotle's definition of change as the motion from potentiality to actuality,²⁴ which is to say that in motion or change qualities and attributes that were potential but not overtly present or active become actualized, that is, overtly present and active.²⁵ In other words, it is evident that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has adopted Aristotle's concept of motion as self-actualization in one or more of three areas: quantity, quality and place. (On this point Brown's belief that Aristotle defines change as "the exchange of one accidental quality for another"²⁶ is a serious error that leads to a distorted view of Aristotle's system as being fundamentally static.) Like Aristotle, 'Abdu'l-Bahá identifies growth as a kind of motion, being a positive change in quantity and quality which is more complex than what Aristotle calls "locomotion"²⁷ or "transit . . . from place to place."²⁸ Change of quality is evident in the change from sickness to health, from a baby's unactualized potentials to their actualization and in the change from ignorance to wisdom and carnality to spirituality. Aristotle's view that change includes coming into existence²⁹ is evident in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sixth form of motion, the movement from non-existence to existence.

It should be noted that the qualitative changes mentioned here are what Aristotle sometimes calls "alteration"³⁰ in order to distinguish them from "coming to be and passing away"³¹ namely, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sixth sense of change or motion. This is a noteworthy development because in effect, it shows 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressing a preference for one Aristotelian term over another. For Bahá'ís this raises an interesting and important question: is there any significance in this? I believe there is because this question relates to the Bahá'í Teaching that existence and non-existence are relative.³² In other words there are degrees of existence just as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says there are "degrees of motion."³³

Moreover, this question relates to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's categorical statement that nothing comes from absolute nothingness: "absolute nonexistence cannot become existence. If the beings were absolutely nonexistent, they would not have come into being"³⁴ and "therefore, nonexistence is only relative and absolute nonexistence inconceivable."³⁵ Logic forces us to admit that if this is the case, then all existing things, including us, have had a potential pre-existence, (albeit it a phenomenal pre-existence caused by God, the Prime Mover)³⁶ before they stepped "into the court of objectivity."³⁷ In short, we all pre-existed potentially before we attained material existence, a fact confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá when He says

*Before we were born into this world did we not pray, 'O God! Give me a mother; give me two fountains of bright milk; purify the air for my breathing; grant me rest and comfort; prepare food for my sustenance and living'? Did we not pray potentially for these needed blessings before we were created?"*³⁸

In *Some Answered Questions*, He tells us that "all creatures emanate from God—that is to say, it is by God that all things are realized,"³⁹ in other words, the potentials of things become real, are realized or brought into material existence by God's action. This explains why 'Abdu'l-Bahá considered the movement from non-existence to existence as a *degree* of change, even though Aristotle thought of specifically differentiated *types* of change: for Bahá'ís, "generation,"⁴⁰ that is, the movement from non-existence to existence is simply the change from potentiality to actuality, which is Aristotle's original and fundamental definition of movement. "Alternation"⁴¹ is a change from a something to something else, and in the Bahá'í view, the movement from non-existence, that is, potential existence, to existence is simply the actualization of an already existing potentiality.

This choice by 'Abdu'l-Bahá is of extreme importance because it provides another perspective from which the Bahá'í Writings resolve the apparent contradiction between the eternity of

the universe and the creation of the world. How can the universe be an eternal emanation from an eternal Creator and the world be created at a point in time by a Prime Mover? Aristotle's notion of potential existence allows us to resolve this seeming self-contradiction by defining the 'creation' of a particular world or being in an Aristotelian manner as the actualization of pre-existing potentials from an infinite store of such potentials. This change requires a mover and, according to Aristotle—as well as the Bahá'í Writings and prayers—ultimately there is only one such mover, namely the Divine. Aristotle's concepts of 'potential' and 'actual' also provide a philosophical reason why God is the "Sustainer": He sustains the universe by being the Prime Mover in a causal chain that leads to the continuous actualization of potentialities in all the kingdoms of material existence.

2.3) Autopoesis

The belief in potentials and a fundamental order in the universe affects Bahá'í apologetics insofar as it puts constraints on the concept of autopoesis or self-organizing. From the Bahá'í/Aristotelian point of view, what is called 'self-organizing' is simply the actualization of possibilities for order already present in matter itself—not to mention the entire experimental situation—both of which are already highly organized. In what *appears* to be the 'self-organizing' we are not witnessing the emergence of order from absolute chaos but rather the emergence of one kind of order from another under special circumstances. This means that from a Bahá'í/Aristotelian point of view, we cannot logically accept the argument that the existence of 'self-organization' as a so-called proof that God is unnecessary to explain order in the cosmos.

2.4) God as the First Mover

At this point we have arrived at the question of the origin of motion and this, of course, is one of the various ways by which we can approach the subject of the Prime Mover. Here again we see how Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings overlap significantly. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

*Know that nothing which exists remains in a state of repose—that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either coming from non-existence into being, or going from existence into non-existence. . . This state of motion is said to be essential—that is natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement . . .*⁴²

Similarly, Aristotle tells us that motion is an inextricable aspect of nature: "Nature has been defined as a 'principle of motion and change.'"⁴³ In other words nature and motion are necessarily correlated, and whatever is in nature, whatever exists, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, is in motion. The fact of motion in nature, or in creation, leads inevitably to the concept of a Prime Mover because whatever is moved is moved by something.⁴⁴ Now things either move themselves or they are moved by another and since matter cannot bring itself into existence or set itself into motion (in effect, the same thing given the correlation between nature and movement) a first mover is required to avoid an infinite regress of movers. Aristotle lays out his arguments on this issue in Book VIII of the *Physics*. The various arguments and deviations require no explication here but the conclusions he draws are important to our subject: (a) there must be a prime mover to first impart motion⁴⁵; (b) this prime mover must be unmoved⁴⁶; (c) it must be apart from nature⁴⁷; (d) it must be one and eternal.⁴⁸ Every Bahá'í will recognize these characteristics as some of the descriptors applied to God in the Writings: "the One, the Single"⁴⁹ the "Prime Mover,"⁵⁰ the "Self-Subsisting."⁵¹ The notion that the Prime Mover must be apart from nature is seen in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "the one true God is in Himself exalted beyond and above proximity and remoteness."⁵² Aristotle, who thought of God as pure

form thinking on Itself (and knowing creation through knowing Itself) would certainly agree.

Albeit very succinctly, Bahá'u'lláh Himself makes use of the unmoved mover argument when He says, "All that is created, however, is preceded by a cause. This fact, in itself, establisheth, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the unity of the Creator."⁵³ Here Bahá'u'lláh simply states the conclusion of the argument first advanced by Aristotle, namely that all motion and contingent beings have a cause; this requires the existence of an uncreated First Cause to bring them into being and set them into motion. Indeed, it proves not just the existence of God but His unity, because oneness is the origin of multiplicity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the same argument:

*... we observe that motion without motive force and an effect without a cause are both impossible: that every being hath come to exists under numerous influences and continually undergoeth reaction. These influences, too, are formed under the action of still other influences . . . Such a process of causation goes, and to maintain that this process goes on indefinitely is manifestly absurd. Thus such a chain of causation must of necessity lead eventually to Him Who is the Ever-Living, the All Powerful, Who is Self-Dependent and the Ultimate Cause."*⁵⁴

This is, in effect, nothing less than a paraphrase of Aristotle's argument using causality and the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes to prove the existence of God. We can also recognize Aristotle's argument in the following quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*Throughout the world of existence it is the same; the smallest created thing proves that there is a creator. For instance, this piece of bread proves that it has a maker."*⁵⁵

In this case, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is simply applying the same craftsman argument used by Aristotle to the things of this world. Having no necessary existence, they are all contingent. The sheer fact of their actual existence means that there must be a non-contingent entity whose existence is necessary and which is capable of bringing the mere potentials into actuality or existence. The denial of such an entity results in an infinite regress which, as Aristotle and 'Abdu'l-Bahá point out, is logically absurd: there cannot be an indefinite number of definite things. Here, too, the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle are of one mind.

2.5) Emanationism and Divine Personalism

It might be objected that whatever the similarities between Bahá'í and Aristotelian concepts of God, two great differences irremediably separate them: emanationism and divine personalism. Emanationism, the belief, as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it, that God originates the universe by divine radiation and not by divine mutation, is generally associated not with Aristotle but with Plotinus, Proclus and other neo-Platonists. Oddly enough, there are no specific references to emanation in Plato's works to support the term neo-Platonism, invented by Thomas Taylor in the early 19th century; indeed, if anything, Plato's *Timaeus* with its world-making demiurge suggests a creationist doctrine. That aside, the fact remains that the concept of emanation can be logically derived directly from Aristotle's notion of God as the Unmoved Mover thinking upon Itself. As already noted, this concept sets up the archetypal emanationist situation: a producer and a product, a thinker and a thought. It is evident that in the order of logic, the thinker is prior to the thought. There can be no thought without a thinker, and thought obviously lacks the power to think the thinker whereas the opposite is not true. Consequently, the thought is related to but distinct from the thinker and, because of its logically derivative nature, belongs to an ontologically secondary level of being. This order—which could also be repeated with the concept of Will—is precisely what emanationism asserts. We even see Bahá'u'lláh setting up this very situation: "Consider the relation between the craftsman and his handiwork, between the painter and his painting. Can it ever be maintained that the work their

hands have produced is the same as themselves?”⁵⁶ The only reasonable conclusion left us is that emanationism is logically derivable from Aristotle’s concept of God and need be neither Platonic in origin nor in nature.

As to the second objection, there is no doubt that Aristotle’s concept of God is impersonal, but even this must be understood in a carefully hedged way because there is nothing that logically requires Aristotle’s God to be absolutely impersonal. When we ask if the Unmoved Mover thinking upon Itself can think about us, the answer that immediately suggests itself (and was, in fact adopted) is that the Divine can do so insofar as in contemplating Itself it contemplates supreme perfection which, of course, includes creation, the universe, and us. In other words, God does not perceive us as a subject perceives an object, but rather contemplates us through thoughts focussed on the Divine perfections—which includes the perfection of actualization of potentials. This makes it virtually self-evident that whereas the Unmoved Mover described by Aristotle is impersonal, there is no logical objection to developing his ideas in a personalist direction. Aristotle’s God can be harmonized with the God of the Bahá’í Writings who takes sufficient personal interest in creation to send Manifestations.

2.6) A Theological Interlude: Other Similarities Regarding God

Because Aristotle and the Writings do not recognize a hard and fast distinction between physics and metaphysics and/or theology—a fact of enormous significance in our consideration of the unity of science and religion—the Divine is an inevitable part of any discussion of the universe’s physical constitution. Not only do both see God as the “Prime Mover”⁵⁷ but they also regard God as utterly self-sufficient, meaning, philosophically speaking, as not preceded by a cause⁵⁸ or, as the Bahá’í Writings say, “Self-Subsisting”⁵⁹ and, therefore, independent of all other existing things. According to Aristotle, God is also the First Mover Who is Himself unmoved or unchanged.⁶⁰ This is because the Unmoved Mover is pure actuality⁶¹, that is, has no potentials, and is, therefore, beyond all change⁶² because there are no potentials left to actualize. One might also express this by saying that God has no privations, no lacks or deficiencies requiring fulfillment. Moreover, the Divine is one and eternal⁶³ that is, undivided and beyond time, characteristics which also suggest that God is not in space among other phenomenal beings. God is not limited by the normal attributes of all phenomenal, material beings.⁶⁴ God is also alive⁶⁵ conscious and thinking.

Because God is ‘beyond’ the phenomenal realm, both the Bahá’í Writings and Aristotle agree that God is essentially unknowable and do so for similar reasons. According to Aristotle, God, unlike all phenomena which are composed of matter and form, is one because the Divine has no matter and is pure form. The Divine is, moreover, pure existence, that is, a non-contingent entity⁶⁶ whose nature is to exist; It is also pure thought thinking only on Itself. As time-and-space bound, composite beings, we can understand these concepts verbally, but cannot comprehend or understand what it is or means to enjoy this sort of being. Similarly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

*It is evident that the human understanding is a quality of the existence of man, and that man is a sign of God: how can the quality of the sign surround the creator of the sign?—that is to say, how can the understanding, which is a quality of the existence of man, comprehend God? Therefore, the Reality of the Divinity is hidden from all comprehension, and concealed from the minds of all men. It is absolutely impossible to ascend to that plane.*⁶⁷

By the “Reality of Divinity”⁶⁸ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá means the essence of divinity which is beyond human comprehension. The attributes of divinity can, of course, be known or comprehended, but not the essence of Divinity.⁶⁹ As pure form thinking Itself,⁷⁰ Aristotle’s God also enjoys a

form of being whose nature can be deduced by Its attributes and actions in the phenomenal realm but cannot be known immediately. This is because, according to Aristotle, true knowledge is knowledge of causes⁷¹ and not mere description. That, however, is the level at which we must remain with the Unmoved Mover.

The similarities between Bahá'u'lláh's and Aristotle's concept of God do not end here. In both views, God is seen to set things into motion not by a direct physical impetus but rather by attracting them to Himself, by being the "object of desire."⁷² In the Bahá'í Writings this idea is expressed in three ways. First, it is implicit in the prime mover argument used by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá: God Who is beyond change and motion is, nonetheless, the source of all movement, a feat that can only be accomplished by being—to borrow a term from fractal geometry—the Great Attractor towards which all beings strive, though only humans may do so consciously. Second, the notion of God as the Great Attractor is also seen in the belief that all beings seek their own perfection, that is, their final cause which can ultimately be found only in God Who is the final goal of their endeavours. They strive to reflect God's bounty more adequately and, thereby, perfect their own existences. Their varying capacities constitute the diversity and very order of the universe from the mineral up through the angelic. Third, the concept of attraction to God is implicit in the Teaching that all things in their own degree reflect the perfections of God, that is, are essentially identified by their capacity to manifest, reflect or turn themselves to the Divine. Such reflection is also a return to the Divine and Its bounties. Humankind is no exception to this; as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "God has created all and all return to God."⁷³ Indeed, the role of the Manifestation is to both renew and expand the scope of our conscious and willful effort to return to the Divine. One need hardly explain that at the simplest, material level, such a return can only mean physical motion for which reason God is the Prime Mover.

If God sets and keeps all phenomenal beings in motion, if God is the goal which all phenomenal beings strive to emulate as best they can, then it follows that the Divine is their final cause, their purpose, their reason for being. This idea, is, of course, reflected in the Bahá'í Noonday Prayer which states that we were created "to know Thee and to worship Thee." However, in being the final cause of creation, the Great Attractor, God sets it and keeps it in motion, thereby also becoming its ultimate efficient cause. The ordinary events of daily life of course have immediate or proximate efficient causes. Up to this point, Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings agree. However, the Bahá'í Writings do not stop here, but rather develop Aristotle's theory of causation one step further: according to them, God is also the ultimate formal cause because creatures are formed, given an essence, by their varying capacities to reflect God's Names and attributes.⁷⁴ Difference in this capacity create essential distinctions among creatures, a fact most readily seen in humankind's exalted position.⁷⁵

2.7) Causality in Physics

Another far-reaching agreement between the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle concerns the all important subject of causality. In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that all phenomena require four causes

*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 which is that it is to be used as a seat. Therefore, this chair is essentially phenomenal, for it is preceded by a cause, and its existence depends upon causes. This is called "the essential and really phenomenal."*⁷⁶

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement simply elaborates Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "All that is created, however, is preceded by a cause."⁷⁷ The views promulgated here, and most specifically 'Abdu'l-Bahá's, are exactly those first propounded in Aristotle in his *Physics*⁷⁸ and the *Metaphysics*.⁷⁹ Here, too, Aristotle discusses the four causes, using precisely the terminology confirmed later by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: the material cause, or matter; the formal cause, or form; the efficient cause, or mover or maker; and the final cause, or purpose. Not only does 'Abdu'l-Bahá employ Aristotle's terms, He uses them exactly as Aristotle used them in order to analyze causality and, furthermore, he uses them to draw a general conclusion about the nature of reality. As we have already seen previously, both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá use the Prime, Unmoved Mover argument first promulgated by Aristotle.

In examining 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, we notice, first of all, the categorical nature of his statement: "the existence of everything depends on four causes."⁸⁰ He is not using Aristotle's theory to illustrate an answer he has already given in other words or to make something more comprehensible to westerners: he is making an unequivocal statement about the nature of phenomenal, that is, emanated reality. Indeed, the immediate context of this statement is a metaphysical question about the kinds of preexistence and phenomena to which question he provides the answer we have quoted. From this alone it is clear that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is committed to the answer He provides as a physical and metaphysical truth that we must understand, accept and work with. At this point we might also recall Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "[a]ll that is created, however, is preceded by a cause"⁸¹ and His reference to God as "the King of the entire creation and its Prime Mover."⁸² The description of God as the "Prime Mover"⁸³ of reality is itself a term that harmonizes with Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*.

2.8) Consequences of Four-Fold Causality

The far-reaching significance of this agreement regarding causality cannot be stressed too much because Bahá'u'lláh's commitment to causality per se, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's commitment to Aristotle's theory of causality lays a particular kind of foundation for the further development of any Bahá'í cosmology, metaphysic and epistemology. This, in turn, will impact on Bahá'í views on the unity of science and religion, indeed, on the very definitions of these terms.

Let us briefly examine why. As already noted above, the belief in causality inescapably commits the Bahá'í Faith to a causal understanding of the physical universe and all physical events. Moreover, the categorical nature of the statements made both by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá make it irrelevant whether or not we are discussing macro or quantum events. This, in turn, limits the physical theories and interpretations of quantum physics which can be logically harmonized with the Bahá'í Writings. A far-reaching example of this impact would be our understanding of the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. The Bahá'í Writings and their explicit commitment to causality requires us to understand this principle epistemologically, as a statement about the limitations of human knowledge rather than metaphysically as a statement about the actually indeterminate nature of the particles themselves. Moreover, it is important to understand that the use of statistics in sub-nuclear science does not logically force us to deny causality. Employing statistical methods merely concedes that we humans cannot comprehend and calculate all of the causes at work, and, therefore make do with knowing degrees of likelihood. There is nothing in this method that requires us to admit that any of the events are uncaused in and of themselves; we need only admit that we cannot know all the relevant causal actions. Consequently, the Bahá'í Writings incline us to one of the variously available causal interpretations of quantum theory, such as David Bohm's.

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that the Bahá'í Teaching about the unity of science

and religion cannot simply mean uncritical agreement between the Writings and any and all scientific theories or interpretations even though accepted at a particular point in time. While the ultimate goal is agreement, that is, harmony between science and religion, it is apparent that the Writings provide us with a basis—an Aristotelian basis—from which to carry out a critical examination of scientific theories. Such a view is strongly supported by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's epistemology which accepts material, sense knowledge as *necessary*, but denies that such knowledge is *sufficient* to attain a complete and true understanding of the universe.

Furthermore, commitment to the Aristotelian theory of causes, commits the Bahá'í Writings to a teleological view of the natural, phenomenal world, a viewpoint in which all entities, and, most obviously, all living entities⁸⁴ exist for a purpose which dictates the form and even the materials used. Nature never acts in vain Aristotle tells us, and, elsewhere he says, "God and nature make nothing at random,"⁸⁵ and still elsewhere that "Nature never makes anything without a purpose and never leaves out what is necessary."⁸⁶ This requires us to conclude that in nature the final cause, the formal cause and, in at least some cases, the material cause are one; stated otherwise, the study of the formal, and sometimes, the material causes, is also implicitly knowledge of the final cause. Now, there is no question that for Aristotle, "nature works like the artist or craftsman"⁸⁷, a concept that is often reiterated throughout his work with a variety of metaphors: the sculptor, the builder, the painter, and, frequently, the doctor who, along with the gardener, is often found in the Bahá'í Writings. The "craft analogy"⁸⁸ between natural and craft production is seen in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to the universe as a "Great Workshop"⁸⁹ and as "one laboratory of might under one natural system"⁹⁰ which, without humankind" would lack its "consummation"⁹¹ and has no purpose, "no result, no fruit."⁹² This argument implicitly sees the entire universe as a garden, that is, a craft work requiring certain pieces to be complete and to attain its purpose. At this point we need only recall that craft work is undertaken for a purpose to see that the "craft analogy"⁹³ operates pervasively throughout the Bahá'í Writings.

This fact is of enormous importance in our understanding of science and religion because the "craft analogy"⁹⁴ of creation means that a science which purports to provide complete understanding of the universe must include final causes as part of its explanation. If we limit ourselves, as current science does, at least theoretically, to material and efficient causes, our explanations will be incomplete and, to that extent, mistaken. True scientific explanations must include both immediate and ultimate final causes, that is, must admit that full explanations of nature inevitably take us beyond the material realm. To one extent or another, they must take the supernatural into account, a point so important to 'Abdu'l-Bahá that He specifically praises Aristotle along with Socrates and Plato, for doing so:

*The philosophers of Greece—such as Aristotle, Socrates, Plato and others—were devoted to the investigation of both natural and spiritual phenomena. In their schools of teaching they discoursed upon the world of nature as well as the supernatural world. Today the philosophy and logic of Aristotle are known throughout the world. Because they were interested in both natural and divine philosophy, furthering the development of the physical world of mankind as well as the intellectual, they rendered praiseworthy service to humanity.*⁹⁵

2.9) The Consequences for Biology and Evolution

Applied to biology, the concept of final causes leads readily to the subject of entelechy, the notion that all things and most especially, all living things, contain particular potentials which they strive to manifest or actualize in order to be 'the best they can be.' To one extent or

another—and there is room to make a case that this includes material objects albeit it to a minimal extent—all things strive to manifest their potential for self-perfection. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “All beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees.”⁹⁶ This not only accords with Aristotle’s view about the nature and growth of all things but leads readily to a specifically Aristotelian and Bahá’í view of development and evolution. Both accept what some call ‘micro-evolution,’ meaning that there can be some change and variation *within* a species but not a transformation of one species into a completely different one. For Aristotle and the Writings, while “species and genera are eternal”⁹⁷; species evolve over time by actualizing, manifesting or displaying their store of potentials in the physical world without changing into different species.

To understand why the Writings take this position, let us examine the issue from the point of view of Aristotle’s potentials. It becomes immediately apparent that the potentials required to be a member of a particular kind (or species or genera) cannot change: certain potentials are eternally necessary to be a spoon as opposed to a knife, a house cat as distinct from a walrus. This is not surprising because a spoon and a walrus have different essences and one can never become the other. No one would dispute this. Thus, if we understand ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Aristotle to be discussing the essences of things or species, there is no real conflict with current scientific beliefs in regarding the stability of essences or species. No one would claim that a million years ago the essence of a spoon was different than it is today. The fact that essences don’t change is true whether we are discussing non-living spoons or developing entities in which the various attributes appear over a period of time.

*Thus the embryo of man in the womb of the mother gradually grows and develops, and appears in different forms and conditions, until in the degree of perfect beauty it reaches maturity and appears in a perfect form with the utmost grace. . . . In the same manner, it is evident that this terrestrial globe, having once found existence, grew and developed in the matrix of the universe, and came forth in different forms and conditions, until gradually it attained this present perfection, and became adorned with innumerable beings, and appeared as a finished organization.*⁹⁸

The most striking point here is that like humankind, the physical earth itself came into existence with a cluster of particular potentialities and has been manifesting these over time. One of these potentials was for the development of various forms of life among which humans are included. Had there been no such potentials for manifesting life inherent in the earth, no such life forms would have developed here.

Equally important is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s point that once in existence, all things, be they babies or planets, develop according to their potentials, and that, for various reasons, at different stages, they have different outer forms. Even though outwardly, phenomenally, they may lack certain potentials, inwardly, or essentially they may well have them. We cannot judge strictly by the outer, apparent form at one moment because potentials manifest over a period of time. Thus, the conclusion drawn by an examination of bones (outward forms) that by reason of resemblance to animals, humankind was once an animal is logically unwarranted. As convergent evolution shows, similarity is no proof of any relationship, let alone ancestry; logically speaking, similarity is not identity. Moreover, similarity of bone might be covering up differences in soft, non-surviving organs such as the brain. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not deny that humankind once appeared more primitive than today; He simply denies the conclusion that because of their primitive appearance, our ancestors were animals. He does not deny the data, but rather the conclusion drawn from it. And He does so for good reason: no matter how dissimilar or similar they appear to other species, humans have potentials lacking in animals.

To see what this means, let us perform the following thought experiment. Imagine a population of the alleged common ancestor of apes and humans being subjected to random mutations. It takes only a little thought to realize that even random mutations can only attain certain results in an organism that has the potential to be affected by the mutation in a certain way. A random mutation in a carrot will not produce a hummingbird; carrot's lack the capacity for such a change. In this population of alleged common ancestors, some had the potential for being randomly mutated in this way and some did not. That's why some mutated and some didn't. At this point it becomes clear that the difference between those that have the potential or capacity for a change that will allow them to manifest certain human abilities and those that don't, is an *essential* difference, a *difference in kind*, not degree. In other words, even then at the stage of unmanifested potentials, there was already a difference between the two populations despite similarity or even identity of outward appearance. In short, the notion that humans were once essentially animals is not only *not supported* by data drawn exclusively from surviving bones, but also is not supported by logical reasoning about potentials.

It might be argued that this pits the Bahá'í Writings against current scientific consensus and thus violates the Bahá'í teaching of the harmony of science and religion. Whether or not this objection holds true depends on how we interpret what this teaching means. I shall argue that it does not mean that religion and science must agree on each and every point at all times and under all circumstances. This is because science itself is evolving; today's truth is tomorrow's 'myth' or falsehood. For example, at one time, science was certain that sunlight was somehow necessary to all life yet the discovery of life near deep-sea vents disproved that assertion. Rather than demanding absolute detailed agreement, in my view the doctrine of harmony between science and religions means a mutual and fundamental commitment to reason and rational inquiry as far as they can go. Rational critique by either side of the other is not ruled out by the demand for harmony between them just as rational critique among scientists themselves does not deny their harmonious co-operation in the project of discovering the truth. Aristotle's four-fold teaching about causality lets us develop this theme even further.

2.10) The Consequences for the Unity of Science and Religion

Aristotle's doctrine of four-fold causality lays the foundation for the unification of science and religion in a single, coherent scheme. Science restricts itself to the study of the material and efficient causes of all phenomena whereas religion studies the formal and final causes. In this sense, they complement, that is, complete, each other and, thereby, help us make complete sense of the phenomenal world.

The issue of final causes will, of course, lead to some controversy about the nature of science and the role of empiricism in the quest for knowledge. However, much of this conflict is spurious insofar as much of the debate on this subject is based on Galileo's and Descartes' misunderstanding of what Aristotle actually said. As Henry Veatch points out, final cause is a perfectly commonsensical notion, applicable to nature as well as products of conscious work once we understand what Aristotle meant. Here is how Veatch explains final causes:

In other words, since natural agents and efficient causes as far as we understand them, are found to have quite determinate and more or less predictable results, to that same extent we can also say that such forces are therefore ordered to their own appropriate consequences or achievement: it is these they regularly tend to produce, and it is these that may thus be said to be their proper ends . . . Aristotelian final causes are no more than this: the regular and characteristic consequences or results that are correlated with the characteristic actions of various agents and efficient causes that operate in the natural world.⁹⁹

In other words, Aristotle's concept of final causes is no less scientific than a chemical formula that successfully predicts the results of certain actions or the belief in the law of gravity. One might also express this by saying that final causes are the potentials that will actualize when certain preconditions are met either naturally or through conscious human manipulation. They are not, as has been so often claimed, mere anthropomorphisms and do not undermine the doctrine of the unity of science and religion.

It has already become obvious that neither Aristotle nor the Writings countenance an absolute division between the natural and super-natural, that is between at least some aspects of natural science and what Aristotle calls 'theology.'¹⁰⁰ In the *Physics*, for example, Aristotle uses logic to move smoothly from a consideration of causality to the argument for the existence of God, a non-sensible substance and cause, as a First Mover. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as we have already seen above, also makes use of this argument. In short, both see God, regarded as a logically necessary First Mover, as an integral part of physics. Moreover, both see science as being at least in part, deductive, that is, able to attain certainty on the basis of carefully formulated premises. This is not to say they deny induction¹⁰¹ but rather that they realize that science requires both.

Though there is no space to pursue it in detail here, it seems evident that the Bahá'í Writings about epistemology and philosophy of science confirm much of Aristotle's philosophy and then add revelation as the crown of its epistemic/scientific edifice. Here is another example: the Writings accept Aristotle's enumeration of the soul's powers as the nutritive, the appetitive, the sensory, the locomotive, and the power of thinking,¹⁰² the last being confined to humankind.¹⁰³ Moreover, Aristotle is even willing to countenance the idea of "immediate intuition"¹⁰⁴ although he points out it represents a different epistemological problem and does not pursue it anywhere else in his works. In his discussion of epistemological issues, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*Briefly then, these four criteria according to the declarations of men are: first, sense perception; second, reason; third, traditions; fourth, inspiration.*¹⁰⁵

In regards to the first two, sense perception and reason, the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle are in complete agreement: the process of knowing begins with sense knowledge to which animals, though not humans, are confined.¹⁰⁶ We then rise to reason in order to draw rational conclusions that take us beyond the senses and particular objects but which we can trust if we have reasoned correctly. His brief reference to intuition aside, Aristotle's epistemology stops at this point. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, however, while not rejecting these four sources of knowledge finds them inadequate¹⁰⁷ and points out the need for revelation. This leads to the conclusion that while Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings agree on the role of sense knowledge, reason and possibly intuition, from the Bahá'í view, Aristotle's epistemology is not so much mistaken as incomplete.

2.11) The Consequences for Epistemology

Finally, the commitment to causality and especially 'Abdu'l-Bahá's endorsement of Aristotle's four causes of phenomenal existents commits a Bahá'í epistemology to the view that all knowledge of phenomenal entities is knowledge of causes—which is precisely Aristotle's view.¹⁰⁸ This also provides another reason why humans cannot comprehend God: as phenomenal beings preceded by causes we are simply incapable of understanding a being that is not. We may recognize the fact that we cannot and even why we cannot; we may be able to deduce the existence of such an entity and some of its attributes, but we are unable to provide any explanation whatever for an uncaused Being.

2.12) The Great Chain of Being

At this point in our necessarily cursory survey of Aristotelian and Bahá'í cosmology, it makes sense to pause and reflect on the profound implications of what has been discovered so far. First, we see the universe portrayed as fundamentally causal. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, in an Aristotelian argument that once again employs causality to prove the existence of God:

*And likewise, those outside influences are subjected to other influences in their turn.. For example, the growth and development of a human being is dependent upon the existence of water, and water is dependent upon the existence of rain, and rain is dependent upon the existence of clouds, and clouds are dependent upon the existence of the sun, which causeth land and sea to produce vapour, the condensation of vapour forming the clouds. Thus each one of these entities exerteth its influence and is likewise influenced in its turn. Inescapably then, the process leadeth to One Who influenceth all, and yet is influenced by none, thus severing the chain.*¹⁰⁹

In effect, both Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings promulgate the doctrine known as “the great chain of being”¹¹⁰ in which all parts of the created world are joined together by causality or mutual influence and in which each part builds upon and augments what is below it. This cannot help but rule out any rigorously non-causal interpretations of the universe, that is, any view which asserts that events—regardless of whether they are micro or macrocosmic—simply happen without prior cause. The concept of absolute randomness is simply not an option in this view. Causality ensures that there is at least some fundamental order in the universe¹¹¹ and rules out any understandings of the universe as genuinely chaotic. It bears noting here that causality and determinism are not the same things. As Aristotle pointed out, two unrelated lines of causality may meet and generate a coincidence, an event that could not be determined by even the most minute analysis of either line of causality. If I go to the market to buy fruit and Ann goes to buy bread, our meeting was not pre-determined though every movement has a cause. Further, if Ann pays me the money she owes me, that too is not determined by our mere meeting. These causes, while necessary, are simply not sufficient to explain the events fully from which we may conclude that causality does not necessarily lead to the loss of free will.

There is, however, another sense in which the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle agree on a great chain of being, namely, the existence of a cosmic hierarchy, “an order of perfection in the kinds of existence, with man highest among the biological existents.”¹¹² This, of course, is readily apparent in the Bahá'í Writings, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, for example, that the differences in reflecting the divine bounties are “of degree and receptivity”¹¹³ and that “all beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees.”¹¹⁴ Humankind is the acme of natural, phenomenal beings because it is “the collective reality, the general reality and is the center where the glory of all the perfections of God shine forth.”¹¹⁵

2.13) The Structure of the Cosmos

Would Aristotle agree with 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the nature of this cosmic hierarchy? We must answer positively because the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle share identical views on the hierarchical structure of the physical world. According to Aristotle and the Writings, nature is divided into four kingdoms with ever-increasing powers of action: the mineral, vegetable, animal and human¹¹⁶ where every step up includes the powers below it in addition to a new power that provides an essential identity. Humankind, of course, comprehends all the levels below it, that is, has all the powers of the mineral, vegetable and animal in addition to a distinguishing

and essentially human power of reason.¹¹⁷ Aristotle's views on this matter receive one of their most thorough explorations in Book III of *On the Soul*.

3) The Soul

Both the existence and nature of the soul are another key area of agreement between the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle. However, before we explore this subject, it is important to clarify the Bahá'í usage of some terminology. We must understand that according to Bahá'u'lláh, "spirit, mind, soul, hearing and sight are one but differ through differing causes."¹¹⁸ In other words, the mind, the rational soul, the power of sight and hearing are all the operations of a single power—spirit—through different instruments. 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms this when He says, "It is the same reality which is given different names according to the different conditions wherein it is manifested . . . when it governs the physical functions of the human body, it is called the human soul; when it manifests itself as the thinker, the comprehender, it is called mind; And when it soars into the atmosphere of God, and travels to the spiritual world, it becomes designated as spirit."¹¹⁹ Aristotle expresses a similar view as the mind as a power of the soul when he writes, "by mind I mean that whereby the soul thinks and judges."¹²⁰ As Julio Savi writes, "These words enable us to understand the fundamental one-ness of the spirit beyond the *multiplicity of its expressions*... The instruments of the soul (or spirit of man) should not, therefore, be viewed as independent entities, but as different aspects of the same reality in its different functions."¹²¹ It is essential not to lose sight of this fact if we wish to make clear sense of what would otherwise be a confused and self-contradictory jumble in the Writings.

The significance of the equation 'spirit = mind = soul' is that it is in fundamental agreement with Aristotle's own views. As in Bahá'u'lláh's statement, Aristotle, too, maintains that the soul controls such bodily functions as movement,¹²² nutrition and reproduction¹²³ and possesses the powers of sight,¹²⁴ touch,¹²⁵ sensation and, most significantly in light of Bahá'u'lláh's statement, thinking.¹²⁶ Thinking is an activity of the mind, or, what Aristotle calls the 'active reason' or 'active intellect.' As we shall see, it is explicitly identified with the soul's higher, specifically human functions for Aristotle, like the Bahá'í Writings, also divides the human soul into two parts, the lower, that is, animal bodily functions and the higher, specifically human function of reason which he calls "divine."¹²⁷ Moreover, in complete agreement with the Bahá'í Writings,¹²⁸ he makes it clear that sickness, old age and death are not a diminishing of the soul itself but rather of its bodily "vehicle."¹²⁸

We have already seen explicit agreement on the existence of a vegetable, animal and human soul each including the powers of the one below it and adding its own essentially unique powers.¹²⁹ Soul is the essence or form which "corresponds to the definitive formula of a thing's essence."¹³⁰ Soul, in other words, is the "essential 'whatness of a body.'"¹³¹ This, in turn, makes soul the "substance"¹³² as well as the "actuality"¹³³ of a body—a point on which it is absolutely necessary to note that 'substance' does not necessarily mean 'matter' in Aristotle. That said, let us see just how similar Aristotle's views and the Writings. I shall first present a list of items on which Aristotle and the Writings share congruent views on the soul, and then focus on two in particular: the immateriality of the mind and the immortality of the soul.

3.1) Rational Soul as Humankind's Essential Attribute

The first similarity between the Writings and Aristotle's concept of the soul is both the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle see the rational soul as the essential attribute that distinguishes humankind from the rest of nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for example identifies the "rational soul"¹³⁴ with the "human spirit"¹³⁵ and describes the "station of the rational soul"¹³⁶ as "the human

reality.”¹³⁷ Elsewhere He asserts “The human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal is the rational soul, and these two names—the human spirit and the rational soul—designate one thing.”¹³⁸ For his part Aristotle shows his agreement with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by saying that “Without reason man is a brute.”¹³⁹ He also asserts that “happiness is activity in accordance with virtue”¹⁴⁰ and that the highest virtue—both in the sense of the highest good and the highest power in humankind—is contemplation.¹⁴¹ He writes, “Happiness, therefore, must be some form of contemplation”¹⁴² and adds that since “reason is divine,”¹⁴³ “he who exercises his reason and cultivates it seems to be both in the best state of mind and most dear to the gods.”¹⁴⁴ Although Aristotle himself never uses the scholastic term “rational soul,” clearly in his view, reason distinguishes humankind distinct from the rest of nature¹⁴⁵ and it is by virtue of rationality that humankind partakes of the divine, or, at any rate partakes of it in a fuller measure than the rest.”¹⁴⁶

3.2) Rational Soul As Immortal

The fact that the human soul distinguishes us from the rest of nature prepares the way for us to recognize that, unlike other beings, it is immortal, another issue on which Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings agree. Aristotle's own views show some development—but no wavering on the fundamental issue of eternal survival. In *Eudemus*, he asserts that the soul existed before entering the body and will continue to exist afterwards¹⁴⁷ an opinion not continued in Aristotle's other works touching on the same subject. This view bears at least some resemblance to the Bahá'í notion that soul pre-existed potentially before its creation or actualization in material form.¹⁴⁸ However, his most famous and influential reference to immortality occurs *On the Soul*, where he tells us unequivocally that the human soul, or at least, the specifically human parts of the soul “may be separable because they are not the actualities of any body at all.”¹⁴⁹ Not being “the formula of a thing's essence”¹⁵⁰ that is, the essence of any bodily organ, they are not limited by them. Elsewhere, Aristotle informs us that the ability to think “seems to be to be a *widely different kind of soul, differing as what is eternal from what is perishable*; it alone is capable of existence in isolation from all other psychic powers.”¹⁵¹ Aristotle also says that when the mind is “set free from its present conditions it [the mind] appears just as it is and nothing more; this alone is immortal and eternal.”¹⁵² In short, the specifically human aspects of the soul can exist without the body and are immortal. The strength of Bahá'í belief in immortality—which needs no great elaboration here—is perhaps best summed up in the title of chapter 66 of *Some Answered Questions*, “The Existence of the Rational Soul After the Death of the Body” and the various proofs offered in support. What is plainly evident is that Aristotle's belief in the immortality of the mind, or active reason¹⁵³ and the Bahá'í Writings are not just in general but in quite specific agreement that what survives is our human, rational functions and not our animal selves.

3.3) Soul as Substance

Among other agreements between Aristotle and the Writings, we find the idea that the soul is a substance,¹⁵⁴ not, of course, in the sense of Locke's materialist misunderstanding of the term, but in the sense of a distinct entity that does not merely exist as a predicate of something else. Indeed, it is “the cause or source of the living body.”¹⁵⁵ The soul is real and no mere emergent or epiphenomenon of physiological processes and is distinct from the body. In other words, when discussing the soul, we must not confuse the appearance of the soul in the body once the body is an adequate mirror and the notion that soul is a product of physiological events. In fact, the situation is quite the other way around: as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “the rational soul is the substance through which the body exists.”¹⁵⁶ Elsewhere, He states:

*Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident—that is to say, the body—be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.*¹⁵⁷

These statements could almost be a paraphrase of Aristotle's claim that "the soul is the primary substance and the body is the matter"¹⁵⁸ which is the philosophical gist of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá says. Using Aristotelian language—"substance [that] exists by itself"¹⁵⁹ and "accident"¹⁶⁰—He clearly rejects the reduction of the soul to an "accident"¹⁶⁰ or epiphenomenon resulting from physiological processes. By asserting that the "rational soul is the substance,"¹⁶¹ He is, of course, implicitly asserting that the rational soul is also the essence and actuality of the body; it is what the body seeks to realize as best it can given its material limitations to reflect the essence or soul. These views harmonize with Aristotle's who tells us, for example, that the soul is a substance, form, essence and actuality,¹⁶² the body's final cause¹⁶³ as well as the origin or cause of the living body.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement here also tells us that the soul or spirit is, in effect, unassailable by external events, a view that is shared by Aristotle when he writes that "The incapacity of old age is due to the affection not of the soul but of its vehicle . . . mind itself is impassible . . ." ¹⁶⁵

3.4) Mind / matter- Mind / body Dualism

The concept that the "spirit or human soul"¹⁶⁶ can exist separately from the body inescapably commits Aristotle¹⁶⁸ and the Bahá'í Writings to some form of what is called mind/matter dualism but which could just as well be termed soul/matter dualism. Aristotle says bluntly that "the body cannot be the soul"¹⁶⁹ and 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

*The spirit, or the human soul, is the rider; and the body is only the steed . . . The spirit may be likened to the lamp within the lantern. The body is simply the outer lantern. If the lantern should break the light is ever the same . . .*¹⁷⁰

Elsewhere He tells us "the reality of man is clad in the outer garment of the animal."¹⁷¹ Clearly evident in these statements is an actual not merely intellectual distinction between the "human soul" or the specifically human powers of the soul and our animal bodies. This supported by the fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá often and approvingly quotes Christ's statement that what is born of flesh or matter is flesh, and what is born of spirit is spirit.¹⁷² Clearly, spirit and matter are two essentially different things.

It may be objected that the oneness of reality precludes any form of dualism but such is not the truly case. The following quotation is often produced to support some kind of monism in the Bahá'í Writings:

*It is necessary, therefore, that we should know what each of the important existences was in the beginning—for there is no doubt that in the beginning the origin was one: the origin of all numbers is one and not two. Then it is evident that in the beginning matter was one, and that one matter appeared in different aspects in each element. Thus various forms were produced, and these various aspects as they were produced became permanent, and each element was specialized. But this permanence was not definite, and did not attain realization and perfect existence until after a very long time. Then these elements became composed, and organized and combined in infinite forms; or rather from the composition and combination of these elements innumerable beings appeared.*¹⁷³

In the first place, both this passage and its context, refer to matter rather than spirit or soul and assert no more than that originally, matter was one and that gradually various forms of

matter evolved or broke symmetry from this initial super-symmetry. There is not the slightest suggestion here that soul, spirit or mind are somehow forms of matter albeit very subtle ones. Moreover, even if one chose to ignore its obvious reference to matter alone, and read this passage as implying that spirit and matter were all originally one, the situation does not change for us as we are today. The passage clearly indicates that matter, and by supposed implication, spirit, have by now evolved into different forms so that whatever unity they may have once had, no longer exists now. Whatever the situation may have been in the past, we now live in a world that shows a clear and essential distinction between matter and spirit. Thus, if there is a monism in the Bahá'í Writings, it is at best a 'historical monism' which is no longer functional.

I would suggest that the following understanding of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements is more consistent with the Writings than the 'monist' interpretation. His statement that "The organization of God is one: the evolution of existence is one: the divine system is one"¹⁷⁴ does not mean all parts of the organization or system are the same and that differences are unreal. Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá rejects that concept when He says that humankind is truly and essentially separate and distinct from nature, that we possess powers not found in nature itself, that, in effect, the phenomenal universe, though one insofar as it is a coherent and unified system dependent on God, is also divided in two insofar as we possess powers not found in the rest of nature.¹⁷⁵ This constitutes a radical division or differentiation within nature though it does not, of course, deny the oneness of the overall *system of reality*. Furthermore, according to the Writings, things differ in their capacity to reflect the divine Names or bounties¹⁷⁶ and those differences of degree are real, essential and permanent.¹⁷⁷ Just as we can never evolve into gods, so stones can never evolve into humans; these stations are fixed because "inequality in degree and capacity is a property of nature."¹⁷⁸ These inequalities and differences are real because they are divinely ordained as part of God's system. Nor can they be crossed.¹⁷⁹ The issue can, of course, be explained using Aristotelian terminology: there are many kinds of unity—unity of matter or material, unity of substance or essence, unity of form, unity of purpose, unity of logical relationship such as dependence and so on. "The organization of God,"¹⁸⁰ the single divine *system*¹⁸¹ has a *formal and purposive unity, which is different from and must not be confused with as a material and/or substantial unity*. Because all things are unified does not mean they are all fundamentally the same. In other words, the dualism of mind-soul-spirit and physical body does not contradict the organizational or systematic unity of creation.

3.5) The Body / Soul Connection

Given their distinctness, it is natural to ask how body and soul are connected. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the mediator between the outer, bodily senses and our inner mental senses such as memory and imagination is the "common faculty" which "communicates between the outward and inward powers and thus is common to the outward and inward powers."¹⁸² Aristotle's views on this matter are not directly addressed to the mind/body issue as we understand it now, so we must infer his views from other writings to related topics. For example, he mentions the "common sense"¹⁸³ that allows the presentation of events perceived outwardly to be recollected inwardly. In effect, this "common sense" mediates between the physical senses or the body and the intellectual senses or the remembering mind. He also sees it as deriving general, that is, abstract ideas from the physical data supplied by the senses. Here too it operates as a mediator between body and mind.¹⁸⁴ He does not, however, consider it a separate sixth sense.

In continuing to explore the subject of how the soul is related to the body, we must be sure to divest ourselves of the notion that the soul somehow resides inside the body like a seed in

a pot. Neither Aristotle nor the Bahá'í Writings see the soul as a 'foreign entity' that somehow enters the body. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, "the rational soul, meaning the human spirit, does not descend into the body—that is to say, it does not enter it, for descent and entrance are characteristics of bodies, and the rational soul is exempt from this. The spirit never entered this body."¹⁸⁵ Aristotle holds a similar view, criticizing as "absurdity"¹⁸⁶ those theories that would "join the soul to a body, or place it in a body."¹⁸⁷ This, of course, leaves us with the question of the soul's relationship to the body, a relationship described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as follows resembling the relationship of light to a mirror: "When the mirror is clear and perfect, the light of the lamp will be apparent in it, and when the mirror becomes covered with dust or breaks, the light will disappear."¹⁸⁸

What, then, is the precise relationship of the soul or spirit to the body according to Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings? We must bear in mind that both provide a philosophical answer, that is, formal answers or answers in principle, rather than specific physical or bio-chemical explanations for which we will have to look elsewhere. If we analyze 'Abdu'l-Bahá's metaphor of the mirror and the light, we find that, in Aristotelian language, the issue is relatively straightforward: the soul is formally or virtually but not substantially present in the body just as the sun is formally but not substantially present in the mirror. The sun enlightens the mirror just as—to use Aristotle's analogy¹⁸⁹—the impression of the signet ring in-forms or provides form to the wax. In other words, the sun itself is never in the mirror but its image, its form or virtual presence is there as long as the mirror is capable of reflecting it. When the mirror breaks, the sun does not disappear anymore than the signet ring is destroyed when the wax melts. In Aristotelian language, we would say that the soul in-forms matter to the degree that matter is capable of receiving that form.

Several things are clear at this point. First, in these analogies, neither the sun nor the signet ring depends on something else for its existence whereas the reverse is certainly the case. Second, light is the intermediary between the sun and the mirror, an observation similar to Aristotle's belief that the soul enlightens or provides light for the active intellect (mind) to perceive, abstract and discriminate. Third, both light source and its emanated light surround the mirror, just as, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the "spirit surrounds the body"¹⁹⁰ without being physically present in it. Aristotle would agree with at least the latter part of this statement.

4) Epistemology: Mind and Brain

Another important similarity between Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings is the clear distinction between the non-material mind and its physical organ, the brain. The two work together but are not the same. For his part, Aristotle calls the mind "the place of forms"¹⁹¹ and even "the form of forms"¹⁹² which is "capable of receiving the forms of an object."¹⁹³ In other words, the mind is not a physical thing, or, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "the power of intellect is not sensible; none of the inner qualities of man is a sensible thing."¹⁹⁴ Because it is itself not sensible¹⁹⁵, the mind does not work with sensible realities, that is, actual substances, but rather with forms, or what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "symbols"¹⁹⁶ of outward things. Instead, the mind perceives forms, picturing to itself as forms various perceptions and intellectual realities¹⁹⁷ such as love, God, goodness and other qualities. In a discussion of epistemology, he says, "The other kind of human knowledge is intellectual—that is to say, it is a reality of the intellect; it has no outward form and no place and is not perceptible to the senses."¹⁹⁸ The Aristotelian term for a phenomenal reality that is not sensible is 'form,' so here too we find endorsement for the Aristotelian concept of the mind working with forms. Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá interprets this capacity to work with forms as a sign of the mind's super-natural nature:

*The spirit of man, however, can manifest itself in all forms at the same time. For example, we say that a material body is either square or spherical, triangular or hexagonal. While it is triangular, it cannot be square; and while it is square, it is not triangular. Similarly, it cannot be spherical and hexagonal at the same time . . . But the human spirit in itself contains all these forms, shapes and figures . . . As an evidence of this, at the present moment in the human spirit you have the shape of a square and the figure of a triangle. Simultaneously also you can conceive a hexagonal form. All these can be conceived at the same moment in the human spirit, and not one of them needs to be destroyed or broken in order that the spirit of man may be transferred to another.*¹⁹⁹

At this point it need only be added that the belief that the human spirit or mind can take in by perception or imagine and contain the forms of things is one of the center-pieces of Aristotelian philosophical and cognitive psychology whose outlines are visible in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's remarks here and elsewhere.

4.1) Reality is Discovered not Constructed

The similarities between Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings in regards to epistemological matters do not end here. Perhaps most significant and far-reaching is their agreement that the mind or spirit discovers and does not create either spiritual or material realities. Bahá'u'lláh writes, "Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel *its* secrets, and *discover* all the pearls of wisdom that *lie hid in its depths*."²⁰⁰ Elsewhere He writes that the divine "gift of understanding"²⁰¹ "giveth man the power to *discern the truth in all things*, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation."²⁰² Nowhere does Bahá'u'lláh state or even suggest that humankind creates or constructs reality. Indeed, if they create anything like reality it tends to be things like the "*thick clouds*"²⁰³ of "idle fancies and vain imaginings."²⁰⁴ Bahá'u'lláh uses the latter phrase throughout His Writings to refer to those who refuse to see the truth about Him and prefer their own imaginative constructions. Significantly, He accounts them with "the lost in the Book of God."²⁰⁵ In a similar vein, He exhorts the Persian people to "come forth to discover the Truth which hath dawned from the Day-Star of Truth"²⁰⁶ about the new Manifestation of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements consistently support the contention that human beings discover—and do not construct—truths about the spiritual and material realms. Indeed, humankind is distinct from the rest of nature and animals because it possesses "the intellectual characteristic, which *discovereth* the realities of things and comprehendeth universal principles,"²⁰⁷ an idea that is widely scattered throughout the Writings in a wide variety of contexts. He also informs us that "When we carefully investigate the kingdoms of existence and observe the phenomena of the universe about us, we *discover* the absolute order and perfection of creation."²⁰⁸

*The power of the rational soul can discover the realities of things, comprehend the peculiarities of beings, and penetrate the mysteries of existence. All sciences, knowledge, arts, wonders, institutions, discoveries and enterprises come from the exercised intelligence of the rational soul. There was a time when they were unknown, preserved mysteries and hidden secrets; the rational soul gradually discovered them and brought them out from the plane of the invisible and the hidden into the realm of the visible. This is the greatest power of perception in the world of nature, which in its highest flight and soaring comprehends the realities, the properties and the effects of the contingent beings.*²⁰⁹

Furthermore, God has endowed humankind "with mind, or the faculty of reasoning, by the exercise of which he is to *investigate and discover the truth, and that which he finds real and true he must accept*."²¹⁰ Aristotle, of course, holds the same views, so much so that the whole

notion of the human 'construction' of reality is found nowhere in his works. The *Metaphysics* begins with his reflections on past efforts to find the truth about reality, and their various inadequacies; the *Psychology* and various other books explore how the senses and the soul work to perceive and discover the nature of the surrounding world.

4.2) Epistemological Realism and Correspondence Theory of Truth

From this we can conclude that the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle agree on several key epistemological issues subject to vociferous contemporary debate: first, that natural reality is objectively real and does not depend on human observers for its existence; second, that reality and its laws are given by God, not constructed, and that we must work with what is given; and third, that truth is the correspondence between reality and our interpretation of it, or, put otherwise, that reality and our interpretation of it are two distinct things and that we must test our interpretations against reality to discover whether or not they are in agreement. From this follows that reality is discovered and that there is such a thing as error, that is, an erroneous or inadequate understanding of reality that can be cured by abandoning it in order to change from ignorant to more knowledgeable. In other words, the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle share a realist epistemology.²¹¹ Without these premises, the entire Aristotelian and Bahá'í enterprises would collapse, most especially the Bahá'í doctrine of progressive revelation which presumes increasingly adequate comprehension of various truths. Finally, the belief that properties are real makes the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle incompatible with nominalism, that is, the belief that properties are either arbitrary human selections or outright impositions only externally related to their objects and that essences are fictitious. (See Aristotle's refutation of the underlying logic of nominalism in *Metaphysics*, VII, 12.) For its part, realism holds that the relationship between attributes and substance is internal, that is, inherent and intrinsic and that essences are natural and real.

The fact that for Aristotle the forms, essences or universals do not exist in a separate world or "Kingdom of Names"²¹² must not under any circumstances be interpreted to mean that for him these forms or essences are any less real than for Plato, the neo-Platonists and the Writings. No less than Plato, Aristotle is a realist, that is, believes that essences or forms are absolutely real and not mere human constructs. Moreover, the universals we abstract from particular things correspond to absolute realities; they are emphatically not arbitrary creations or selections. For this reason, the most we may conclude is that the difference between Aristotle and Plato is not whether or not the original essences or forms exist, but rather about *where and how* they exist—in a separate world, "Kingdom"²¹³ or mind—or exemplified or instantiated in particular things. From this it follows that Aristotle cannot be presented as a nominalist without doing violence to his metaphysic and epistemology; his view, says renowned Aristotle scholar W. D. Ross, "is not that the object is constituted by thought."²¹⁴ Indeed, he is an "extreme realist allowing for no modification, still less construction of the object by the mind."²¹⁵ Even in regards to the universal that is abstracted from particulars, Ross says "the universal is always for Aristotle something which though perfectly real and objective has no separate existence."²¹⁶ This means that we cannot divide the Bahá'í Writings from Aristotle on the issue of the reality of forms or essences as Keven Brown seems tempted to do in *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*.²¹⁷

Indeed, it is not too much to say that anything other than a realist, correspondence theory of truth would render numerous passages in the Writings meaningless. If reality were not objectively given and all constructions equally adequate or valid, Bahá'u'lláh could not lament that He "fell under the treatment of ignorant physicians, who gave full rein to their personal desires, and have erred grievously."²¹⁸ These physicians are ignorant precisely because they have constructed reality to fit their "personal desires"²¹⁹ and thus "erred grievously."²²⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá

could neither tell us that an “ignorant man by learning becomes knowing, and the world of savagery, through the bounty of a wise educator, is changed into a civilized kingdom.”²²¹ nor that the soul’s journey is necessary in order to acquire divine knowledge²²² to overcome our “lower nature, which is ignorant and defective.”²²³ Manifestations could not provide humankind with the “science of reality.”²²⁴ Without the existence of objective truth about reality, we could not be transformed from “the ignorant of mankind into the knowing”²²⁵; it would make no sense for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to say that “the ignorant must be educated.”²²⁶ Indeed, the whole Bahá’í concept of evolution to further knowledge and understanding both in this world and the next would be moot.

Aristotle’s and the Writings’s agreement about the discovery (not construction) of reality and the correspondence theory of truth is bound to be a controversial issue in our times when theories about the ‘construction’ of reality abound. It is, therefore, necessary to explain in somewhat greater detail what Aristotle and the Writings mean. In a nutshell, the issue stands as follows: we all discover the same basic reality but construct different interpretations of it. However, these interpretations or constructions are constrained by the nature of what they are interpreting. For example, we may understand fire in various ways from the specific chemistry of combustion to a manifestation of divine power but what no interpretation can deny is that fire is hot and will burn human flesh unless counter-measures are taken. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “The power of the rational soul can discover *the realities of things*, comprehend the peculiarities of beings, and penetrate the mysteries of existence.”²²⁷ How we interpret those “realities”²²⁸ may differ but all recognize the reality of fire’s power to inflict severe damage on human flesh. In other words, in considering this issue, we must, as precisely as possible, distinguish between what is perceived and what is interpreted, that is, we must distinguish between metaphysics and epistemology and hermeneutics. Here is another example. In progressive revelation, the Writings expect all to accept the fact or reality of Christ as a Manifestation of God but also they expect us to understand or interpret what this fact means in different ways at different times in history. As we can see, the doctrine of progressive revelation logically depends on the mind’s ability to distinguish real and objective fact from interpretation. Indeed, the Writings go even further because they explicitly condemn some interpretations as erroneous, as being “the dust of vain imaginings and the smoke of idle fancy,”²²⁹ that is, misinterpretations due to the distortions of the ego and our lower animal natures. Here too, the Writings implicitly expect us not only to distinguish real fact from constructed interpretation but also to distinguish between constructions that are appropriate and inappropriate for the age in which we live. This idea is also presented in the image of the sun’s light or reality being diminished or distorted by the dust on the mirror: “The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror.”²³⁰ The fact is that the mirror can be cleansed.²³¹ Not only does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá support this but He also makes it clear that not all mirrors are equal in this regard: “The most important thing is to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that they may become illumined and receptive of the divine light. One heart may possess the capacity of the polished mirror; another, be covered and obscured by the dust and dross of this world.”²³²

4.3) The Reality of Attributes

If attributes were not real, did not inhere in their substances and were not essential, how are we understand ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that the “names and attributes of Divinity are eternal and not accidental?”²³³ Obviously the attributes of Divinity are not merely human constructs. If they were, why bother to strive to live up to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that “The soul that excels in attainment of His attributes and graces is most acceptable before God?”²³⁴ What could

the phrase “His attributes”²³⁵ even mean? Indeed, if attributes and properties are not real, then there is no rationale for God’s creation since, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that “It is necessary that the reality of Divinity with all its perfections and attributes should become resplendent in the human world.”²³⁶ Furthermore, the whole of Bahá’u’lláh’s salvational project would be useless if properties were not real and did not provide real knowledge because of the Noonday Prayer’s assertion that we were created “to know [God] and to worship [Him]” would be rendered meaningless. If attributes are only human impositions, are not inherent and do not provide real knowledge about things, they could only teach us, at most, about ourselves and our own *modus operandi*. This would effectively leave us locked in a bubble of our own perceptions and constructs. Aside from their logical weaknesses, such views simply contradict ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He says:

*But the question may be asked: How shall we know God? We know Him by His attributes. We know Him by His signs. We know Him by His names. We know not what the reality of the sun is, but we know the sun by the ray, by the heat, by its efficacy and penetration. We recognize the sun by its bounty and effulgence.*²³⁷

Indeed, it is Bahá’u’lláh Himself who tells us that attributes are real when he describes God as “the Creator of *all* names and attributes.”²³⁸ If God created them, they are obviously real. If attributes were not real how could it be true that “His names and His attributes, are made manifest in the world”?²³⁹ The following statement would also become senseless:

*He must so educate the human reality that it may become the center of the divine appearance, to such a degree that the attributes and the names of God shall be resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man, and the holy verse “We will make man in Our image and likeness” shall be realized.*²⁴⁰

If God had no real attributes how could they be made “resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man”?²⁴¹ Indeed, if attributes are simply human fictions and impositions, they could not be attributes ‘of God’ and it would be we, the created, who are shaping the Creator and making Him in our image. Such a notion simply violates the Bahá’í principle that the created cannot comprehend—let alone shape—the Creator. Believing that such is the case would indeed be to “join partners with God.”²⁴²

Nor should we think that it is only God Whom we know by means of attributes, for, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “Phenomenal, or created, things are known to us only by their attributes,”²⁴³ a fact supported by his statement that “In the human plane of existence we can say we have knowledge of a vegetable, its qualities and product.”²⁴⁴ If these attributes did not provide real knowledge about the object, the use of the word ‘know’ and its variations would be inappropriate. Obviously attributes are not simply human impositions but rather, actually provide knowledge about the objects or substances we are studying. As Bahá’u’lláh says, “This gift [“the gift of understanding”] giveth man the power to discern the truth *in* all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to *discover* the secrets of creation.”²⁴⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reminds us that the rational soul, “the inner ethereal reality grasps the mysteries of existence, discovers scientific truths and indicates their technical application.”²⁴⁶ Elsewhere He says, “Man is able to resist and to oppose Nature because he discovers the constitution of things”²⁴⁷ once again demonstrating that in the Bahá’í view, humankind is capable of gaining real knowledge through an exploration of reality. The continual use of the word ‘discover’ throughout the Writings also proves that we discover what already exists independently and do not construct it.

5) The Analysis of Reality

The topic of discovering reality leads readily to the all important issue of how we analyze it to discover its truth. This subject, already touched on in our discussion of causality and the Prime Mover, makes it clear that the Writings analyze and present reality in Aristotelian terms. In other words, they present an Aristotelian vision of reality in which there are substances which have essential and non-essential attributes; in which things have essences; in which—as already shown—change is the actualization of potentials²⁴⁸; and in which materially existing things are composites of matter and form, and subject to corruption. Readers may confirm for themselves the pervasive use of this Aristotelian terminology by typing them into any hyper-text edition of the Writings. They will find that these words occur in almost every book. Of course, some of them also have a general, non-philosophical usage: ‘substance,’ for example, is also employed as a synonym for ‘wealth.’²⁴⁹ In reviewing what follows, one must remember that the Aristotelian concepts form a coherent system of inter-dependent concepts and the use of one concept necessitates the use of at least some others.

However, before embarking on our survey of the Aristotelian analysis of reality, it is necessary to look briefly at the important issue of ‘standpoint epistemologies,’ the notion that reality appears differently to differing points of view. All too often these are erroneously equated to relativism, the notion that all viewpoints of reality are equally true because all are ‘relative.’ However, properly understood, the two are not the same and must be clearly distinguished. The Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle embody a stand point epistemology but are not even slightly relativistic. The best way to grasp the difference is to imagine a jig-saw puzzle picture of Mount Fuji. A true stand-point epistemology simply asserts that there are many pieces all of which have some portion of the truth; whatever their differences, the pieces are ultimately rationally compatible with one another and will form a picture of the whole mountain. A relativist, on the other hand, asserts that any piece—indeed, any piece from any puzzle—makes an equally valid fit at every point on our Mount Fuji puzzle. There is nothing in the Bahá'í Writings nor in Aristotle that suggest such relativism since doing so would vitiate not just the concept of the Manifestation as a revealer of absolute truth but the entire concept of knowledge altogether. We must not be misled, as some have been by Shoghi Effendi's statement that “religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final.”²⁵⁰ In each case where Shoghi Effendi makes this statement, the word ‘relative’ is clearly used in reference to progressive revelation not to the truth value of the essential teachings. In terms of our illustration, each Manifestation adds a piece to the puzzle but this does not even remotely suggest that the truth value of the piece is not absolute.

5.1) A Brief Crash Course: Substance, Attribute and Essence

The primary concept in Aristotle's analysis of reality is ‘substance,’ a concept which underwent some development but never strayed far from the belief that a substance is anything which does not exist as the attribute of something else. Substances are particulars, a fact that is used by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in explaining the return of Elias.²⁵¹ Your raincoat is a substance and so is this essay. Substance, however, does not only mean ‘matter’ or what Aristotle called “sensible substances.”²⁵² When it does, such matter forms the “substratum”²⁵³ of a thing, namely that which is given form. ‘Matter’ in Aristotle's view is a relative term: matter is anything which potentially receives form. In the case of your raincoat, matter may be physical material but in regards to this study, the matter is the ideas expressed therein. A substance possesses attributes which identify it as the particular substance it is, raincoat, essay, rose or idea and these attributes are called its ‘essence’ which we must distinguish from other non-essential or ‘accidental’ attributes which a thing does not require to be what it is.²⁵⁴ For example, weight

and color are non-essential, accidental attributes in regards to the ideas in this essay. However, being water-proof is an essential attribute to raincoats. Each of these three substances differs essentially.

Neither essential nor accidental attributes can exist by themselves as substances: no one has ever seen 'red' or 'democracy' or 'crumpled' by themselves because they depend on substances to be real. Roughly speaking, Aristotle uses 'substance' in four different ways, as "sensible substance" or physical matter that receives form and is, therefore, a composite; as "non-sensible substance" or spirit, or soul that provides form; as a general reference to any particular thing which does not exist as an attribute of something else; and finally, as the form, essence or actuality of a thing.²⁵⁵ The difference among the latter three terms is one of nuance and emphasis. 'Form' emphasizes the structure of a substance; 'essence' emphasizes its necessary attributes and 'actuality' emphasizes the typical or culminating actions of a thing. Like the Bahá'í Writings, Aristotle identifies humankind as the highest substance in the phenomenal realm.²⁵⁶

5.2) God as a Substance

Let us now analyze the concept of substance as used in Aristotle and the Writings in greater depth. Both use the term in two distinct ways: as "sensible substance or matter in the ordinary sense and as something which does not exist as an attribute. There are also non-sensible substances²⁵⁷ of which Aristotle recognizes, above all, God, the Unmoved Mover. Significantly enough, this is exactly the Bahá'í position. For example, speaking about the Manifestations, Bahá'u'lláh tells us,

*Unto this subtle, this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself.*²⁵⁸

In this passage we first notice that, as with Aristotle, the "physical"²⁵⁹ is clearly distinguished from the "substance,"²⁶⁰ in this case, God's substance. This establishes that the physical and the substantial are not the same and that God is a non-physical or non-sensible substance. If substance were understood materialistically, this statement would suggest that God has a material substance, a notion flatly incompatible with the Bahá'í Teachings for that would render God susceptible to change²⁶¹ and make the Divine a composite of matter and form. However, understood in an Aristotelian fashion, this passage presents no philosophical difficulties. God is the supreme substance, the only entity which absolutely exists and can in no wise be seen as an attribute of something else. He is also the supreme actuality insofar as God has no potentials left to be actualized. That is precisely what makes the Divine inaccessible to us.

Furthermore, this passage tells us that spiritually, the Manifestation is an immediate emanation from God, and is formally, though not substantially identical with the Divine. This reading, based on Aristotle's terminology, is confirmed in the immediately following sentences which state, "He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself. To this testifieth the tradition: 'Manifold and mysterious is My relationship with God. I am He, Himself, and He is I, Myself, except that I am that I am, and He is that He is.'"²⁶² The Manifestation has formal identity with God—"I am He"²⁶³—but not substantial identity with God because He is "born of the substance of God"²⁶⁴ and "He is that He is."²⁶⁵ For an Aristotelian, this relationship is rational, clear and perfectly unparadoxical: it is no different than the relationship between the original of a manuscript and a copy: the two share formal but not substantial identity and one is logically prior and is the final cause of the other.

5.3) The Soul as Substance

'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation of the nature of the immortal soul provides another example of the Aristotelian usage of 'substance' and related terms.

*Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident—that is to say, the body—be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains.*²⁶⁶

The first thing to notice is how the Master defines substance in proper Aristotelian fashion as something that “exists by itself”²⁶⁷ and not as an attribute of something else. Moreover, He refers to the soul as a non-material substance and applies this concept vis-à-vis the body. This is an implicit denial of any epiphenomenalist understanding of the soul, a point He emphasizes by describing the body with the Aristotelian term “accident.”²⁶⁸ An ‘accident’ according to Aristotle, is an attribute that is non-essential to the existence of a thing which is why the substantial soul can live without the ‘accidental’ body. Thus, we can see at this point, how 'Abdu'l-Bahá grounds His argument for the immortality of the soul in the concepts and definitions originally espoused by Aristotle. He explicitly states that “the rational soul is the substance through which the body exists.”²⁶⁹ It is, in other words, the essence that provides the form that makes a body into a human body. Interestingly enough, Bahá'u'lláh applies this same concept to the Manifestation's relationship to the world:

*At that time, the signs of the Son of man shall appear in heaven, that is, the promised Beauty and Substance of life shall, when these signs have appeared, step forth out of the realm of the invisible into the visible world.*²⁷⁰

No materialist understanding can make rational sense of the italicized phrase. However, if we apply Aristotle's concept of substance, its meaning becomes clear: the Manifestation is the essence of life; He is That which informs matter with life itself, and is, in that sense, the world-soul. He is also the actuality, the culmination of life, that is, the highest possible example of life in the phenomenal realm.

5.4) Other Uses of 'Substance'

The Aristotelian use of substance also allows us to perceive new levels of meaning in some of Bahá'u'lláh's statements. Take, for example, the following:

*When shall these things be? When shall the promised One, the object of our expectation, be made manifest, that we may arise for the triumph of His Cause, that we may sacrifice our substance for His sake, that we may offer up our lives in His path?*²⁷¹

At the first, most obvious level, this discusses our willingness to sacrifice our material wealth for the Manifestation. However, an Aristotelian reading suggests a deeper level: it expresses a willingness to sacrifice our very identity, our nature, our essence, our actuality for God's Cause. This is the martyrdom of ontological “evanescence,”²⁷² of truly “utter abasement”²⁷³ before God. Bahá'u'lláh alludes to such complete and ongoing ontological martyrdom when he praises such holy souls as Mullah Husayn: “They have offered, and will *continue to offer up* their lives, their *substance*, their souls, their spirit, their all, in the path of the Well-Beloved.”²⁷⁴ With the Aristotelian reading of ‘substance,’ we see new aspects of Husayn's martyrdom. The phrase “will continue to offer up”²⁷⁵ suggests that such ontological martyrdom may not be a single act but rather a way of life.

I do not, of course, mean to suggest that the Writings never use the word ‘substance’ as a synonym for ‘material,’ for such is patently not the case,²⁷⁶ but rather that we must carefully

distinguish between Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian usage if we wish to avoid confusion. Take the following passage for instance: "Here we see that if attraction did not exist between the atoms, the composite substance of matter would not be possible."²⁷⁷ The phrase "composite substance of matter"²⁷⁸ makes no sense until we recall that for Aristotle, all physical things were composites of matter which received form²⁷⁹ which together make them a substance or unity.²⁸⁰ Indeed, as seen in the following example, we find that 'Abdu'l-Bahá fully recognizes that material things are composites of matter and form.

*The sun is born from substance and form, which can be compared to father and mother, and it is absolute perfection; but the darkness has neither substance nor form, neither father nor mother, and it is absolute imperfection. The substance of Adam's physical life was earth, but the substance of Abraham was pure sperm; it is certain that the pure and chaste sperm is superior to earth.*²⁸¹

In the first part of this statement, 'substance' is meant as 'sensible substance' or common matter which, in order to be anything must receive form. He denies the reality of darkness because in the phenomenal world, nothing that lacks substance and form is real. However, in what follows, the meaning of 'substance' begins to shift in an Aristotelian direction. The substance of Adam, that is, his sensible substance as well as his being as a non-attribute, is connected to the earth, whereas the substance of Abraham, a Manifestation, is "pure sperm." Unless we read them with the Aristotelian substratum of the Writings in mind, such statements could intellectually embarrass a modern believer. However, the meaning becomes clear when we recall that for Aristotle, sperm provided the form and that for Abraham in His divine station, that form is provided by God with whom He shares a formal, though not substantial identity. This divine form is obviously superior to the sensible matter of the earth. Lest anyone quarrel too harshly with Aristotle about sperm providing form, let us recall that sperm decides whether an infant is male or female, that is, in that regard, the formative principle.

Here is another example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of substance in Aristotelian fashion:

*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.*²⁸²

'Substance' is certainly not being used as "sensible substance" or matter, for that would render the passage meaningless or in complete denial of other Bahá'í Teachings concerning the non-materiality of God. This passage emphasizes in the strictest philosophical manner that God, the Reality of Divinity, is a substance insofar as it is absolutely not an attribute of anything else. The "substance of the essence of Oneness"²⁸³ means that the very substratum or essence of what it means to be One is totally independent and sanctified above all other things. Although this idea is not new to Bahá'ís, it is interesting to observe how 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains—and thus provides the basis for a rational philosophical defense—for this belief in Aristotelian terms.

5.5) Hylomorphism: Matter and Form

As the foregoing passages make clear, the Writings and Aristotle²⁸⁴ agree on hylomorphism, that is, the belief that everything in creation is made of both matter and form, though we must bear in mind that 'matter' is a relative term in Aristotle insofar as it can refer to physical 'stuff' sometimes called "elemental"²⁸⁵ by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Most fundamental to Aristotle is the doctrine that matter is the potential to receive form. In Aristotle, the form is the active principle while matter is receptive, passive or patient, an idea Bahá'u'lláh expresses when He writes:

The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction

*between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different.*²⁸⁶

Two comments are in order. First, the statement that these two are the “same”²⁸⁷ refers to their origin and nature as created entities while their differences refer to their action in the phenomenal world of creation. This statement should no more be read as a reductionism to spirit than as a reductionism to matter. The Bahá'í Writings, like Aristotle's thought, are examples of hylomorphism, the belief that existence is made of matter and form; therefore, neither of them can be reduced to a spiritual-idealistic or material monism. Second, in the foregoing passage, the “heat generated”²⁸⁸ by the imposition of form onto matter is the tension that inevitably exists between form and matter, since form is the active principle of perfection while matter is the principle of receptivity but also of inertia. This tension is part of what constitutes and most especially living things since the quest for perfection, that is, highest possible self-expression, is an integral part of their existence. Although Aristotle does not explicitly refer to such tension, it is implicit in his characterization of matter and form.

The distinction between matter and form also brings us back to our resolution of the apparent self-contradiction between creationism and emanationism and the associated doctrines of time. ‘Creation’ refers to the notion that God made the world like an artisan, a concept implying that the world was made at some point in time. On the other hand, emanationism suggests that the universe is eternal—which by the way is another point of agreement between Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings—and, consequently, there is no creation in time. On the basis of Aristotle,²⁸⁹ we may conclude that ‘creation’ refers to the specific creation of a concrete thing such as the earth or this universe whereas ‘emanation’ refers to the formal principle, essence which has always existed as a potential available for actualization. After all, a Creator requires a creation but nothing says this creation must be material. In short, there is no contradiction between the two Teachings because one refers to the order of specific matter and time, whereas the other refers to the order of potential and form.

5.6) Essences

Not only do Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings analyze the world in terms of substances and attributes, they also use the concept of ‘essence’ and accept essences as real. Controversial though it may be in the current philosophical climate, the bottom line is that the Bahá'í Writings espouse a form of essentialism, a fact that comes as no surprise given its adherence to a realist epistemology and metaphysic. Because even the most cursory reading of such Aristotelian works as *Metaphysics*, *Physics* and *On the Soul*, or any basic exposition of his works reveals the centrality of ‘essence’ to his thought, I will not needlessly lengthen our study by expounding on this subject. More to our purpose is to see how the concept of essence appears in the Bahá'í Writings, for here, too, it plays a key role since everything, including God, is said to have an essence.

The Bahá'í Writings use the term ‘essence’ in a variety of contexts and to express a variety of ideas but none of them stray from the fundamental Aristotelian meaning of (a) the attributes needed for a substance to be the kind of substance it is; (b) the defining or characteristic nature of a thing and (c) the capacities or potentials inherent in a thing; (d) the final cause of a thing’ (e) the formal cause of a thing and (f) substance and (g) the form of a thing and (h) actuality and (i) culmination.²⁹⁰ These various usages, differing in what aspect of the concept of ‘essence’ they emphasize, are related insofar as they all refer to those attributes, potential or actual, which make a thing the kind of and particular thing it is. Everything we can discuss has an essence which we can know insofar as human beings have the capacity to know it.

There seems to be little question that the Bahá'í Writings see all existing things endowed with an essence as described by Aristotle. In *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh tells us that “the light of divine knowledge and heavenly grace hath illumined and inspired the *essence of all created things*, in such wise that in each and every thing [is] a door of knowledge.”²⁹¹ In *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Bahá'u'lláh states that “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.”²⁹² In this quotation, the essence or “inmost reality”²⁹³ of a thing is defined by its capacity or potentiality to “testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God.”²⁹⁴ The concept of essence as capacity is in perfect harmony with Aristotle's basic position. The Writings specifically mention that each of the following has an essence: God²⁹⁵; the human soul²⁹⁶; humankind²⁹⁷; belief in Divine Unity²⁹⁸; justice²⁹⁹; “all created things”³⁰⁰; beauty³⁰¹; species of living things³⁰²; truth³⁰³; religion³⁰⁴; “this new age”³⁰⁵; and the spirit.³⁰⁶ On the basis of such a wide array of references to ‘essence’ it is, in my view, safe to say that the existence of essences is an important point of agreement between Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings. Indeed, these references to the essence are even more wide-spread once we realize that such phrases as “inmost reality”³⁰⁷; “the realities of”³⁰⁸; “reality of”³⁰⁹; “inner reality,”³¹⁰ and “inner realities”³¹¹ also refer to the essence of things. This connection is further emphasized by the parallel usage seen in the references to the “inmost essence”³¹² of things.

In addition to being pervasive, the terms ‘essence’ and “inmost reality” are used in a manner that is not only consistent with but also combines several, if not all, of Aristotle's usages into one. Take, for example, the following statement:

*(1) Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. (2) Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self . . . (3) These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp.*³¹³

In these statements we can detect all of Aristotle's uses of the term ‘essence.’ The first statement shows the term being used as a reference to (a) the non-accidental attributes of a thing or substance and (b) its defining characteristic and therefore, (c) its form as well as (d) the formal cause of that substance. Because the formal cause requires (e) a final cause, we can say that the latter is included by logical implication. In the second statement, which is really a re-statement of the first with particular focus on humankind, we can detect the additional sense of ‘essence’ as actuality and culmination, that is, the emphasis on the undeniable existence of humankind as the culminating point of phenomenal reality. Finally, in the third statement, we see ‘essence’—the attributes of God which are also “energies”³¹⁴—portrayed as potentials or potencies “latent”³¹⁵ in us and are waiting to be moved from “from potentiality into actuality.”³¹⁶ We could also repeat this analysis for Bahá'u'lláh's statement that “[f]rom 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”³¹⁷ where we especially notice the attention drawn to “inmost reality”³¹⁸ as “capacity”³¹⁹ or potential (which is another key Aristotelian term) as well as to how the phrase “[e]ach according to its capacity”³²⁰ shows capacity or essential potential defining a thing as the kind of thing it is.

In light of what we have learned, it seems impossible to escape the conclusion that the Bahá'í

Writings espouse some form of essentialism, although at this point, the exact nature of this essentialism requires further study and exploration. This conclusion is also supported, as we shall see, by Bahá'í and Aristotelian ethics. Given the already noted division of nature into the mineral, vegetable, animal, human and supernatural realms, it cannot be denied that the Bahá'í world picture divides phenomenal creation into kinds, each with their essential endowments of God's attributes and consequently, natural and appropriate behaviors. These kinds are further divided into individuals who are or are not appropriate exemplars of their kind.

5.7) Essences and Epistemology

According to Aristotle³²¹ what we know of a thing is its universal form, its universal essence or "formula"³²² to use Aristotle's example, we recognize the form of 'circular' in a particular bronze circle but we must recall that while there is a formula for a circle and a formula for bronze, there is no formula or definition for this particular bronze circle. It is only recognized by the aid of "intuitive thinking or of perception."³²³ As he writes, "It is not possible to define any thing, for definition is of the universal and of the form."³²⁴ This formula or definition is known by the attributes manifested by specific examples but the particular itself is not known in and as itself: "matter is unknowable in itself."³²⁵ This position does not differ significantly from what 'Abdu'l-Bahá means when He says,

*Know that there are two kinds of knowledge: the knowledge of the essence of a thing, and the knowledge of its qualities. The essence of a thing is known through its qualities, otherwise it is unknown and hidden.*³²⁶

Not only does this passage show yet again that attributes are real and provide real knowledge, but it also tells us that the essence of a particular thing is not completely known. In other words, all human knowledge is about universals and forms, but cannot extend to the knowledge of the essence of a particular thing. As Aristotle says, "there is neither definition of nor demonstration about sensible, individual substances."³²⁷ Aristotle relegates the knowledge of particulars to "opinion"³²⁸ and, although he does not explicitly say so, he, like the Bahá'í Writings, would have to admit that only God is capable of knowing particulars in-themselves, that is, the individual essence.

However, this cannot logically be taken to mean that the knowledge we obtain from the attributes and qualities is (a) false or (b) inadequate for our phenomenal purposes or (c) arbitrary fictions or (d) absolutely relative. In other words, while the Bahá'í world picture is divided in two, with a noumenal realm known only to God and phenomenal realm known to us via attributes and qualities, this somewhat Kantian aspect of the Writings does not undermine the adequacy or correctness of our knowledge for the phenomenal realm and of universals. If it did, it would undermine science, which is a knowledge of universals in contrast to art which provides intuition of particulars. There is simply no logical reason to lead the Writings into relativistic wastelands seen in the work of some contemporary philosophers. Instead, the limitations on our knowledge lay the foundation for a rational argument for the necessity of revelation.

5.8) Potential

Another aspect of substance, ultimately related to essence,³²⁹ is potential. The word 'potential' does not refer to a mysterious little hidden 'thingy,' but rather to the fact that only a certain number of transformations can be made in a substance without destroying it as the substance it is. One can use a raincoat as a blanket, a book as an eye-shade and, with some manual dexterity, a rose as a drinking cup: these are potentials that each of them has. However, no amount of effort transforms a raincoat into a 800 pound gorilla, an book into a water-well or

a rose into a telephone. They simply lack the potential for that. In many ways, essences are simply a ‘cluster’ of potentials that define a kind and/or an individual. As something changes or evolves—either moved internally or externally—its potentials are actualized or realized, that is, its potentials are revealed and manifested. A rosebud blossoms to produce as beautiful fragrance; of their own nature, a raincoat and essay do not.

Now is also a good time to notice that raincoats, books and roses have different forms: in fact, each of them is matter that has been given a certain form that allows it to be and do certain things. All substances are composed of matter and form which are not the same: the matter in the raincoat could have been given the form of an umbrella, the words in the book arranged into a long metaphysical poem and the rose could have formed another kind of flower. Like two sides of a coin, matter and form are distinct, but not separable: all matter has form but which particular form it receives can vary. Matter also imposes potential limits on what forms can be adopted: sheet metal cannot accept the form to become light bulbs or rodeo bulls.

5.9) Essences and Potentials

In previous discussions, we have seen the close connection between essence and the concept of potentials. This connection is made even closer when we realize that an essence can also be defined as the collection of potentials that distinguish a particular kind and/or individual from other kinds and/or individuals. Humanity, for example, is endowed with and essentially defined by its rational and spiritual capacities both as an individual and as a species or kind. We must also bear in mind that potentials (and essences) are not little entities hidden in a substance like raisins in a bun. Rather they are (a) the ability or power to initiate or stop change in oneself or another³³⁰ or (b) the ability to change into or be changed into something else or be acted upon.³³¹ To make use of the old proverb, a sow’s ear lacks the potential to be changed into a silk purse. The lack of a particular potential or potency is a “privation.”³³² All created things suffer or exhibit absolute “privation” vis-à-vis God, and for this reason may be properly described as “utter nothingness.”³³³ This understanding allows a logical resolution to the apparent contradiction between Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that we come from “utter nothingness”³³⁴ and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s claim that nothing can come from absolute nothingness.³³⁵ As the context makes clear, Bahá’u’lláh’s statements are in relation to “privation” or our ‘privative natures’ vis-à-vis God whereas ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s assertions refer to substance and positive potentials or capacity. No logical contradiction exists because the statements are about different subjects. The concept of potentials also provides us with a rational interpretation of Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that copper can be turned into gold and vice versa.³³⁶ The language of this passage, for example, “lieth hidden,”³³⁷ “possible”³³⁸ and “can be turned,”³³⁹ clearly indicates this statement is about potentials or capacities, which makes it a statement of scientific fact.

The belief that potentials or capacities define us essentially is plain when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that “although capacities are not the same, every member of the human race is capable of education.”³⁴⁰ This asserts that we share individually different portions of the general species capacity to learn. In both Aristotle and the Writings, these capacities are sometimes also portrayed as powers or abilities to act or be acted on.³⁴¹ The connection between capacities, or potentials and powers is plainly evident in the following quotation:

*The ideal faculties of man, including the capacity for scientific acquisition, are beyond nature’s ken. These are powers whereby man is differentiated and distinguished from all other forms of life. This is the bestowal of divine idealism.*³⁴²

As we can see, potentials are the powers or abilities that humankind possesses, indeed, are the unique, that is, necessary characteristics that distinguish us from the rest of creation.

However, we must be careful to note that although the words 'potential,' 'power,' 'potency' and 'potencies' are used pervasively throughout the Writings, not all usages of the latter two refer to potentials. For example, the description of God as "He, verily, through the potency of His name, the Mighty"³⁴³ does not use 'potency' in the sense of 'potential' but rather in the sense of an existing power. As a matter of fact, reading it as 'potential' would lead to the serious theological error of ascribing potentials, that is, unactualized powers or attributes to God, and, thereby characterizing the Divine as imperfect. We must, therefore, be careful to distinguish between Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian uses of these terms. There are three other terms by which to explore the subject of potentials in the Writings: the first is 'latent,' which is pervasively used.³⁴⁴ The second is "hidden" which is found in a similarly wide range of Bahá'í texts referring to the concept of hidden—that is, potentially revealed or realized—qualities and their manifestation either through divine revelation, through natural processes or through human activity.³⁴⁵ The third is 'realize' which, when used philosophically instead of as a term for 'to understand suddenly,' refers to the process by which the hidden or potential is made real, comes to fruition or is revealed in the world of being.³⁴⁶

The importance of the concept of potentials for Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings can hardly be over-stated especially in an age in which the topic of change, and especially evolutionary change, is so hotly debated. Both Aristotle's and the Writings' entire vision of change and development depend on his belief that change—be it locomotion, increase, growth or decay is the actualizing or realizing of hitherto invisible, hidden potentials. For this reason, they share a common understanding of evolution which is not seen as the alteration of one species into another but rather the successive actualization of hidden, unrealized potentials. This allows both to argue that each species is a specific and original complex of potentials that were always available or hidden in creation and that what appears to be the transformation of one species into another is really the actualization of hitherto hidden potentials. (The underlying reasoning goes as follows. Among the alleged common ancestors of human and ape, outward similarities notwithstanding, only one group had the potential to manifest a rational soul. This group must have had this potential from the beginning because the concept of potentials leading to new potentials involves an infinite regress and is, thereby, logically untenable. Here's why. Either an organism has the potential to manifest rationality, or it does not. If it does not, it needs to acquire this potential (1) but to get this potential (1), it must first get the potential (2) to get the potential (1), and then, in turn it needs to acquire potential (3) to get potential (2) to get potential (1) and so on . . . If the organism turns out to already possess potential (3) to get potential (2) to get potential (1), then the organism is obviously part of the distinct human line.)

Thus, it is inaccurate to say that Aristotle and the Writings deny evolution. Rather, they re-interpret the same data used by all anthropologists in terms of potentiality and conclude that all evolution is the actualization or manifestation of previously hidden potentials. They disagree with current scientific views but they are not out of harmony with science because there is sound logical reasoning about potentials underlying their views.

5.10) Essence and Existence

The distinction between potential and actualization points to yet another point of agreement between Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings, namely the distinction between essence and existence. As already noted, for Aristotle, the essence may be seen as the potentiality of a thing: the identity of a hammer, for example, is constituted by all its potential uses that determine it can be employed as a prop to hold up a shelf of books as well as melted down to make a steel plate and cup but not as a guard dog. Our actions are required to bring the hammer's

various potentials into actuality, that is, to bring them into existence. In other words, for Aristotle, existence is actualization: bringing something into existence means actualizing a potential. The same is true in the Bahá'í Writings where we are brought into existence, that is, are actualized or manifest from mere potentialities which are actualized when the right combination of elements occurs. In *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asks, "Did we not pray potentially for these needed blessings *before we were created*?"³⁴⁷ The word "created"³⁴⁸ here must be read as meaning 'actualized,' 'brought into appearance' or 'manifest' because if we read it as meaning 'brought into existence from absolute nothing,' then 'Abdu'l-Bahá would be contradicting His own statements that

*existence and nonexistence are both relative. If it be said that such a thing came into existence from nonexistence, this does not refer to absolute nonexistence, but means that its former condition in relation to its actual condition was nothingness. For absolute nothingness cannot find existence, as it has not the capacity of existence.*³⁴⁹

Thus, for the Writings, as for Aristotle, *to exist* means to be *actualized* or to be *manifest*: we do not really exist before the point of actualization although the potential for us exists because, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we cannot come into existence from absolute nothing. Consequently, it follows that things do not come into manifest existence merely because they have an essence, that is, merely because there is a potential for them to come into existence. Existence does not necessarily or automatically follow from one's potential for existing. It must be provided by a special act—in Aristotle, the continued action of the Unmoved Mover, and, in the Bahá'í case, the voluntary act of God Who chooses which potentials to actualize. In other words, for a potential to come into existence requires an act from an entity that already exists and is, thereby, able to take action which is something only existing entities can do. In the Bahá'í view, this 'entity' is ultimately God, Who actualizes or provides existence to all things other than Himself. Only God exists by virtue of His own nature, that is, only in God are essence/potential and actualized existence one and the same. In short, it is not only God's nature to exist but also to exist as a perfectly actualized Being.

The distinction between essence/potential and existence is of supreme philosophical importance for both Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings because it is the foundation for a Bahá'í existentialism. The core of existential philosophies is the belief that 'existence' precedes essence,' although the meaning of this statement is variously interpreted. In all cases, however, existence is a result of a distinct act, and theistic and atheistic existentialisms diverge on the issue of whether God or the individual is ultimately responsible for this act. A Bahá'í existentialism would, in a sense, have it both ways. As in theistic forms of existentialism, God is ultimately responsible for the act that manifests a potential in the world, and, as in atheistic existentialism, it is the individual who creates his or her own 'voluntary self' by choosing which potentials to actualize in this life. Indeed, the whole notion of our lives being a process of actualizing potentials leads us closer to the form of existentialism developed above all by Martin Heidegger and Gabriel Marcel, although it bears affinities to Sartre's existentialism as well.

Although this issue is explored more fully in my paper "The Call to Being: Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism," it is worthwhile to digress for a moment to make a few salient points to demonstrate the versatility of the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle. It is in my view, precisely this versatility which led Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to retain whatever was useful in Aristotle as the substratum of the Writings. For example, if our lives are a process of actualizing our potential selves, certain consequences are unavoidable. Our lives are matters of perpetual choice among possibilities—often based on little more than faith—in a world in which we face the challenges of trying to relate to a God Who is essentially unknowable, as well as a world

made up of things whose essences we cannot know directly. We live, and choose, in a world of essential mystery. Moreover, it also becomes evident that we are never completely ourselves which means that self-alienation and estrangement, wonder, and mystery are inherently structured into our being. We are, since the Writings assert the existence of an after-life of perpetual development and evolution, ladies and gentlemen 'in waiting,' and therefore, not surprisingly, prone to 'angst' about our choices and their consequences. We are Marcel's "*homo viator*," for ever in transit, for whom every moment is simultaneously an arrival and departure and our only 'rest' is the journey itself. Moreover, we are intrinsically dissatisfied because we are, and never can be, never fully and completely ourselves. We are locked in a constant struggle to become—or to avoid becoming—what we are not and our 'nothingness' always haunts us. Indeed, we can become so overwhelmed by this struggle that we give up, act in 'bad faith,' lose our individual being in the anonymity of the crowd and adopt a collective rather than true-to-ourselves, personal identity. Then, we face the challenge of hearing the 'call to being' and finding the power to answer it. We are always 'in a situation' and 'in a world'; we are concrete real beings, not abstract concepts, whose moods and attitudes present the world and others to us in various ways and condition our 'modes of being.' Finally, the Writings' emphasis on the process of actualization and on our individual and social evolution to overcome ourselves to help establish a more highly evolved form of humankind has clearly Nietzschean overtones worthy of exploration. Readers even passingly familiar with existential thought will recognize both the existential themes as well as authors alluded to in this paragraph.

It may be objected that the Writings and Aristotle cannot be essentialist and existentialist at the same time. However, this objection does not hold because of the individual's free will to choose which of his human and personal potentials to actualize, when, where, how and why. Aristotelian essentialism does not do away with choice; it is not a form of ethical determinism. What the Aristotelian insights confirmed by the Writings do is to provide an outline of the nature and structure of being and specifically human being, a project in which they are not fundamentally different than *Being and Time*, *Being and Nothingness* and *The Mystery Of Being*. (Even Sartre who is most allergic to any suggestions of a general 'human nature' still recognizes, and thereby contradicts himself by reserving for humankind the specific character of "pour-soi" as distinguished from everything else which is "en-soi.") A Bahá'í existentialism explores how we personally experience the nature and structure of human being, and what this experience means for us as individuals in the world.

5.11) Substance-Attribute Ontology

Closely associated with Aristotle's concept of substance is the concept of attributes since substances can only be known by the attributes they possess, a crucial fact explicitly stated in the Bahá'í Writings: "Phenomenal, or created, things are known to us only by their attributes. Man discerns only manifestations, or attributes."³⁵⁰ This also applies to our knowledge of God:

*Inasmuch as the realities of material phenomena are impenetrable and unknowable and are only apprehended through their properties or qualities, how much more this is true concerning the reality of Divinity, that holy essential reality which transcends the plane and grasp of mind and man?*³⁵¹

This issue is of far-reaching philosophical importance because it shows that the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle both share a substance-attribute analysis of existence or a substance-attribute ontology and this, in turn, limits the kind of metaphysics and epistemologies to which

they can be logically allied. This is clearly evident from even a cursory examination of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's preceding quotations in which there are three points worthy of note. First, the properties are "their"³⁵² properties; they belong to a particular created substance and are clearly not arbitrary human constructs or 'fictions' imposed on them by the perceivers. The properties of substances are not necessarily human impositions. Second, phenomenal things are known to us through their attributes, from which it follows logically that these attributes provide real—albeit, as seen above, limited—knowledge. However limited it may be, such knowledge is still real knowledge about the substance possessing or manifesting the attributes. Third, this knowledge comes to us directly from the substances by means of their attributes or properties which we perceive. Such is precisely the import of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "the mind is connected with the acquisition of knowledge, like images reflected in a mirror."³⁵³ In other words, the mind perceives or reflects these attributes directly and immediately just as a mirror directly and immediately reflects whatever it faces.³⁵⁴ Just as humankind reflects the divine perfections,³⁵⁵ so the mind reflects the real attributes of the substances around it.

6) Logic and Rationality

This brings us to another major area of agreement between Aristotle and the Writings—the belief that logical and rational inquiry, if correctly pursued, can provide true knowledge about reality. In other words, as shown in far greater detail in my paper "*Reason and the Bahá'í Writings*,"³⁵⁶ the Bahá'í Writings, like Aristotle, are committed to a moderate form of rationalism. Suffice it to say that as far as the Writings and Aristotle are concerned, logical thought is based on the law of non-contradiction which can be expressed in various forms. The most useful of these states that "A cannot be A and not-A at the same time in the same sense" or that "A cannot have quality C and not have C at the same time in the same sense." For example, fire cannot be hot and cold at the same time in the same way. It is hot to us and cold in comparison to the sun but it cannot be hot and cold to the sun simultaneously. To claim otherwise is a logical self-contradiction because the two statements cancel each other out.

It is vital to note that the Writings do not use one kind of logic and reason in what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "logical" proofs" and another in what he calls "spiritual proofs."³⁵⁷ The Writings do, indeed, employ logic to pursue different kinds of arguments by various means (such as argument by analogy) but regardless of particular topic and application, all of the reasoning found in the Writings follows the law of non-contradiction and the laws of logical reasoning following from that. "Spiritual proofs,"³⁵⁸ using scripture as their premises and verification, follow the same rules of reasoning as "logical" proofs. Only the applications vary, not the laws of logic and reasoning. To illustrate this, let us examine an example of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls a "spiritual proof"³⁵⁹:

*Therefore it cannot be said there was a time when man was not. All that we can say is that this terrestrial globe at one time did not exist, and at its beginning man did not appear upon it. But from the beginning which has no beginning, to the end which has no end, a perfect manifestation always exists. This man of whom we speak is not every man; we mean the perfect man. For the noblest part of the tree is the fruit, which is the reason of its existence; if the tree had no fruit, it would have no meaning. Therefore it cannot be imagined that the worlds of existence, whether the stars or this earth, were once inhabited by the donkey, cow, mouse, and cat, and that they were without man! This supposition is false and meaningless. The word of God is clear as the sun. This is a spiritual proof, but one which we cannot at the beginning put forth for the benefit of the materialists; first we must speak of the logical proofs, afterwards the spiritual proofs.*³⁶⁰

It is important to notice that 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not abandon the laws of logic simply because He is providing a "spiritual proof."³⁶¹ In fact, His argument is so logically rigorous that it can be presented as two syllogisms as invented by Aristotle.

- (1) All created things need a final cause (reason to exist) to exist.
- (2) The universe is a created thing.
- (3) Therefore, the universe needs a final cause to exist.

and

All created things need a final cause (reason to exist) to exist.

- (2) The perfect man is the final cause of the universe which has always existed.
- (3) Therefore, the perfect man has always existed.

However, I must point out that I am not saying the Bahá'í Faith is a purely rationalist religion in which the heart, intuition, faith, mysticism and revelation have no place. Quite the opposite. The structure of the philosophy embedded in the Writings is *architectonic*: one level builds on another in a step by step fashion until we reach the pinnacle of knowledge and understanding, namely the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation for this age and the object of all knowledge.³⁶² Rational, philosophic knowledge forms the foundation this structure. However, to actualize its full potential, reason needs the Holy Spirit, i.e. divine grace and inspiration:

*He must also impart spiritual education, so that intelligence and comprehension may penetrate the metaphysical world, and may receive benefit from the sanctifying breeze of the Holy Spirit, and may enter into relationship with the Supreme Concourse.*³⁶³

and

*But the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained.*³⁶⁴

In other words, while we may *begin with reason*, reason alone cannot reach the heights of knowledge. The supra-rational ways of knowing, that is, intuition, feeling, and mystical experiences empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit as manifest in the Writings and Institutions, is necessary to complete our rational knowledge. In other words, the philosophy embedded in the Writings has an architectonic structure that accommodates rational and supra-rational knowledge.

Philosophically, this means the Bahá'í Faith is a variant of moderate rationalism. To discover what this means, we must ask ourselves the all important question, "How much can reason or logic tell us?" There are three possible answers: everything; some things; nothing. Rationalists in their various versions and incarnations believe that reason and logic can tell us everything that is worthy of being called 'truth' or knowledge. Today's positivists belong in this camp. These are the champions of what they call the 'scientific method' and they refuse to accept as truth any statement that cannot be explained and proven by experiment, logical explanation and/or Popper's falsifiability principle. They do not believe that there is any limit to the power of logical explanation and, therefore, whatever cannot be explained logically is "non-sense."

At the opposite extreme are skeptics and many forms of post-modernist philosophy which, for various reasons do not believe that reason and logic can give us any truth at all. Indeed, the hard skeptics deny that there is any such thing as 'Truth' in any objective sense, and the soft

skeptics, while willing to admit that such a 'Truth' might exist, deny that human beings can ever know it. Both positions are logically self-refuting. To say 'There is no 'Truth' in effect asserts there is at least one 'Truth,' namely, that there is none! Unfortunately, this fundamental flaw has never hindered skeptics from advancing their arguments.

Between the two extremes are the moderate rationalists who assert that reason can tell us some things but not everything. The challenge, of course, is to identify what reason can and cannot tell us. This position leaves plenty of scope for the power of reason but also recognizes that reason alone cannot tell us everything, thereby leaving room for other modes of knowing and, above all, revelation. This is the Bahá'í position, but one which the Faith shares with Aristotle although he never developed this aspect of his philosophy to any great extent. He does, however, recognize that intuitive knowledge exists³⁶⁵ and recognizes that intuition represents a real though problematical avenue to knowledge.³⁶⁶ However, the existence of intuition and "intuitive reason"³⁶⁷ is sufficient to render Aristotle a moderate rationalist, as is his recognition that reason knows universal forms but not the particular essence of things as distinct from their universal or species essence. This conclusion is also supported in the *Eudemian Ethics*, where Aristotle writes, "The starting point of reasoning is not reasoning, but something greater"³⁶⁸ which he explicitly identifies with "god."³⁶⁹ He then goes on to explain that a few, "called fortunate"³⁷⁰ have "inspiration"³⁷¹ and have no need for "deliberation."³⁷² Finally, there are also "the dreamers of what is true"³⁷³ who are more susceptible to the influence of God, "the moving principle"³⁷⁴ "when the reasoning power is relaxed."³⁷⁵

Readers will, of course, recognize that Aristotle's belief in knowledge from the inspired "fortunate"³⁷⁶ and "dreamers of what is true"³⁷⁷ provides a small but nonetheless indisputable opportunity to recognize the existence of Manifestations and prophets, that is, those who do not depend entirely upon our usual perceptive and reasoning processes. Although he does not develop these ideas to any great extent, he is prepared to recognize alternate sources of knowledge and guidance for humankind.

7) Ethics

The similarities between Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings extend beyond the theoretical wisdom of philosophical knowledge to the practical wisdom in ethics. Although one might expect a system with divine revelation and one without to be dramatically different, the truth is that while differences exist, the underlying structures are virtually identical. That is because both systems share three fundamental premises. The first is that happiness is the final goal of all behavior and that ethical behavior is a means to that goal. Second, both agree that happiness consists in the actualization of our highest potentials. The third area of agreement is that the acquisition and practice of virtues is the best means to the highest possible self-actualization. Whatever other agreements and differences may exist between the two ethical systems, they are essentially compatible because they are built on the same foundation.

7.1) Happiness as the Final Goal

Let us now examine these positions in more detail. In both the *Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asserts that happiness is the final goal for which all human beings strive: "Happiness is at once the pleasantest and the fairest and best of all things whatever."³⁷⁸ This is because it is what "we choose always for itself, and never for the sake of something else"³⁷⁹ which means that other goals are really no more than means to achieve happiness. This, of course, is where other systems may disagree and see righteousness, living in good faith or personal salvation as the final goals by which to assess behavior. However, Bahá'u'lláh makes the Bahá'í position clear when He says, "We desire but the good of the world and the happiness

of the nations”³⁸⁰ which is emphasized when He writes, “whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already been revealed by the Pen of Glory.”³⁸¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá supports this when He states, “In this way the primary purpose in revealing the Divine Law—which is to bring about happiness in the after life and civilization and the refinement of character in this—will be realized.”³⁸² Elsewhere He says, “The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God.”³⁸³ These beliefs are succinctly encapsulated in the assertion that “Bahá’u’lláh has brought you divine happiness.”³⁸⁴

Having established that happiness is the final end of ethics, we are now in a position to examine the chief means of attaining it. At this point the influence of their hierarchical cosmic world picture and potential-actuality metaphysic begins to make itself felt. According to Aristotle, every kind of creation has its own proper happiness based on its essential nature: “Each animal is thought to have its proper pleasure, as it has a proper function; viz., that which corresponds to its activity.”³⁷⁹ In other words, some activities are appropriate to the animal’s essential nature and these activities promote genuine happiness. From this we may conclude that while all of an animal’s activities may be natural, they are not all appropriate to its essential nature. To take an example from the farm: it is natural for a donkey to mate, but it is not appropriate for a donkey to try mating with a cow. In humans, this distinction between the natural and the appropriate becomes even more pronounced and has a profound impact on our understanding of what activities are proper to our nature. For example, sexuality is a natural part of our human nature, but not all expressions of sexuality are appropriate to our essence. Many of today’s attitudes on this subject are based on conflating and confusing these two vitally different categories. The Bahá’í Writings, of course, clearly recognize this distinction between the natural and the appropriate as shown for example in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s amusement at the materialist philosophers whose epistemologies are no different than a cow’s.³⁸⁵ His point is that such epistemologies while natural are also inappropriate to the human essence because they ignore reason and the existence of a spiritual soul.

7.2) Happiness as Appropriate Actualization

However, it take more than appropriate pleasures for a being, and especially a human being, to achieve happiness which, according to Aristotle is not just an “activity,”³⁸⁶ nor even activity in accordance with virtue³⁸⁷ but rather activity “in accordance with the highest virtue.”³⁸⁸ Now, the appropriate virtue of a thing obviously depends upon its essential nature and the essential nature that all things, and especially all living things have in common is the drive to exist in the most perfect and complete state possible, that is to say, all things strive to self-actualize, to move from potency to act, or, to make their potentials actual. Aristotle notes that happiness comes in “activities in accordance with our human estate”³⁸⁹ or nature, and connects actualization with happiness in his claim that “philosophic wisdom”³⁹⁰ produces happiness by being actualized within a person. This activity actualizes our highest, specifically human, potential and, thereby, cannot help but bring supreme happiness. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expresses a similar idea when he says, “All the virtues which have been deposited and *potential in human hearts are being revealed* from that Reality as flowers and blossoms from divine gardens. It is a day of joy, a time of happiness, a period of spiritual growth.”³⁹¹ The same point is made in his statement that “Through the infusion of divine power all nations and peoples become quickened, and universal happiness is possible.”³⁹² The new measure of self-actualization inspired by the new Manifestation is precisely what makes our times happy despite the obvious diffi-

culties; humankind is constantly actualizing and revealing new potentials both within itself and in the material world. The importance of the self-actualization ethic is also seen in the emphasis on the need for women to actualize all their powers as part of a general global self-actualization. We may sum this all up by saying that the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle share an ethic of conscious self-actualization that sees development and growth—not mere personal comfort and ease—as the signs of true happiness. Indeed, one may be quite uncomfortable but nonetheless supremely happy because one is truly growing and developing.

What, we may ask, is this highest virtue by which humankind can achieve happiness? According to Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*, which is a more religiously oriented work than the *Nichomachean Ethics*, what is best for us is whatever "will most produce the contemplation of god"³⁹³ a statement that is remarkably close to the Bahá'í Noonday Prayer which asserts that we were created "to know [God] and to worship [Him]." He then defines as bad anything "that through deficiency or excess hinders one from the contemplation and service of god."³⁹⁴ However, even in the less spiritual *Nichomachean Ethics*, he notes that the highest activities "take thought of things noble and divine"³⁹⁵ and remarks that contemplation is superior to action because contemplation can be carried out more continuously.³⁹⁶ Ultimately, he awards contemplation the laurel as the highest virtue and the source of "perfect happiness."³⁹⁷ As already seen, the Noonday Prayer, also gives contemplation, the knowing and worshipping of God, an enormously high place as does 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation."³⁹⁸ Indeed, one can make a very good case that in the Bahá'í Writings, as in Aristotle, the theoretical virtues of knowing and contemplation take priority over practical action:

*Although a person of good deeds is acceptable at the Threshold of the Almighty, yet it is first "to know," and then "to do." . . . The lamp is lighted, but as it hath not a conscious knowledge of itself, no one hath become glad because of it. Moreover, a soul of excellent deeds and good manners will undoubtedly advance from whatever horizon he beholdeth the lights radiating. Herein lies the difference: By faith is meant, first, conscious knowledge, and second, the practice of good deeds.*³⁹⁹

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes the reason for the priority of knowing clear: doing is something we have in common with inanimate matter as well as animals, but "conscious knowledge"⁴⁰⁰ is unique to humankind.

7.3) The Acquisition of Virtues

In the foregoing discussion, we have already seen how the actualization of our highest attributes is essential to our happiness as human beings distinct from animals. This suggests, of course, that Aristotle and the Writings espouse a teleological ethics, in which "[w]hat conduces to the attainment of his good or end will be a 'right' action on man's part."⁴⁰¹ The good that humankind is to attain is the happiness appropriate to our specifically human nature. All this, however, still leaves us with the question as to the best way to achieve this goal. Here too, Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings essentially agree that the best way to achieve our specifically human happiness is to acquire and practice the highest virtues appropriate to our highest nature. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "The honor allotted to man is the *acquisition of the supreme virtues* of the human world. This is his *real happiness* and felicity."⁴⁰² Although Aristotle never explicitly says so, that he shares the same view is clearly seen in the contempt in which he holds for example, the "incontinent" and "brutish type,"⁴⁰³ that is, those who live more according to their lower animal selves than their specifically human selves which is at least partially "divine."⁴⁰⁴

This belief in the “acquisition of the supreme virtues”⁴⁰⁵ clearly distinguishes Bahá'í and Aristotelian ethics from more subjective ethical systems that view as supreme such things as ‘truth to oneself’ or ‘sincerity’ or ‘living in good faith.’ In other words, the Bahá'í and Aristotelian systems are more objective insofar as they set external standards that should be met regardless of how one personally feels about them. Personal feelings must often be set aside in the quest for the morally good life since they are not necessarily accurate guides. Furthermore, because of their beliefs about the essential nature of humankind, they maintain there are objective, universally applicable moral standards consonant with the actualization of our specifically human potentials. This also means that there can, in fact, be a science of ethics based on our knowledge of human potentials and how they are best actualized. Neither Aristotle nor the Writings see ethics as a purely subjective endeavor in which any and all viewpoints are equally valid. We must not, of course, see this as a call to intolerance but rather learn to distinguish tolerance and approval. Tolerating a belief or practice does not mean that one approves of, or agrees with it; instead, one is simply prepared to allow another person to choose to make an error because of a fundamental respect for personal freedom.

It bears adding that neither Aristotle nor the Bahá'í Writings espouse a naturalistic ethic, that is, an ethic that views surrounding nature and ‘the natural’ as the ideal for which humans must strive. To the contrary, our chief ethical task is to actualize our specifically human potentials and not to immerse ourselves in the nature we share with animals and plants. To paraphrase the heroine of *The African Queen*, we are here to rise above nature not to sink ourselves in it. However, we must not think of Aristotle and the Writings as anti-nature; they are not. Rather, their ethics focus on our specifically human nature, which, like a tree has its roots in the soil but rises far above it.

The two systems are also distinguished by their emphasis on a rational moderation in all things. “In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil”⁴⁰⁶ Bahá'u'lláh tells us, and Aristotle, of course, is well known for his doctrine of virtue as the golden mean between extremes.⁴⁰⁷ Another aspect of moderation is balance which is lauded by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.⁴⁰⁸ As well, the two systems agree in their emphasis on rational choice (NE, III, 1112a), that is, choice that is truly free because it is informed, voluntary, and follows principles of reasoning. This belief underlies the Bahá'í Writings’ stress on the independent search for truth for no one can be truly informed, free or rational simply by imitating ancestors. They also agree that “all who are not maimed as regards their potency for virtue may win it by a certain kind of study and care.”⁴⁰⁹ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá exhorts us to “train their children with life and heart and teach them in the school of virtue and perfection.”⁴¹⁰

7.4) Acquisition of Virtue and Free Will

It goes almost without saying and needs no more than mere notation that on the basis of their beliefs about the actualization of potentials, Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings agree on the important issue of freedom of will.⁴¹¹ Both believe in freedom of will since, without such freedom, no rational ethical system is possible: after all, we cannot be held personally responsible for acts we are compelled to do or which we do in ignorance.

Contrary to appearances, there is no contradiction between the “acquisition of virtues”⁴¹² by learning and habituation and the principle of free choice, since both Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings expect us to understand and utilize the rational logic on which the virtues are based. They are not simply arbitrary impositions and limitations of human freedom but serve a rational purpose which, in both cases, is to facilitate personal happiness and the good in community life from which the individual inevitably benefits. Both the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle

recognize that humankind is social in nature and that we cannot live happily, that is, actualizing our various potentials in accordance with our highest capacities, as solitary creatures. As Aristotle says, “man is born for citizenship”⁴¹³ in some state or community. We not only need each other to survive but also to thrive, an indisputable fact that forms the rational touchstone by which to test all ethical principles.

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “Through association and meeting we find happiness and development, individual and collective.”⁴¹⁴ If, therefore, someone asks why justice is an important individual (and social) virtue, the rational answer is that injustice promotes divisions and conflicts that undermine both individual actualization as well as the cohesiveness needed to make society work for the good of all persons. Furthermore, in this light, for individuals to insist on their right to act as they please regardless of personal and/or social consequences (“It’s *my* life.”) is simply irrational.

In addition to our universal human potentials, we also possess our “haecceitas” or specific individual essence, and that too has its own potentials needing actualization. These, however, are secondary or lesser insofar as they are logically dependent on the existence of a universal human essence of which they are variations. This hierarchy of essences leads to a hierarchy of freedoms in Aristotle and the Bahá’í Writings. If we find ourselves in a conflict between actualizing our personal preferences or the universal human essence, we are obligated to choose the latter as the greater good. Our duty to be a good instantiation of the human essence—in Bahá’í terms, for example, to actualize our spiritual selves over our animal nature—takes precedence over our desire to please ourselves, a concept I call ‘objective freedom’ to distinguish it from the ‘subjective freedom’ of merely pleasing oneself. It is important to note that the latter is not denied but is simply not made absolutely and finally decisive on issues related to freedom. The same principle will make itself felt in the relationships between the individual and the community as a whole.

7.5) Evil

The Bahá’í Writings and Aristotle also “deny the existence of any evil principle in the world”⁴¹⁵ or as Aristotle says,

*Clearly, then, the bad does not exist apart from bad things; for the bad is in its nature posterior to potency. And therefore we may also say that in the things which are from the beginning i.e. in eternal things, there is nothing bad, nothing defective, nothing perverted (for perversion is something bad).*⁴¹⁶

In short, the Divine does not create an imperfect product. Moreover, when Aristotle says that “the bad is in its nature posterior to potency,”⁴¹⁷ he means that evil does not even have potential existence because it is something that can logically only come after potentials have been created in the first place and have begun their actualization process. Like a shadow, it is not a potency but a mere accidental “by-product of the world-process,”⁴¹⁸ a failure and not a positive reality.

In other words, both Aristotle and the Writings agree that in itself, creation is perfect. For His part, Bahá’u’lláh tells us that “So perfect and comprehensive is His creation that no mind nor heart, however keen or pure, can ever grasp the nature of the most insignificant of His creatures”⁴¹⁹ and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá approvingly quotes a philosopher who says “There is no greater or more perfect system of creation than that which already exists.”⁴²⁰ “In creation there is no evil; all is good”⁴²¹ says Abdu’l-Bahá, and compares evil to a shadow or darkness which has no reality or substance in itself but exists only as the lack or privation of some good:

All that God created He created good. This evil is nothingness; so death is the absence of life. When man no longer receives life, he dies. Darkness is the absence of light: when there is no light, there is darkness."⁴²²

However, if creation is, in itself, perfect, what is evil and how does it originate? Put into Aristotelian terms, evil is the failure to properly develop the appropriate potential perfections that are latent in all created things. It is, to continue 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analogy, the shadow of a good that should have been actualized but is not. In other words, evil is a "by-product"⁴²³ insofar as it happens when, for whatever reason, created things fail to actualize their potentials properly. It is a misdevelopment whose occurrence depends on the universal potency for good but either stops short and/or twists (perverts) that good away from its intended, natural end. Obviously, evil cannot apply to the Divine since It is not subject to the process of actualization.

This view of evil as a diversion from a sought for good makes itself felt throughout the Bahá'í Writings. For example, it provides a rational explanation for the Báb's prayer that "All are His servants and all abide by His bidding": in Aristotelian terms, all created things do seek the good, that is, "abide by [God's] bidding" in seeking to actualize their potentials, though, of course, all do not do so in the way intended. This is especially true of humans who are capable of 'sin,' that is, consciously and knowingly seeking their own, lesser good over the greater good demanded by God. Relative to God's greater good, the lesser good is 'evil' which means that even wrong-doers, while subjectively intending the good as such, pursue the lesser good by deficient means. This view of evil is also the rational basis of the "world-embracing"⁴²⁴ vision for which Bahá'ís strive since the wide diversity of actions and beliefs are often no more than different means of gaining universal goals. This Aristotelian perspective on evil obviously also provides a foundation for belief in the eventual unification of humankind in a commonwealth which will reconcile universal agreement on ends with a wide diversity of means.

The concept of evil as a failure of actualization leads, naturally, to the concept of a universal natural morality and a universal natural law, two concepts integral to the establishment of a truly unified global commonwealth. Any ethical system that allows us to actualize our specific potentials as human beings is thereby 'natural' and 'moral.' Moreover, because human nature or human essence is universal, it is possible to devise a single moral code of goals applicable to all human beings in all times and places. Since this code is based on our universal human essence bestowed on us by God, it can also become the basis of a system of global natural laws and rights. Whatever interferes with this actualization is not only morally evil but should also be illegal for being contrary to the natural law of our being.

7.6) Agreement on Particular Virtues

Given such far-reaching foundational similarities in their ethical systems, it is not surprising that Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings agree on the importance of a wide variety of particular virtues. For example, Aristotle and the Writings place an enormous premium on justice as one of the essential virtues. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that "O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice."⁴²⁵ Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically writes about "industrial justice"⁴²⁶ emphasized by Aristotle as 'distributive justice'⁴²⁷ which distributes goods and other rewards according to merit so that proper proportion will not be lost and some will have excess while others have not enough. As Aristotle says, "injustice is excess and defect."⁴²⁸ The concept of distributive justice remarkably resembles Bahá'u'lláh's Teaching that there should be no extremes of wealth and poverty, that is, wealth and poverty should be properly proportionate.⁴²⁹

Aristotle also believes that “rectificatory”⁴³⁰ justice “restores equality”⁴³¹ which reflects the close association in the Bahá’í Writings between justice and equality.⁴³² Both also agree on the importance of temperance and moderation⁴³³; liberality or generosity⁴³⁴; honor and nobility⁴³⁵ and proper leisure, that is, leisure appropriate to our specifically human nature.⁴³⁶ The range of specific agreements between the two is enormously wide as shown by the following samples: the importance of music in character education⁴³⁷; the importance of suppressing swearing and foul language⁴³⁸; rational liberty⁴³⁹ or “true liberty”⁴⁴⁰; majority rule limited by considerations of fairness⁴⁴¹; equality of all citizens⁴⁴² and the primacy of good character.⁴⁴³ As Aristotle says, “a good man may make the best even of poverty and disease and the other ills of life.”⁴⁴⁴ In other words, poverty or adverse circumstances are no excuse for unworthy behaviors, an idea expressed by Bahá’u’lláh when He says,

*Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts.*⁴⁴⁵

However, the similarities between the two ethical systems go still further than this. For starters, both put an enormously high value on friendship and especially on friendship with virtuous people.⁴⁴⁶ Indeed, in language reminiscent of Baha’u’llah,⁴⁴⁷ Aristotle asserts that friends should ideally be “a single soul”⁴⁴⁸ and devotes all of books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to this subject. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out that friendship can even reform the world: “Thus may we live in the utmost friendship and love, and in return the favors and bounties of God shall surround us; the world of humanity will be reformed; mankind, enjoy a new life; eternal light will illumine, and heavenly moralities become manifest.”⁴⁴⁹ This quotation is especially significant because it clearly and unequivocally links individual friendship to its social consequences beyond the person. Personal and social ethics are clearly connected and cannot be regarded separately, something to which Aristotle would agree. The importance of friendship among Bahá’ís is also emphasized by the practice of referring to each other as ‘friends.’

8) Statecraft

It is a short step from the notion that individual virtue and social life are intimately connected to the adoption of a positive, non-minimalist theory of community and state neither of which are mere aggregates of individuals seeking their best interests. Nor are they mere neutral environments for personal action. Both community and state exist specifically “for the sake of a good life”⁴⁵⁰ and, therefore, have a positive role to play in fostering this good life for all members. This is possible because while individual preferences may differ, the fact remains that we all share in an essential and universal human nature, for example, as rational beings whose souls have a divine and immortal part. In other words, there are some goods that are universally good, even though some individuals may choose to reject or neglect them just as some reject and neglect a healthy life style of good diet and exercise. One might also make this point by saying that the state or community does not exist merely as a referee to monitor individual actions, nor as a mere facilitator of individual choices. Rather, it exists as an active promoter of a particular vision of the good life, defined in this case as the appropriate actualization of our specifically human attributes. This should not, of course, be interpreted as any-

thing other than that Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings advocate a moderate position between the two extremes of the cradle-to-grave 'nanny-state'—let alone any form of totalitarianism—and a laissez-allez community that is no more, and often less, than a referee.

The existence of a universal human nature enables Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings to envision a universally valid and global morality and hierarchy of values with contemplation forming the apex for Aristotle and knowing and loving God the apex for Bahá'ís. This does not mean that individuals should not please themselves⁴⁵¹ but they should do so within rational bounds which take the communal good into consideration. In Aristotle, this follows from the fact that the happiness of the individual and the community or state “are the same,”⁴⁵² a notion that is implicit, for example, in the Bahá'í emphasis on the maintenance of unity even amidst disagreement as the best way of serving both the individual and the community.

8.1) The Active State

Since the community and state exists for the sake of the good life, it follows logically that they must take positive action to promote it. In the Bahá'í Writings this is evident from the list of duties assigned to individual Bahá'ís to foster this goal as well as in the duties prescribed to Local and National Spiritual Assemblies both now and in the future. For Aristotle, the highest good of the state or community as well as for individuals is “the life of virtue”⁴⁵³ which requires “external goods enough for the performance of good actions.”⁴⁵⁴ He devotes the entirety of Book V of *Politics* to the subject of revolution and their causes in the state's failure to live up to its *raison d'être* and spends Book VI discussing the various ministries needed for the state to promote the good life.

8.2) The Organic State

Another significant issue on which the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle agree is the organic nature of human community or state. Aristotle tells us that “the state, as composed of unlikes may be compared to the living being,”⁴⁵⁵ that is, a unity composed of differences, or, as Bahá'ís say, “unity in diversity.” Moreover, not only do the Writings specifically refer to the “organic unity of the whole commonwealth,”⁴⁵⁶ they also continuously stress this idea by continuously using tree imagery in regards to humankind and the human community. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, “Be as one spirit, one soul, leaves of one tree, flowers of one garden, waves of one ocean.”⁴⁵⁷ He also says,

*The Blessed Beauty saith: ‘Ye are all the fruits of one tree, the leaves of one branch.’ Thus hath He likened this world of being to a single tree, and all its peoples to the leaves thereof, and the blossoms and fruits. It is needful for the bough to blossom, and leaf and fruit to flourish, and upon the interconnection of all parts of the world-tree, dependeth the flourishing of leaf and blossom, and the sweetness of the fruit.*⁴⁵⁸

There are two important and far-reaching consequences of this view. First, the organic view of community suggests a strong commitment to proper order and hierarchy not only politically but cosmologically. At the cosmic level this is evident in the fact that for Aristotle, God orders the world by being the “object of desire,”⁴⁵⁹ a fact that flatly denies Keven Brown's claim that Aristotle saw the universe as “self-ordering.”⁴⁶⁰ Indeed, the importance of order both in cosmic stasis and change and in politics need hardly be emphasized in the case of Aristotle, who wrote extensively on the causes and cures for revolution and anarchy (*Politics*, V) and who advises that “in well-attempted governments there is nothing that should be more jealously guarded than the spirit of obedience to law.”⁴⁶¹ The existence of hierarchy and the maintenance of order is also strongly advocated in the Bahá'í Writings:

Your nails and eyes are both parts of your bodies. Do ye regard them of equal rank and value? If ye say, yea; say, then: ye have indeed charged with imposture, the Lord, my God, the All-Glorious, inasmuch as ye pare the one, and cherish the other as dearly as your own life.

*To transgress the limits of one's own rank and station is, in no wise, permissible. The integrity of every rank and station must needs be preserved.*⁴⁶²

8.3) Rational Freedom and Rights

Second, we can see that because of this commitment to hierarchy and order, both Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings, while not denying that freedom has its rightful place, are also aware that it has limits. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, the will of the majority must prevail in consultation⁴⁶³ and the minority must accept the majority without engaging in sedition lest the whole community suffer. For his part, Aristotle informs us that "Every man should be responsible to others, not should anyone be allowed to do just as he pleases; for where absolute freedom is allowed there is nothing to restrain the evil which is inherent in every man."⁴⁶⁴ Bahá'u'lláh reminds us that we must seek "true liberty"⁴⁶⁵ which must not be confused with the seditious liberty of animals.⁴⁶⁶ The freedom of individuals must be balanced with the demonstrable good of the whole community; neither individual nor communal 'rights' are ever simply a theoretical question to be regarded without paying heed to the consequences. They must not merely be exercised but exercised rationally, that is, in light of our irrevocable membership in an inter-dependent community striving to attain the good life for all.

Because the Bahá'í Writings and Aristotle believe that the good of the individual and the community or state are one, they do not recognize the notion that there is an inherent conflict between the two. Neither Aristotle nor the Bahá'í Writings share the Rousseau-ist fantasy of a 'pure' and 'natural' humankind living its proper life in the condition of nature, nor do they recognize the so-called 'noble savage' living a better life because it is supposedly more natural. Indeed, Aristotle specifically points out, "the state is a creation of nature"⁴⁶⁷ and is not an artificial imposition upon humankind which somehow distorts our character. Of course, this is not to say that the individual lives for the community. Rather, the two share the same interests and are there for each other like the two legs of a compass. From this, it follows that Aristotle and the Writings do not feel any need for a 'civil rights' culture, a culture in which individuals must constantly struggle to maintain their personal rights against the encroachments of society. In the Bahá'í and Aristotelian viewpoints, the question is not if society has the right to encroach but whether or not this supposed encroachment is for the rational, common good. If it is, then it is justifiable⁴⁶⁸ because the common good includes the good—although not necessarily the preferences—of the individual.

9) A Difference Regarding God

Another vital difference between Aristotle and the Writings is that Aristotle does not recognize the active role of God, the Manifestations and the after-life in his ethical system. However, from a Bahá'í point of view, this makes his system incomplete rather than mistaken. The Divine simply does not play an active role in humanity's ethical life other than as a goal to emulate. There are, of course, differences of detail as well, such as Aristotle's historically conditioned emphasis on military courage⁴⁶⁹ which is not much mentioned in the Bahá'í Writings. This is not to say that the Bahá'í Writings do not value courage, for indeed, they do but the courage extolled is generally the courage of self-sacrifice⁴⁷⁰ and what Germans call "civil courage," that is, the courage to do and/or say necessary but very difficult things in daily life.

10) Why the Aristotelian Foundation?

The preceding survey has, I believe, demonstrated that the Bahá'í Writings and the works of Aristotle share a large number of significant similarities and shown that more could easily be explicated in a study of greater length. At this point, it is important to re-iterate something mentioned at the beginning of this paper, namely, that I do not claim that Aristotle influenced Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Indeed, for religious reasons, I would deny such influence in the case of the Manifestation since a Manifestation needs schooling from no one. From a Bahá'í point of view, the most one can claim is that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirmed and used *some*—by no means all—Aristotelian ideas undoubtedly present in Muslim philosophical culture to express their teachings. However, I believe this choice is not a matter of mere happenstance; indeed, from a philosophical point of view, I believe there are at least two reasons why Aristotle are a logically sensible choice for the philosophical substratum of the Bahá'í Writings.

In the first place, the Aristotelian substratum allows Bahá'í philosophy to ground itself on common experience that is universal to humankind regardless of culture, time or place in history.

Aristotle builds his philosophy on ordinary experiences available to all human beings. No matter where or when we live, and no matter how we choose to explain or interpret it, fire is hotter than we are, triangles have three sides, plants grow, die and decay, no one is both physically alive and dead at the same time, two physical objects cannot occupy the same place at the same time and everything has shape. Aristotle's philosophy is founded on these simple, indisputable, universal facts. We may even choose to try and explain these facts away, but in order to do even this much, we must first recognize them. The bottom line is that they are simply inescapable and are universally recognized in daily behavior and practice even if, as occasionally happens, ignored or disputed in theory. In my view, this universality is vital because it under-writes Bahá'u'lláh's injunction to investigate the truth for ourselves.⁴⁷¹ Since this is a spiritual and intellectual requirement for all Baha'is, it suggests that the truths of the Bahá'í Writings must be accessible to all sincerely thoughtful people even though they lack especially constructed laboratory experiences and special scholarly knowledge. Aristotle's method of analyzing and reasoning about reality provides precisely that common experience and common sense way of doing this, thereby making the Writings and their reasoning understandable to all. This is not, of course, to deny or denigrate the value of specialized scholarship; however, it seems obvious that in a religion where faith cannot be conditioned by anyone but ourselves⁴⁷² that the basic truths about reality and religion must be accessible to common human experience, common sense and basic logical reasoning. Otherwise, discovery and knowledge of the truth would be limited to and depend upon scholars and, thereby, diminish individuals' responsibility for themselves and possibly even open the door to the development of a 'clergy.' This consonance with universal human experience make the portions of Aristotle's philosophy confirmed by the Bahá'í Writings a reasonable basis on which to build a Bahá'í philosophy just as they have already laid the foundation for significant portions of Jewish, Christian and Muslim thought. In other words, the Aristotelian substratum allows our understanding of the Writings to make contact with a wide variety of other traditions both ancient and modern.

The second advantage of an Aristotelian substratum is its incredible flexibility. As already indicated, early philosophers found a way to graft Plato's Ideas onto an Aristotelian stock and, thereby, to develop the neo-Platonism important elements of which are confirmed in the Writings.⁴⁷³ Just as significant is the fact that the Aristotelian aspects authenticated by the Writings may be re-cast in an existentialist form and in terms of modern process philosophy as most prominently exemplified by the work of Alfred North Whitehead. This means that the

Aristotelian substratum does not trap the Writings in a so-called static metaphysic of substance and, thereby, violate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertions that "all things are in motion"⁴⁷⁴ and that "[t]his state of motion is said to be essential—that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement."⁴⁷⁵

One of the two key areas of study in this regard is Aristotle's concept of 'substance' which must not be misunderstood—as happens, for example, in Locke—as a mysterious, vacuous, material without any qualities of its own to which other attributes are attached like stick-pins. Such at least is not Aristotle's understanding. For Aristotle, a 'substance' is any individual thing that can exist apart from other things; it has some degree of independence and God, the ultimate substance, alone has absolute independence. In more formal language, a substance is anything that is not a predicate of anything else.⁴⁷⁶ Nowhere here does Aristotle say that 'substance' must be a static physically material thing; the closest he comes to doing so is when he describes it as "the ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else." This, however, could just as well refer to a process. As William Christian points out, Aristotle is not necessarily talking about matter at all but is simply trying to describe the experiential fact that 'things' have identifiable and "real individuality, self-existence and permanence which have been elements in traditional interpretations of substance, [and] find expression in Whitehead's philosophy."⁴⁷⁷ (As Christian notes, Whitehead is not nearly as blind to the stabilities in nature as has often been claimed; Whitehead revises the concept of 'substance' rather than rejecting it completely.) The long and the short of this issue is that Aristotle's 'substance' can be re-interpreted as referring to a process exhibiting "real individuality, self-existence and [by way of repetition] permanence"⁴⁷⁸ which are the essential attributes of things that the concept of 'substance' is supposed to convey. A particular process—say a coal fire—has this "real individuality"⁴⁷⁹ insofar as it has its own qualities or attributes that distinguish it chemically from a gasoline or electrical fire. It has "self-existence"⁴⁸⁰ because it has some independence from its surroundings: it is unaffected by who or how many are watching it and the kind of furniture in its presence. Finally, it exhibits "permanence,"⁴⁸¹ that is, the processes that make up this fire repeat themselves until this particular fire burns itself out. Thus, as Christian points out, a process can have all the necessary attributes conveyed by the idea of 'substance.' While the concept of 'substance' raises interesting metaphysical and theological questions for Bahá'ís, the use of this concept does not lock the Writings into a static metaphysic.

We may approach this issue from yet another angle by examining the concept of 'potentials.' Like Veatch, we might choose to define 'potentials' as latent energies for changes.⁴⁸²

This leads to a line of reasoning that brings the Bahá'í Writings still closer to process philosophy. Since one of Aristotle's definitions of 'substance' is "the essence, the formula . . . of each thing"⁴⁸³ and the essence of things is also identified with their potentials, we can discern the following relationship: substance = essence; essence = potentials; potentials = latent energies and therefore, substance = latent energies. (If $a = b$ and $b = c$, then $a = c$.) Here, too, we can see a process view of 'substance' growing directly out of Aristotle. Our understanding of the Writings will, undoubtedly, change in light of process philosophy but such a change may simply be a part of our intellectual and spiritual evolution.

As Whitehead himself already pointed out, process philosophy brings philosophy closer to the new quantum theories of sub-atomic reality. In other words, a process interpretation of the Writings will facilitate a new re-approachment between science and religion, a development that the Bahá'í Writings find highly desirable.

11) Practical Applications

After a study such as this it is only natural to ask if there are any practical applications of this material. There are two positive answers to this. In the first place, there is a general answer which applies to the study of philosophy in general. The study of philosophy affects the way in which we see the world and our self-image, and, as psychology has shown, our world-view and self-image have an immediate and direct impact on the way we live and on the things and people that surround us. Contrary to first impressions, philosophy is 'everybody's business.'

Second, the Aristotelian substratum of the Writings has an enormous practical value because on its basis we can develop a rational, common-sense apologetics by which to expound and explicate the Bahá'í Faith as well as defend it against its detractors. Its common experience foundations will make it easier to reach a wider variety of individuals and audiences in an age of competing religious claims and the current aggressive postures of various fundamentalisms whose only long term effect can be to keep humankind religiously fragmented. In other words, an apologetics based on a common experience, common sense philosophy crowned with the higher knowledge of revelation will allow not only Bahá'í philosophers but more importantly, Bahá'í teachers to make significant strides in the progress of unifying this planet for Bahá'u'lláh.

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Notes

As always my thanks to my wife, Kirsti for her unfailing support, to Rhett Diessner for his comments and suggestions and to Iraj Ayman for his encouragement.

- 1) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 146; *Bahá'í World Faith* 337; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 348.
- 2) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 327, 348.
- 3) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XI, 14.
- 4) *Treatise on the Creation*, Question 45, Articles 2 and 4.
- 5) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XI, 14. See also *Bahá'í World Faith* 310, 311; *Tablets of*

Bahá'u'lláh 201.

- 6) *Ibid.*
- 6) For an excellent discussion of this, see Theo Cope's *Re-Thinking, Re-Visioning, Re-Placing*.
- 7) *Bahá'í World Faith* 310.
- 8) *Physics* VII, 3, 249b.
- 9) *Some Answered Questions* 180; see also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 82.
- 10) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVI, 61.
- 11) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*, 57.
- 12) *Ibid.*
- 13) *Ibid.*
- 14) *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
- 15) *Metaphysics* VIII, 4, 1044b.
- 16) *Metaphysics* IX, 8, 1049b.
- 17) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*, 82.
- 18) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*, 83.
- 19) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVI, 61.
- 20) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*, 82-83.
- 21) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*, 83.
- 22) 'Abdu'l-Bahá *On Divine Philosophy*, quoted from Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God* 57.
- 23) *Physics* I, 5, 188b.
- 24) *Physics* III, 1, 201a.
- 25) See *Some Answered Questions* 203 on actualization or realization.
- 26) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief*, 52.
- 27) 'Abdu'l-Bahá *On Divine Philosophy*, quoted from Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God* 57.
- 28) *The Philosophy of Aristotle* 52.
- 30) *On Generation and Corruption* I, I, 314a.
- 31) *Ibid.*
- 32) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 88.
- 33) 'Abdu'l-Bahá *On Divine Philosophy* quoted from Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God* 57.
- 34) *Some Answered Questions* 180.
- 35) *Ibid.* See also *Bahá'í World Faith* 264.
- 36) See 'Abdu'l-Bahá *Some Answered Questions* 233. See also Eberhard von Kitzing in *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief* 206-7, 234.
- 37) 'Abdu'l-Bahá *On Divine Philosophy* quoted from Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God* 57.
- 38) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 246, italics added.
- 39) *Some Answered Questions* 203.
- 40) *On Generation and Corruption* I, I, 314a.
- 41) *Ibid.*
- 42) *Some Answered Questions* 63. See also 233.
- 43) *Physics* III, 1, 200b. See also *Physics* VIII, 6, 260a.
- 44) *Physics* VIII, 4, 254b.
- 45) *Physics* VIII, 6, 258b.
- 46) *Ibid.*
- 47) *Physics* VIII, 6, 259a.
- 48) *Ibid.*
- 49) *Bahá'í Prayers* 24.
- 50) *Ibid.*
- 51) *Ibid.*
- 52) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XCIII, 184.
- 53) *Ibid.* LXXXII, 162.
- 54) *Tablet to Dr. Forel* in *Bahá'í World Faith* 343.
- 55) *Some Answered Questions* 6.

- 56) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CLX, 337. See also *Some Answered Questions* 5.
- 57) *Prayers and Meditations*, 262. See also *Metaphysics* XIII, 7, 1072b.
- 58) *Physics* VII, 1, 242a. See also *Some Answered Questions* 148, 280.
- 59) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* X, 6.
- 60) *Physics* VIII, 5, 256a. See also *Physics* VIII, 10, 267b; *Metaphysics* XII, 8, 1073a; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 172.
- 61) *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
- 62) *Metaphysics* XII, 8, 1073a. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 172.
- 63) *Physics* VIII, 6, 258b.
- 64) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XIX.
- 65) *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072b. See also *Bahá'í World Faith* 410; *Some Answered Questions* 76; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 370.
- 66) *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072b.
- 67) *Some Answered Questions* 146-7.
- 68) *Ibid.*
- 69) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 422. See also *Some Answered Questions* 221.
- 70) *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072b.
- 71) *Physic* I, 1, 184a.
- 72) *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a,b. See also *Metaphysics* XII, 9, 1075a.
- 73) *Foundations of World Unity* 73.
- 74) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 14. See also *Some Answered Questions* 195-6, 236.
- 75) *Ibid.*
- 76) *Some Answered Questions* 280.
- 77) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXXII, 162.
- 78) *Physics* II, 7, 198 a, b.
- 79) *Metaphysics* V, 1, 1013 a, b.
- 80) *Some Answered Questions* 280.
- 81) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXXII, 162.
- 82) *Prayers and Meditations*, CLXIX, 262.
- 83) *Ibid.*
- 84) *On the Soul* III, 11, 434a.
- 85) *On the Heavens* I, 4, 271a.
- 86) *On the Soul* III, 11, 432b.
- 87) *Metaphysics* VII, 9, 1034a.
- 88) Edel, *Aristotle and His Philosophy* 68.
- 89) *Bahá'í World Faith* 341.
- 90) *Some Answered Questions* 182.
- 91) *Bahá'í World Faith* 341.
- 92) *Ibid.*
- 93) Edel, *Aristotle and His Philosophy* 68.
- 94) *Ibid.*
- 95) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 326.
- 96) *Some Answered Questions* 199.
- 97) Copelston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, Part II, 68. See also *Some Answered Questions* 184, 192 and *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief* 84-5.
- 98) *Some Answered Questions* 182-3. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 358-9.
- 99) *Aristotle: A Modern Appreciation* 48, italics added.
- 100) *Metaphysics* VI, 1, 1026a.
- 101) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 29.
- 102) *On the Soul* II, 3, 414a.
- 103) *On the Soul* II, 3, 414b.
- 104) *On the Soul* II, 3, 414b. See also *On the Soul* II, 3, 415a.

- 105) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 21.
- 106) *Ibid.* 262.
- 107) *Ibid.* 254–257.
- 108) *Physics* I,1, 184a. See also *Posterior Analytics* I,1, 71b.
- 109) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 49.
- 110) See A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*.
- 111) *Some Answered Questions* 199.
- 112) Edel, *Aristotle and His Philosophy* 66.
- 113) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 14.
- 114) *Some Answered Questions* 199.
- 115) *Ibid.* 196.
- 116) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 29, 114.
- 117) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 158, 240. See also *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 46; *Some Answered Questions* 235; *On the Soul* II, 3, 414b.
- 118) “*Studies in Immortality*,” *Star of the West* XIV, 8, quoted in *The Eternal Quest for God* 152.
- 119) “*Survival and Salvation*,” *Star of the West*, VII, 190. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 259.
- 120) *On the Soul* III, 4, 429a.
- 121) *The Eternal Quest for God* 152, italics added.
- 122) *On the Soul* III, 2, 427a, 432a. See also *Metaphysics*, 2, 1046b.
- 123) *Ibid.* II, 4, 416a.
- 124) *Ibid.* II,1, 413a.
- 125) *Ibid.* II, 2, 413b.
- 126) *Ibid.* II, 2, 413b.
- 127) *NE* X, 7, 1177b.
- 128) *Some Answered Questions* 227-229.
- 128) *On the Soul* I, 4, 408b.
- 129) *Some Answered Questions* 208.
- 130) *On the Soul* II, 1, 412b. See also *On the Soul* III, 7, 431b.
- 131) *Ibid.*
- 132) *Ibid.*
- 133) *On the Soul* II, 2, 414a.
- 134) *Some Answered Questions* 239.
- 135) *Ibid.*
- 136) *Ibid.* 151.
- 137) *Ibid.*
- 138) *Ibid.* 208. See also *Bahá'í World Faith* 317.
- 139) *EE*, VI, 96b quoted in *The Development of Aristotle* 168.
- 140) *NE* X, 7, 1177a, b. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 49.
- 141) *Ibid.*
- 142) *NE* X, 8, 1178b.
- 143) *NE* X, 7, 1177b.
- 144) *NE* X, 8, 1179a.
- 145) *On the Soul* III,1, 413a.
- 146) *On the Parts of Animals* II, 10, 656a. See also *EE* VIII, 14, 1248a; 1249b.
- 147) *Eudemus*, frag. 5, in *The Development of Aristotle* 166.
- 148) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 246.
- 149) *On the Soul* II, 1, 413a.
- 150) *On the Soul* II, 1, 412b.
- 151) *On the Soul* II, 2, 413b, italics added.
- 152) *On the Soul* III, 5, 430a.
- 153) *Aristotle* 148.
- 154) *Metaphysics* VII, 10, 1035b. See also *Metaphysics* VIII, 2, 1043a.

- 155) *On the Soul* IV, 4, 415b.
- 156) *Some Answered Questions* 240.
- 157) *Ibid.* 239, italics added.
- 158) *Metaphysics* VII, 11, 1037a.
- 159) *Some Answered Questions* 239.
- 160) *Ibid.*
- 160) *Ibid.*
- 161) *Ibid.*
- 162) *On the Soul* II, 1, 412a.
- 163) *Ibid.* II, 4, 415b.
- 164) *Ibid.* See also *Metaphysics* V, 8, 1017b.
- 165) *On the Soul* I, 4, 408b.
- 166) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 416.
- 168) *The Development of Aristotle* 67.
- 169) *On the Soul* II, 1, 412a.
- 170) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 416.
- 171) *Foundations of World Unity* 110.
- 172) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 58-9, 257. See also *Foundations of World Unity* 58 and *Paris Talks* 158.
- 173) *Some Answered Questions* 181.
- 174) *Some Answered Questions* 199.
- 175) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 17. See also *Some Answered Questions* 187.
- 176) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 173.
- 177) *Ibid.* 58.
- 178) *Ibid.* 32.
- 179) *Ibid.* 58.
- 180) *Some Answered Questions* 199.
- 181) *Ibid.*
- 182) *Some Answered Questions* 210. See also *The Eternal Quest for God* 155.
- 183) *On Memory and Reminiscence* I.
- 184) Allan, *The Philosophy of Aristotle* 55. See also *Aristotle and His Philosophy* 160 and *Aristotle* 138-140.
- 185) *Some Answered Questions* 239.
- 186) *On the Soul* I, 3, 407b.
- 187) *Ibid.* See also *On the Soul* II, 1, 413a.
- 188) *Some Answered Questions* 239.
- 189) *On the Soul* II, 12, 424a.
- 190) *Some Answered Questions* 157.
- 191) *On the Soul* III, 4, 429a.
- 192) *Ibid.* III, 8, 432a.
- 193) *Aristotle* 131.
- 194) *Some Answered Questions* 83.
- 195) *Ibid.* 84.
- 196) *Ibid.*
- 197) *Ibid.*
- 198) *Ibid.* 83.
- 199) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 307, italics added.
- 200) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXX, 136.
- 201) *Ibid.* XCV, 194.
- 202) *Ibid.*, italics added.
- 203) *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 15, italics added.
- 204) *Ibid.*
- 205) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 79.

- 206) *Ibid.* 49-50.
- 207) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 61-2, italics added.
- 208) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 79, italics added.
- 209) *Some Answered Questions* 217-8.
- 210) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 294, italics added.
- 211) *Universals*.
- 212) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XI, 14.
- 213) *Ibid.*
- 214) *Aristotle* 131.
- 215) *Ibid.* See also 159.
- 216) *Aristotle* 166.
- 217) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief* 55.
- 218) *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh* 67.
- 219) *Ibid.*
- 220) *Ibid.*
- 221) *Bahá'í World Faith* 395.
- 222) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 296.
- 223) *Ibid.*
- 224) *Ibid.* 297.
- 225) *Ibid.* 40.
- 226) *Ibid.* 121.
- 227) *Some Answered Questions* 217-8, italics added.
- 228) *Ibid.*
- 229) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 41.
- 230) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVII, 66.
- 231) *Ibid.* XXVII, 67.
- 232) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 14.
- 233) *Ibid.* 272.
- 234) *Ibid.* 233.
- 235) *Ibid.*
- 236) *Ibid.* 378. See also 219.
- 237) *Ibid.* 422.
- 238) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XIII, 22, italics added.
- 239) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXII, 54.
- 240) *Some Answered Questions* 9, italics added.
- 241) *Ibid.*
- 242) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* VIII, 11.
- 243) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 421.
- 244) *Ibid.* 114.
- 245) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XCV, 194.
- 246) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 465, italics added.
- 247) *Some Answered Questions* 9. See also 3.
- 248) *Ibid.* 138. See also *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 32.
- 249) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 29. See also *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCI.
- 250) *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, 58. See also 115.
- 251) *Some Answered Questions* 9. See also 134.
- 252) *Metaphysics* VIII, 1, 1042a.
- 253) *Ibid.*
- 254) *Metaphysics* IV, I, 1003. See also *Metaphysics* IV, I, 4, 1007a,b.
- 255) *Aristotle and His Philosophy*, 128.
- 256) *Aristotle and His Philosophy*, 129.

- 257) *Metaphysics*, VIII, 2, 1043a.
- 258) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* XXVII, 66, italics added.
- 259) *Ibid.*
- 260) *Ibid.*
- 261) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 172.
- 262) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* XXVII, 66-7.
- 263) *Ibid.*
- 264) *Ibid.*
- 265) *Ibid.*
- 266) *Some Answered Questions* 9. See also 239.
- 267) *Ibid.*
- 268) *Ibid.*
- 269) *Ibid.* 240.
- 270) *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 25, italics added.
- 271) *Ibid.* 27, italics added.
- 272) *Prayers and Meditations*, 90.
- 273) *Ibid.*
- 274) *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 129.
- 275) *Ibid.*
- 276) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 29.
- 277) *Ibid.* 268.
- 278) *Ibid.*
- 279) *Metaphysics* VIII, 2, 1043a. See also *Metaphysics* VIII, 2, 1045a.
- 280) *Metaphysics* VIII, 6, 1045a.
- 281) *Some Answered Questions* 89, italics added.
- 282) *Ibid.* 145.
- 283) *Ibid.*
- 284) *Metaphysics* VII, 8, 1033b.
- 285) *Some Answered Questions* 9. See also 98.
- 286) *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 140.
- 287) *Ibid.*
- 288) *Metaphysics* VII, 8, 1033b.
- 290) Aristotle 169 -171. See also *Aristotle and His Philosophy* 111-133; *Metaphysics* V, 8, 1017b; *Metaphysics* VII, 4, 1030a; *Metaphysics* VII, 6, 1031b; *Metaphysics* VII, 6, 1032a; *Metaphysics* VII, 7, 1032b.
- 291) *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 29, italics added. See also *Some Answered Questions* 195.
- 292) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* XC, 177.
- 293) *Ibid.*
- 294) *Ibid.*
- 295) *Ibid.* XCIII, 187. See also *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 326.
- 296) *Ibid.* LXXXII, 160.
- 297) *Ibid.* LXXXIII, 164. See also *Bahá’í World Faith* 359.
- 298) *Ibid.* LXXXIV, 167.
- 299) *Ibid.* LXXXIII, 167.
- 300) *Ibid.* CXXXIX, 302.
- 301) *Ibid.* CLI, 321.
- 302) *Ibid.* CXXXVIII, 300. See also *Some Answered Questions* 184.
- 303) *Ibid.* CLIII, 328.
- 304) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 354.
- 305) *Ibid.* 431.
- 306) *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 167.
- 307) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* XXVII, 65.
- 308) *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, XXVI, 63. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 39.

- 309) *Ibid.* XXVI, 64. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 39.
- 310) *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, 55. See also *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 58; *Foundations of World Unity* 109.
- 311) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 157.
- 312) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XV 36. See also *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 20.
- 313) *Ibid.* XXVII, 65-6, numbering added.
- 314) *Ibid.*
- 315) *Ibid.*
- 316) *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 11.
- 317) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XC, 178.
- 318) *Ibid.*
- 319) *Ibid.*
- 320) *Ibid.*
- 321) *Metaphysics* VII, 10, 1035b,1036a.
- 322) *Metaphysics* VII, 10, 1036a.
- 323) *Ibid.*
- 324) *Ibid.*
- 325) *Ibid.*
- 326) *Some Answered Questions* 83.
- 327) *Metaphysics* VII, 14, 1039b. See also *Metaphysics*, VII, 15,1040a.
- 328) *Ibid.*
- 329) *Metaphysics* IV, 4, 1007a.
- 330) *Metaphysics* V,12, 1019a,b.
- 331) *Ibid.* See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 19. See also 438.
- 332) *Metaphysics* V, 10, 1019b.
- 333) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVI, 61.
- 334) *Ibid.*
- 335) *Some Answered Questions* 281.
- 336) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XCVII, 197.
- 337) *Ibid.*
- 338) *Ibid.*
- 339) *Ibid.*
- 340) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 85. See also 106, 217.
- 341) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 19. See also 438.
- 342) *Ibid.* 51, italics added.
- 343) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 5.
- 344) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVII, 67. See also *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 177; *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 72; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 17; *Foundations of World Unity* 49; *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 4; *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 27.
- 345) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XIV, 27-35. See also *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXIX; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 17; *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 3; *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, 147; *Some Answered Questions* 217-8, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 4,188; *Foundations of World Unity* 10.
- 346) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 279. See also 284, 286 and *Some Answered Questions* 6; *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 183,187; *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CXII, 223; *Bahá'í World Faith* 31, 241.
- 347) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 246, italics added.
- 348) *Ibid.*
- 349) *Some Answered Questions* 281. See also *Some Answered Questions* 180, 204, 225 and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 88, 89. Thus Bahá'u'lláh's statements about nothingness must be read as 'nothingness relative to God' and not absolute nothingness. See *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVI, 61; XXIX, 71; CXXV, 266.

- 350) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 421.
351) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 421-2.
352) *Ibid.*
353) *Some Answered Questions* 108.
354) *Ibid.* 157, 229
355) *Ibid.* 196.
356) ABS Conference, Seattle, Washington; September, 2001; available at www.geocities.com/SoHo/Den/4944/
357) *Some Answered Questions* 195.
358) *Ibid.*
359) *Ibid.*
360) *Ibid.* 196, italics added.
361) *Ibid.* 195.
362) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXXV, 84.
363) *Some Answered Questions* 9, emphasis added.
364) *Some Answered Questions* 297, italics added.
365) *NE* VI, 2, 1139b. See also *NE* VI, 7, 1141b.
366) *On the Soul* II, 3, 415a.
367) *NE* VI, 6, 1141a.
368) *EE* VII, 1248a.
369) *Ibid.*
370) *Ibid.*
371) *Ibid.*
372) *Ibid.*
373) *Ibid.*
374) *Ibid.*
375) *EE* VII, 6, 248b.
376) *EE* VII, 1248a.
377) *Ibid.*
378) *EE* I, 1 1214a.
379) *NE* I, 7, 1097a,b.
380) *Proclamations of Baha'u'llah*, n.p.
381) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 220.
382) *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 46.
383) *Ibid.* 60.
384) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 188.
385) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 361.
386) *NE* X, 6, 1176b.
387) *NE* X, 7, 1177a.
388) *Ibid.*
389) *NE* X, 8, 1178a.
390) *NE* VI, 13, 1144a.
391) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 38, italics added.
392) *Ibid.* 170.
393) *EE* VII, 15, 1249b.
394) *Ibid.*
395) *NE* X, 7, 1177a.
396) *Ibid.*
397) *NE* X, 8, 1178b.
398) *Paris Talks* 174.
399) *Bahá'í World Faith* 382-3, italics added.
400) *Ibid.*

- 401) *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. I, Pt II, 74.
- 402) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 166, italics added.
- 403) NE VII, 1145a.
- 404) *On the Soul* I, 4, 408b.
- 405) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 166.
- 406) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 69.
- 407) NE III, IV; V.
- 408) *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 59.
- 409) NE I, 1099a. See also IX, 9, 1170a.
- 410) *Bahá'í World Faith* 398.
- 411) NE III, 3,1112a, b. See also *Some Answered Questions* 248.
- 412) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 166.
- 413) NE I, 7, 1097b.
- 414) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 35.
- 415) Aristotle 175.
- 416) *Metaphysics* IX, 9, 1051a.
- 417) *Ibid.*
- 418) Aristotle 175.
- 419) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XXVI, 62.
- 420) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 80.
- 421) *Some Answered Questions* 215.
- 422) *Ibid.* 264.
- 423) Aristotle 175.
- 424) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XLIII, 94.
- 425) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 36-37. See also *The Hidden Words* (Arabic), #2.
- 426) *Bahá'í World Faith* 280.
- 427) NE V, 3, 1131a.
- 428) NE V, 5, 1133b.
- 429) *Foundations of World Unity* 36.
- 430) NE V, 5, 1131b.
- 431) NE V, 3, 1132a.
- 432) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 99 See also *Some Answered Questions* 273.
- 433) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 153. See also *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, 69; NE III, 9, 1117b.
- 434) NE IV, 1, 1119b; see also *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXXX.
- 435) NE IV, 3,1125a; see also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 60, 332, 466; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXL, 306.
- 436) NE IV, 8, 1128a,b; see also *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 134.
- 437) *Politics* VIII, 5,1340b. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 52.
- 438) *Politics* VII, 17,1336b.
- 439) *Politics* VI, 2, 1317a-1317b.
- 440) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XLIII, XLV, CLIX.
- 441) *Politics* VI, 3,1318a. See also *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 88.
- 442) *Politics* VI, 3,1318a. See also *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 39, 40, 43.
- 443) *Politics* VII,13, 1332a. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 135.
- 444) *Politics* VII,13,1332a.
- 445) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXXX, 285.
- 446) NE IX, 9, 1170b. See also NE VIII, 1157b; EE VII; MM, II, 11-17; *Bahá'í World Faith* 434.
- 447) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXXVI, 170.
- 448) NE IX, 8, 1168b.
- 449) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 66.
- 450) *Politics* I, 2, 1252b.
- 451) *Politics* VI, 2, 1317b.

- 452) *Politics* VII, 1, 1324a. See also *Politics* VII, 3, 1325b.
453) *Politics* VII, I, 1323b. See also *Politics* VII, 2, 1324a.
454) *Ibid.*
455) *Politics* III, 4, 1277a.
456) *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* #173.
457) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 24.
458) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 1.
459) *Metaphysics* XII, 7, 1072a.
460) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief* 57.
461) *Politics* V, 8, 1307b.
462) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XCIII, 188.
463) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 88.
464) *Politics* VI, 4, 1318b.
465) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XLIII, 92.
466) *Ibid.* CLIX, 335-6.
467) *Politics* I, 2, 1253a.
468) *Some Answered Questions* 79. See also *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 116.
469) *NE* II, 2, 1104a,b.
470) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 112.
471) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 248.
472) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXV, 43.
473) See work by Theo Cope's book *Re-Thinking, Re-Visioning, Re-Placing* and articles by Mark Foster and Nima Hazini.
474) *Some Answered Questions* 233.
475) *Ibid.*
476) *Metaphysics* V, 8, 1017b
477) *An Interpretation of Whitehead's Metaphysics*, 115.
478) *Ibid.*
479) *Ibid.*
480) *Ibid.*
481) *Ibid.*
482) *Aristotle: A Contemporary Appreciation* 35.
483) *Metaphysics* V, 8, 1017b.

The Call into Being

Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism

Ian Kluge

1) Introduction

This paper will demonstrate how, based on the concept of potentials, a Bahá'í existentialism can be developed from the Writings. According to the Writings, human beings, like all other entities, are essentially defined by their potentials,¹ "possibilities,"² "capacities,"³ "susceptibilities"⁴ or "powers."⁵ Bahá'u'lláh tells us, "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value."⁶ Thus, humankind differs from animals in regards to the capacity for rational and abstract thought,⁷ while human beings differ from one another in terms of innate intellectual capacity.⁸ This naturally leads to questions as what it means to understand ourselves "in terms of [our] possibilities"?⁹

2) The Nature of Existentialism

Before proceeding, it is necessary to provide a brief description of existentialism. In a nutshell, existentialism is an analysis of the human situation from the point of view and experience of the human subject who lives and acts as an active participant in the world. All varieties of existentialism reject Descartes' subject-object analysis of our relationship to the world because it is only an abstraction from our actual "being-in-the-world"¹⁰ and does not, therefore, accurately reflect our real situation. The Bahá'í Writings Themselves, that is, the tablets and epistles to particular individuals, verbal answers to specific questions, letters of guidance to personal problems and the like reflect Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's understanding that we are always "being-in-the-world"¹¹ and never isolated like Descartes' subjects.

Existentialists also tend to agree with Sartre that existence precedes essence—although there can be much variation in how we are to understand this. If we understand it to say that by means of decisions in the actual process of existence we create our own personalities, selves or identities, then there is agreement among all existentialist thinkers. However, this agreement would vanish if we asserted that there is no such thing as a general human nature, or, that there is no common structure in what Heidegger calls *Dasein*, that is, a specifically human way of being. Heidegger's *Being and Time*, probably the central work of modern existentialism, dedicates itself to nothing less than outlining the structure inherent in and, in that sense, essential to, all *Dasein*. Vital as it is, this difference must not be allowed to obscure the fact that existentialists tend to concentrate and agree on a number of issues: the unique status of human being; the essential role of freedom, choice, risk and action; the importance of authentic existence and living in good faith; the role of anxiety in illuminating the human situation; concern and engagement with others and the world; the confrontation with human finitude and death; the subject of God; the inherent limitations of abstract, rational analysis, and the role of paradox in human existence. This mix of themes is present whether the existentialist is an atheist such as Sartre or Camus, a theist such as Kierkegaard and Marcel, or a non-theist such

as the Heidegger of *Being and Time*.

3) The Unique Status of Human Existence

All existentialists agree that human existence is fundamentally different from other forms of being. Whereas other beings are 'in-themselves', "*en-soi*"¹² and simply exist as they are without being consciously present to themselves or feeling any inner conflicts about themselves, humans alone are 'for-themselves', "*pour-soi*,"¹³ that is, consciously present to themselves and required to take a stance in regards to themselves. They can choose—or refuse—to live for themselves. Heidegger reserves the term "*Dasein*" for the human way of being to indicate that *Dasein* is distinguished from other ways of being by that fact that we ex-ist, that is, consciously stand out from our environment and thus have certain unique capabilities as well as liabilities. *Dasein* is always concerned with "its ownmost possibilities of Being in the world."¹⁴ He adds that "*Dasein* exists as an entity for which, in its being, being is itself an issue."¹⁵ Marcel asserts that the human 'I' cannot simply be assimilated into the world of things."¹⁶

The Bahá'í Writings are in fundamental agreement with this analysis of the human situation. Humankind is not simply a part of nature, but is defined by its potential for rationality or "rational soul"¹⁷ which not only distinguishes us from inanimate nature, plants and animals¹⁸ but also has power over nature. Moreover, it has "no end."¹⁹ The exhortations to evolve, improve and free ourselves²⁰ indicate that the Bahá'í Writings, like the existentialist philosophers, view humans as being present to themselves, as being objects of action "for-themselves"²¹ and deeply concerned with their "ownmost possibilities."²² In short, they all agree that humankind is self-conscious in a way unlike any other beings.

4) The Meaning of "To Exist"

The Bahá'í Writings and existential philosophy also share similar viewpoints of what it means to "exist." The Writings refer to the 'call into being'²³ with its unmistakable suggestion that coming into existence means to 'ex-ist', to stand out from a background, "to emerge, to arise."²⁴ Elsewhere Marcel writes that to exist means not just to be "present to my own awareness"²⁵ but also to be a manifest being: "I exist—that is as much to say: I have something to make myself known and recognized both by others and by myself."²⁶ When things come into existence, they appear, they show or reveal or manifest themselves and are thus differentiated from their background of environment²⁷ and, consequently, are no longer hidden.

5) Being "In Process" and "Being Toward"

If our species and individual essences is defined by our potentials then both as species and as individuals we are always in process and, therefore, incomplete. We are always, as Heidegger says, "Being toward a possibility."²⁸ On the individual level this is emphasized by the Bahá'í teaching on immortality according to which we develop our potentials without end through the "many worlds"²⁹ of God. At the collective level, this is emphasized by the Bahá'í view of human evolution as the gradual actualization and manifestation of previously hidden potentials rather than the transformation of one species into another.³⁰

6) Being "Not-Yet"

Because we are 'being-toward-possibility', human beings (Heidegger's "*Dasein*") are inevitably "not-yet,"³¹ that is, we are never completely ourselves because we are works in progress rather than finished products. It also means that "*Dasein* is constantly 'more' than it factually is"³² because of the unactualized potentials that make up our essence. Both as a species and as individuals, we are "permeated with possibility"³³ that must always be taken into account if we are to understand ourselves correctly and develop an accurate, authentic self-

image. What we see is not all there is. These possibilities represent our more complete, future selves and their presence—even as mere potentials—cannot help but influence us in the present time. We can either accept them, reject them or ignore them but in each case a decision of some kind is required.

Never being finished means that, to some extent, we are always in the position of waiting for ourselves and living in anticipation³⁴ of a final identity. In the words of Heidegger, “Anticipation makes *Dasein* [human beings] authentically *futural* and in such a way that *Dasein*, as *being*, is always coming towards itself.”³⁵ Elsewhere he says we are a “Being towards one’s *ownmost, distinctive potentiality-for-being*”³⁶ We are always approaching, but never fully reaching, ourselves. As Sartre puts it, “man is always separated from what he is by all the breadth of the being which he is not . . . Man is a being of distances.”³⁷ Final identity recedes like the horizon while forever drawing us onward. In the Bahá'í vision of life and the after-life, the endless quest for ever more adequate self-actualization is a positive vision reflecting the infinite glory God has bestowed on humankind. We are all engaged on an endless voyage of discovery in which every moment is both a sheltering harbor and a point of departure.

Because we are a “being-toward,”³⁸ we are, whether conscious of it or not, innately vectored, have a direction and live towards a particular future, namely, the actualization of our personal potentials. Our lives are not simply intended to be a random and shapeless succession of events no matter how pleasurable this might be because each of human life is innately and inherently structured as a particular “for-the-sake-of-which.”³⁹ Having a purpose is an inherent part of our being.

7) Self-Transcendence

Another way of portraying our “being-toward”⁴⁰ and being “not-yet”⁴¹ is to say that humankind is self-transcendent: we are always trying to overcome ourselves as we are in favour of what we might be.⁴² Indeed, Marcel links this “urgent inner need for transcendence”⁴³ to “an aspiration towards purer and purer modes of experience.”⁴⁴ For his part, Sartre links our urge for self-transcendence to the inherently doomed project of becoming God. In short, almost all existentialists agree that if we live authentically, that is, according to our human nature, we are inherently and structurally unsatisfied with ourselves and seek to be better than we are. This suggests that we are inevitably plagued by varying degrees of self-dissatisfaction.

8) Self-Dissatisfaction

Because of our nature as “not-yet,”⁴⁵ we are bound to suffer a certain amount of eternal dissatisfaction with or alienation from ourselves because it is impossible for us to be ‘all there’. In Marcel’s words, “the need for transcendence presents itself, above all, [as a] deeply experienced . . . kind of dissatisfaction.”⁴⁶ Of course, this is not to say that existentialism or the Writings endorse a self-crippling or self-destructive perfectionism that is a pathological perversion of our innate dissatisfaction with ourselves. We should see this dissatisfaction as a sign of our heroic potential for self-conquest and self-overcoming. We need not interpret this dissatisfaction negatively as does Heidegger whose Christian background leads him to interpret this dissatisfaction as guilt, and to claim that “being-guilty belongs to *Dasein*’s [human] being.”⁴⁷ Bahá'ís may embrace this innate dissatisfaction as ‘divine’, as one of God’s signs that we reflect the infinity of His names,⁴⁸ that we always face an open future, that we are always free to remake and renew ourselves, that we face an infinite number of new possibilities for actualization and, therefore, ought never to despair.

9) Detachment

Given our situation as perpetually incomplete, we should not be too 'stuck' on any current version of ourselves, but should, rather, practice the art of detachment from our present personalities since they are all 'just temporary'. "Cast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things."⁴⁹ From this it follows that feeling fully 'at one' with themselves is not an authentic option for Bahá'ís since any such feeling must be, at best, a temporary respite; if such feelings persist, they will inevitably blind the possessors to their real ontological circumstances as a perpetually unfinished work needing improvement. Feelings of profound self-satisfaction with one's current condition and a desire to prolong it are to be understood as signs of an inauthentic existence at variance with our true ontological natures.

10) Dialectical Self-Conflict

Since our current condition and identity are being constantly undermined by the potentials of our future, there is an inherent and on-going dialectical struggle with our present selves as we continuously re-create ourselves in new and more adequate forms. It is our nature to be locked in this dialectical self-conflict, and were it to stop, we would immediately fall into inauthentic existence. Therefore, this condition of inner struggle is not to be regarded negatively, but rather as part of our ontological identity as human beings. There is no doubt that this internal self-conflict causes suffering, but we must learn to understand this suffering as 'growing pains', as positive signs of our advancement. We must appropriate to ourselves personally what Bahá'u'lláh says about the conflicts in the world: "The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive. Were men to discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation, they would assuredly cast away their fears, and, with hearts filled with gratitude, rejoice with exceeding gladness."⁵⁰

11) Progressive Revelation

At this point it becomes evident that the innate ontological structure and dynamic of our personal lives reflects the Bahá'í Teaching of "progressive revelation"⁵¹ (in which certain essential religious truths are recapitulated in new forms, and new divine potentials released from them to match the intellectual, material and spiritual conditions of new times). Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. To live authentically in accordance with our essential natures both the human species and individuals are required to grow, to overcome their own collective and personal "ancestral forms."⁵² and advance into higher, that is, more subtle, more inclusive and more adequate versions of ourselves. We must do so despite the fact that the process inevitably involves overcoming a variety of pains including the painful awareness that failure, or the fall into inauthenticity, is always possible. We must, therefore, develop what Paul Tillich calls "the courage to be" lest we fall into the despair of "having lost our destiny."⁵³

12) Fallen Existence

In Heidegger's terms, we must avoid a "fugitive way of saying 'I'"⁵⁴ which is "motivated by *Dasein's* falling; for as falling, it flees in the face of itself into the 'they'."⁵⁵ Even though this 'I' seems 'normal' to outsiders and even ourselves, "[w]hen the 'I' talks in the 'natural' manner, this is performed by the they-self,"⁵⁶ that is, the mass ('*Das Man*'; the 'they') or crowd identity we inevitably take on when our lives are not filled with genuine content. The crowd speaks and acts through us; we have been appropriated by the crowd. As Heidegger puts it, "It itself is not; Being has been taken away by the Others"⁵⁷ although this "inconspicuous domination"⁵⁸ may not always be obvious. As a result, we belong to the Others and augment their power by

becoming “dispersed into the ‘they.’”⁵⁹ We have “fallen away”⁶⁰ from our true possibilities and suffer from “alienation [*Entfremdung*] in which [our] ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from [us].”⁶¹

Heidegger, like all existentialist philosophers, rejects this kind of inauthentic existence. So do the Bahá'í Writings which make each of us responsible for our own actions and do not allow us to shake off responsibility for our lives on others. If God asks us why we have rejected His Manifestation, we cannot point to others because “such a plea will, assuredly, be rejected. *For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself.*”⁶² In other words, there is no refuge and no flight from personal responsibility in the mass or what Heidegger calls the “they-self.”⁶³

Being ‘resolute’, or avoiding “fallen-ness”⁶⁴ is also a socially beneficial act since a genuine community in which genuine consultation occurs, can only be found among people who are authentically themselves, and see with their own eyes and speak their own thoughts. The best way for us to help create such a community is to be such a person ourselves which is precisely what the Bahá'í Writings demand. As Heidegger writes, “*Dasein's* resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let Others who are with it be in their ownmost potentiality-for-being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates . . . Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another—not by ambiguous and jealous stipulations and talkative fraternizing in the ‘they.’”⁶⁵ By self-actualizing, each of us attains the authentic being that lets us serve as an example for others.

13) Anxiety

The fact that we are always susceptible of “falling”⁶⁶ into inauthentic being makes a certain amount of anxiety structurally inherent in human existence. For Heidegger, the anxiety provoked by this prone-ness to falling is the origin of the conscience, since the experience of anxiety is the sign of having or developing a conscience. Thus we should welcome anxiety because it is proof of wanting-to-have-a-conscience which ultimately helps us to gain, preserve and regain our authenticity. It is precisely this anxiety which eventually helps us attain that “resoluteness . . . [which is] that truth of *Dasein* which is most primordial because it is authentic.”⁶⁷ Such anxiety is a natural part of being ourselves and we would, in fact, not be well off if this natural anxiety were absent since that would lower our level of concern about our existential condition. The resulting carelessness would not serve us well neither as individuals nor as a community. Clearly, this anxiety is not to be understood as a kind of panic but rather as what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calls “due concern.”⁶⁸

In the same way, Bahá'u'lláh tells us that we should feel “concern”⁶⁹ “only for that which profiteth mankind, and bettereth the condition thereof.”⁷⁰ As we have already seen, concern for improving the human condition includes self-actualization of one's potentialities and the attainment of authentic identity. From this we can see that the Bahá'í Writings accept a certain amount of anxiety and concern as an inevitable part of the human condition. This idea is also inherent in the notion that eventually “Ye shall, most certainly, return to God, and shall be called to account for your doings in the presence of Him Who shall gather together the entire creation.”⁷¹ This idea is further emphasized by the injunction to “weigh in that Balance thine actions *every day, every moment of thy life. Bring thyself to account* ere thou art summoned to a reckoning.”⁷² In other words, there is a kind of salutary and growth-promoting anxiety that we must not only learn to live with but accept as a positive part of the human condition. Because this kind of existential anxiety serves a positive life-enhancing function for individu-

als and communities, it must not be confused with the debilitating fears and phobias that prevent personal and social life from being lived to their full potential.

Anxiety not only reveals the continuing possibility of inauthentic existence, it also discloses our situation in the world. According to Heidegger, in anxiety we face our “ownmost-Being-thrown”⁷³, that is, confront the fact that we simply exist and that there is no humanly discernible or rational reason why this should be so. We simply are, and find ourselves being: “*Dasein* has been *thrown* into existence”⁷⁴ says Heidegger. Sartre also uses this term.⁷⁵

It is precisely on this point that the Bahá'í Writings offer an alternative direction in the development of existentialism. Rather than seeing humankind as “thrown” into existence, a view that in the case of Sartre and Camus, leads to the judgment that existence is somehow absurd and inherently meaningless, the Bahá'í Writings view humankind and indeed, the entire universe as *called* into being.⁷⁶ The view that we are “thrown” into existence is a consequence of failing to take into account the fact that the universe and all its inhabitants are the creations of a supreme Being who called everything into being for a particular purpose in the evolutionary world process. We only feel “thrown” when we foreshorten our vision and ignore the existence of God. Whereas “thrown” (*geworfen* in German) connotes a disorderly, haphazard, undignified and even violent arrival which might easily lead to sense of worthlessness, carelessness and despair, being ‘called’ suggests that each thing is wanted, has a place and a task, is invested with the natural dignity and possesses inherent value. Contrary to superficial expectations this does not ease the challenges that we face. Indeed, it intensifies them because being inauthentic is not just being untrue to ourselves but is also a rebellion against God’s will. God’s call is to a particular person who must not squander this call by trying to be someone else; it is issued to our authentic potentials. We must not “flee to the relief which comes with the supposed freedom of the they-self.”⁷⁷ Nor can we dismiss this call as absurd since God has His reasons in each case. This fact is emphasized by the Báb’s prayer which states that “All are His servants and all abide by His bidding.”⁷⁸ In other words, human existence is inherently meaningful even though we do not always actualize this meaning successfully. This is one issue on which a Bahá'í existentialism differs radically from the atheistic existentialism of Sartre and Camus.

14) Not-belonging

Anxiety also reveals our human condition as not being fully ‘at home’ in the world. Unlike other entities and creatures, humans are not fully at home in the world insofar as we possess conscious capabilities other creatures lack. We cannot live with the sensual contentedness of a cow, nor, as Abdu'l-Baha noted, should we because to do so means not actualizing our true potentials.⁷⁹ Through their emphasis on detachment from the world, the Bahá'í Writings also emphasize that humankind neither is nor should ever be as at home in the world as animals. “[T]he contingent world is the source of imperfections”⁸⁰ and humans should be focussed on divine perfections. Indeed, relative to the divine perfections we are intended to actualize, the world is as ‘nothing’ and we must neither over-value nor undervalue it. In one sense, the world is certainly an illusion, a mirage, a nothing,⁸¹ and, if we foreshorten our vision to exclude God, we will indeed find ourselves “thrown” into nothingness or into a meaningless, seething mass of being. This feeling of not-being-at-home or not-belonging is something that all Bahá'ís can recognize and which the Writings, to a certain extent, approve.⁸² Our recognition of the situation in which we are *in* but not fully *of* nature, readily leads to anxiety about our true place, our ‘home’ and our belonging. One of the reasons for the arrival of Manifestations is to alleviate this structurally inherent anxiety and to help us direct this emotional energy to the divine world where we really belong.

15) Resoluteness and the Call Into Being

The issues of resoluteness, anxiety and “the call into being”⁸³ lead naturally to what we might refer to as the ‘call of being’, namely the fact that through anxiety, we hear “the call of conscience [that] summons us to our potentiality-for-Being.”⁸⁴ This has two consequences. First, anxiety reveals our freedom to choose for or against the actualization of our possibilities.⁸⁵ It discloses the fact that human being is characterized by freedom, a view that underlies the foundation of all Bahá'í ethics. This freedom can, of course, be frightening because it marks the beginning of responsibilities for the conduct of one's life. Second, through anxiety, conscience summons us to an authentic existence by calling on us to self-actualization. “When the call of conscience is understood, our being lost in the ‘they’ is revealed. Resoluteness brings *Dasein* back to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-itself.”⁸⁶ The call of conscience “calls *Dasein* forth (and forward) to its ownmost possibilities, as a summons to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self.”⁸⁷

We must ask where this call comes from especially since it is often “against our expectations and even against our will”?⁸⁸ According to Heidegger, the call comes from us and yet from beyond us. In other words, “the call of conscience”⁸⁹ originates as a call from our unactualized potentials, projecting the influence of their presence into our lives; these unactualized potentials are our own future possible selves and their presence makes us uneasy about what we are doing with ourselves. Thus, “[i]n conscience *Dasein* calls itself.”⁹⁰ However, the call also comes from outside, a fact that Heidegger recognizes but does not develop. The Bahá'í Writings suffer no such disadvantage, and can frankly assert that the call of being and the call of conscience are one and same: they are signs of God's action in the world through the anxious state of mind or “mood.”⁹¹

However, even this positive view of the call of conscience still leaves us—and Heidegger's philosophy—with a problem: is conscience by itself actually capable of empowering us to return from our fallen state back into authenticity? As John Macquarrie says, conscience “can at best *awaken* in fallen man the awareness of lost possibility of being. It can disclose to him his ontological possibility of authenticity. *But it cannot by any means empower him to choose that possibility.*”⁹² At this point we understand the existential necessity of a Manifestation to re-orient our lives to self-actualization, authenticity and the transcendent aspects of our existence.

16) “Being-Toward-Death”

Because we are continuously changing,⁹³ it follows that our identities are continuously dying as we cast aside outmoded, no longer adequate selves in order actualize new possibilities. This is one way in which human beings are what Heidegger calls “Being-towards-death”⁹⁴ since we are, in fact, constantly striving to re-invent ourselves. We die daily, indeed, during periods of challenging, rapid growth or, at times of crisis, hourly or even from moment to moment. It is one of the great paradoxes of human existence that dying is our most authentic way of life. In the words of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, “Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favour and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr's field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised.”⁹⁵ We thus live in perpetual anticipation of death, of which the death of the physical body is only one kind. Indeed, the Bahá'í Writings encourage the daily practice of “Being-towards-death”⁹⁶ when they tell us to bring ourselves to account each day before we perish.⁹⁷

17) "Being-Toward-Death" and Freedom

Once understood and appropriated for oneself, "Being-towards-death"⁹⁸ is also a source of ontological freedom because it frees us from any undue attachment to former versions of ourselves. There is no point in holding on to a version of oneself that, if things go well and real growth occurs, is destined to pass out of existence. At this point, we cannot help but remember Bahá'u'lláh's statement, "I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendor. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?"⁹⁹ Death is "a messenger of joy" because the dying of one identity is a pre-requisite for a more adequate identity, just as our physical dying is a pre-requisite for entrance into the Abhá Kingdom. It is the death that precedes a birth and a life of encountering opportunities.

18) Being an "Inexhaustible Mystery"

Another way of viewing our inherent incompleteness and perpetual evolution is to say that we are an "inexhaustible mystery."¹⁰⁰ As the Writings tell us, "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value."¹⁰¹ Consequently, human beings are always mysterious to themselves, and experience themselves as a mystery, as something that by its very nature can never be fully understood. No amount of factual information can ever provide exhaustive knowledge of even a single person, for, as the Bahá'í Writings say, "Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery."¹⁰² This is also what the theistic existentialist Gabriel Marcel is getting at in the title of his two volume *The Mystery of Being* and this is precisely the main point of Kierkegaard's entire oeuvre and his objection to Hegel: human beings are inherently mysterious and cannot be adequately summed up by any abstract, intellectualized system.¹⁰³

How we personally experience our mysteriousness can vary greatly. Some, like the Russian theistic existentialist Nicolas Berdyaev, experience it as an utterly inexplicable irrationality that proves our absolute freedom and creativity beyond any rational, logical limitations.¹⁰⁴ Others, such as the French atheist existentialists Sartre and Camus, experience it as further evidence of our inherent absurdity. Perhaps most interestingly, this inner "inexhaustible mystery"¹⁰⁵ might be experienced as a profound inner emptiness—an emptiness that is, paradoxically, also profoundly full of endless potentials. This line of thought draws an existential understanding of the Bahá'í Writings closer to Buddhism and Taoism.

Our incompleteness is also the source of our inherent creativity as we struggle to find new and more adequate ways to actualize our potentials in the midst of an ever-changing world. This means that we are inherently creative beings who are continuously bringing novelty into this world by manifesting potentials that have previously been hidden. Indeed, humankind also creatively serves cosmic evolution and reveals novelties by bringing out the hidden potentials of matter in our various inventions.¹⁰⁶

19) Man and Super-man

The fact that we—both collectively and individually—are essentially incomplete beings, provides a logical basis for the Bahá'í Faith's evolutionary view of humankind; we are always on our way to being 'something better', that is, an ever more complete actualization of our potentials. This understanding of our species as well as our individual existences bears obvious affinities to Nietzsche's theory of the super-man or 'Uebermensch' since in both views, humans regard themselves as a transition to something better.¹⁰⁷ Of course, whereas Bahá'ís and Nietzsche agree that the new 'super-man' has a superior intellect¹⁰⁸ and moral system,¹⁰⁹ they will not necessarily agree on the content of this new moral system. However, it cannot be denied that the evolutionary outlook inherent in the Bahá'í Writings leads to a vision of becoming a type of human superior to what we are today although we can never exceed our

ontological human status. It bears pointing out that even an atheist existentialist such as Sartre recognizes this self-transcendent function in human beings, that is, the notion that ultimately human beings want to be more than what they currently are. In Sartre's view, human beings want to be God, even though this project is, by definition, bound to fail.

20) Authenticity

Because we are a "Being-in-the-world,"¹¹⁰ we can only exist in full authenticity if we have an intimate and authentic relationship to the world in which we live. As Bahá'u'lláh says, "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."¹¹¹ Concern for the needs—as distinct from the wants and preferences—of the age is the most intimate and authentic way to engaging with our world-as-a-whole, and must not to be confused with relating intimately and authentically to the needs of individuals we encounter. *Both*, not one or the other, are necessary to a full, engaged and authentic existence that actualizes the complete range of our social potentials. Heidegger recognizes the possibilities for authentic engagement with the world under the rubric of 'care' which he characterizes not only as authentic being-toward-one's-own-possibilities but also as "Being-in-the-world"¹¹² and "being-with."¹¹³ He says that "Being-in-the-world is essentially care"¹¹⁴ and describes "care as the Being of *Dasein*."¹¹⁵ Thus care in its social dimension, that is, our "concern and solicitude"¹¹⁶ for our co-inhabitants on the earth is an integral part of our being and cannot be avoided if we wish to develop authentically. However, unlike Bahá'u'lláh, Heidegger does not specifically explain what characterizes authentic Being-in-the-world.

21) Free Will and the Volitional Personality

Another issue on which the Writings agree with existentialism is the inherent mystery of self. According to the Bahá'í Writings, humankind is endowed with free will¹¹⁶ which, in practical terms means, we define, that is, create ourselves by the choices we make. This has immediate consequences for a Bahá'í existentialism because it means we must carefully qualify Sartre's dictum that existence precedes essence. From the perspective of the Writings, this is true only so far as our volitional, that is, *chosen* personality is concerned, since our choices did not exist before we made them. Nonetheless, those choices are made in the context of having a specifically human nature that is capable of making such choices in the first place. Because we have no choice but to make these choices, we are, in Sartre's memorable phrase "condemned to be free"¹¹⁷ and, therewith the architects of our own destiny.

22) The Mystery of Self

Furthermore, this volitional self or essence is inherently mysterious insofar as it does not exist before any choices are made, yet something is required to make the first choice. What is that something? We could speculate in any number of ways but the final result will always be that we cannot know, at least not intellectually in the manner of logical necessity or physical causality. This is because, in Marcel's terms, the self is a "mystery"¹¹⁸ and not a "problem."¹¹⁹ The difference between the two is clear cut: a problem is a difficulty that can be solved with the proper procedure or technique whereas a mystery cannot be solved at all. A "mystery [is] a problem which encroaches on its own data"¹²⁰ that is, a problem that does not allow us to study it objectively but irrevocably requires us to be involved: "I cannot place myself outside it or before it; I am engaged."¹²¹ Our personal identity, the self is destined to remain a mystery in Marcel's sense because we cannot reflect on ourselves without involving ourselves.¹²² The Writings agree with Marcel's view. However, according to them we are mysteries to ourselves and others because we are "called into being"¹²³ by the inscrutable will of God¹²⁴ who, through Baha'u'llah has told us that "Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery."¹²⁵ In other words, we

do not know why God has called us or others into being because at this point we have arrived at an inherent limit to rational inquiry. We cannot inquire about the reason's for God's will because all rational inquiry is based on either the law of non-contradiction or cause and effect and God transcends both of these laws.

The mystery of the self is reinforced by the Bahá'í Teaching that the inner essence of things is unknown and unknowable¹²⁶; things are known by their attributes but their essences are beyond the reach of human knowledge. This is especially true of the human soul: "Verily I say, the human soul is, in its essence, one of the signs of God, a mystery among His mysteries. It is one of the mighty signs of the Almighty, the harbinger that proclaimeth the reality of all the worlds of God. *Within it lieth concealed that which the world is now utterly incapable of apprehending.*"¹²⁷ For this reason, 'mysteriousness to ourselves' is inherently structured into human existence and the only choice we really have is in deciding how to respond to it.

23) Self-Alienation

This sense of mysteriousness to oneself and, therefore, not belonging to oneself, suggests that a certain sense of alienation is structurally inherent in being human. As Marcel writes, "from the moment when I start to reflect, I am bound to appear to myself as a, as it were, non-somebody."¹²⁸ However, it can often intensify into a pathological state of alienation insofar as one is alienated from acting in one's own best interests. This idea underlies such injunctions as the following: "Suffer not yourselves to be wrapt in the dense veils of your selfish desires, inasmuch as I have perfected in every one of you My creation."¹²⁹ We also read "Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves"¹³⁰ and "deprive not yourselves of the liberal effusions of His grace."¹³¹ Each of these quotations suggests that human beings can be so alienated from themselves that they act to inflict harm on themselves. From this point of view, the 'call into being' takes on a new dimension: in addition to being the call by which the original volitional self begins, it is also the call back into authenticity, the call to return to our true selves. Indeed, insofar as we do not really exist when we do not live authentically—a kind of 'substitute' lives in our place—the 'call into being' is also a call to return to existence. If responded to, this call can be considered a kind of "second birth"¹³² in which we attain our true spiritual selves or what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "the world of the Kingdom."¹³³ According to Heidegger, this "call says nothing which might be talked about, gives no information about events. The call, which can be identified with the call of conscience points *forward* to *Dasein's* potentiality-for-Being and it does this as a call which comes *from* "uncanniness."¹³⁴ Thus, it is possible to experience one's alienation itself positively as a call to return to one's true self. Ignoring this call is a failure to hear oneself or, even worse, an outright refusal to do so and a rejection of oneself.¹³⁵ This, of course, leads to inauthentic existence because one is leading a life that reflects the 'they' or the mass instead of one that reflects one's "ownmost"¹³⁶ potentials.

24) The Mystery of Essence

Because things are known by their attributes and unknowable in their essence,¹³⁷ it follows that to some extent we will always find ourselves situated in a world of things that are essentially mysterious to us. We cannot know them completely. Indeed, vis-à-vis essence, we are destined to remain mysterious even to ourselves despite the fact that we have direct interior experience of ourselves.¹³⁸ Consequently, we are always remote-from-ourselves¹³⁹; we live in perpetual anticipation for an ever fuller disclosure of ourselves. Given that we know only attributes and not essences, it is not surprising to find that we may feel a certain alienation from all things and thus not feel fully 'at home' in the world. We can choose to lament or resent this

situation, or we can ask ourselves if, in fact, we were ever intended to feel fully at home in the world, and to live without a certain yearning for something more. In other words, is a certain feeling of not-belonging an inherent, structural component of human existence? The answer from the Bahá'í Writings and Heidegger seems to be positive. The Writings certainly suggest that such is the case as seen in their exhortations to become detached from the world.¹⁴⁰ Since Heidegger believes that a kind of inauthenticity results from being too attached to daily existence and becoming “absorbed”¹⁴¹ in our “Being as everyday Being-with-one-another”¹⁴² we may conclude that he, too, advocates a certain degree of feeling *unheimlich*, not-at-home in the world as a requisite for authenticity.

However, we must bear in mind that detachment does not mean a disinterest or lack of concern for the world; Bahá'u'lláh, after all, tells us to be “anxiously concerned for the needs of the age [we] live in”¹⁴³ and Heidegger sees solicitude,¹⁴⁴ an important aspect of the care in which *Dasein* reveals itself,¹⁴⁵ as an integral part of our Being-in-the-world. Rather, it means that we must not see the world as the ultimate and final value in our lives; we must recognize that our relationship to “the things of this world,”¹⁴⁶ meaning both concrete things and worldly affairs, must not be allowed to stand in the way of achieving personal authenticity or an authentic relationship to God. To paraphrase Christ, what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?¹⁴⁷

25) The Necessity of Faith

The fact that the world is inherently mysterious to us because we know things only by their attributes and not directly by their inner essence¹⁴⁸ means that there are inherent, structural limitations to our knowledge. Our knowledge, our science and our action are limited to the phenomenal level of reality and debarred from the noumenal realm which is the exclusive domain of God. This shows that the Bahá'í Writings espouse a moderate rationalism, that is, they recognize that while reasoned investigation and logic can tell us many things, they cannot tell us everything and certainly not everything we need to know to live appropriately as human beings. The key for an accurate epistemology is to know where to draw the line between the two because this distinction is the basis for asserting the existence of other, supra-rational ways of knowing. As the Writings tell us, we know by “faith and knowledge”¹⁴⁹ which are the “two wings’ of the soul.”¹⁵⁰

In Marcel’s language, the difference between faith and knowledge is the difference between “believing that”¹⁵¹ and “believing in.”¹⁵² The first is like a “conviction”¹⁵³ of which we have complete intellectual certainty and which—here we are going beyond Marcel—is hedged round with all kinds of careful provisos and qualifications to preserve it from attack. “Believing in,”¹⁵⁴ however, is something quite different. According to Marcel, it means “that I place myself at the disposal of something,”¹⁵⁵ that is, I make myself available to something or someone. In short, faith is the kind of knowledge we get when we willingly open ourselves to the other and give our assent to the knowledge gained in that way. Indeed, such knowledge “absorbs most fully all the powers of [our] being.”¹⁵⁶ It also affects our own being, that is, what we actually are as persons. We are, as the saying goes, ‘touched’.

Now it is obvious that faith has both down-to-earth practical as well as religious applications. Marcel uses the homely example of granting someone credit; we believe *in* that person—perhaps even in contradiction to a past financial mistake. Faith in God, of course, exacts a higher standard, but the principle is the same: we make ourselves available to whatever evidence or knowledge God chooses to bestow. To acquire faith we must prepare ourselves spiritually. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “If thou wishest the divine knowledge and recognition, purify thy heart from all beside God, be wholly attracted to the ideal, beloved One search for and choose Him”¹⁵⁷

and Bahá'u'lláh's "first counsel [is to] possess a pure kindly and radiant heart."¹⁵⁸ However, in the Writings, faith and knowledge are not opposed. After telling us to "search for and choose Him [Bahá'u'lláh],"¹⁵⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, apply thyself to rational and authoritative arguments "for arguments are a guide to the path and by this the heart will be turned unto the Sun of Truth"¹⁶⁰ and have no need of further proofs because we will simply see the truth directly. To do this, we must make use of our freedom and choose to see.

26) Kinds of Truth

If knowledge can be acquired by rational inquiry as well as by faith, it follows that the concept of truth in the Writings has at least two levels. The first, is the rational and empirical level. Here the Writings espouse a form of the correspondence theory of truth.¹⁶¹ The second, existential level concerns the issue of living 'in truth' insofar as we are what we appear to be and appear to be what we are both to others and ourselves. Sartre calls this living in good or "bad faith,"¹⁶² that is, in not lying to others or ourselves. Thus, to the extent that we lie neither to others nor ourselves, we live 'in truth'. We exhibit what Heidegger calls "authentic disclosedness"¹⁶³ to others and ourselves. In terms of the correspondence theory of truth, we are consciously at one with ourselves.

However, the Writings suggest that there is yet a second level of existential truth illustrated for example in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "He, Who is the Eternal Truth, beareth Me witness!"¹⁶⁴ Naturally, the question arises how God can *be* the truth. There are at least three possible answers. In the first place, we might say that God and the Manifestation are the truth because they are ultimately the standard by which all humanly discovered truths are to be assessed. Another, metaphysical answer follows logically from the unity of God, that is, the belief that God is absolutely one and "admits of no division."¹⁶⁵ As 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, "the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence."¹⁶⁶ Since truth is one of God's attributes we cannot escape the conclusion that God is truth. It is virtually self-evident that God could not possess absolute unity if essence and attribute were distinct and divided. Such a division would reduce God to the level of His creations in which the essence made up of potentials and the attributes made up of actualized attributes are different. For reasons of logic alone, God must *be* truth.

A third way in which God is the truth may be developed on the basis of Heidegger's philosophy. According to Heidegger, "[a]ssertion is not the primary 'locus' of truth."¹⁶⁷ In other words, truth is not simply a matter of statements that correspond to reality. Such statements possess a strictly secondary or "derivative character."¹⁶⁸ Rather, "in the most primordial sense,"¹⁶⁹ truth is the "disclosedness"¹⁷⁰ that allows us to proceed to make judgments about correctness or falsity: "The most primordial 'truth' . . . is the ontological condition for the possibility that assertions can either be true or false—that they may uncover or cover things up."¹⁷¹ Thus, 'primordial truth' is the pre-condition for all subsequent judgments. As the Prime Mover, the ground of being, the "object of desire" of the entire universe, God is that ontological pre-condition necessary for things to be true or false and indeed, in that sense, God is the Truth of truth. Without this pre-condition of truth, there could be no perception or understanding of the secondary truths. As such a pre-condition for all judgments about truth, God may be compared to light which is not seen in itself but is the necessary pre-condition for seeing. Another way of saying all this is to point out that God is the "disclosedness"¹⁷² of things, that is, the condition of "uncoveredness"¹⁷³ or being uncovered by which the secondary or derivative truths can be known.

If God is truth in the Heideggerian sense, then it follows that God is always available in our

quest for knowledge. He is, as Bahá'u'lláh writes, “closer to man than his life vein.”¹⁷⁴ God is, quite literally, the universal pre-condition for all knowledge and discrimination and, in that sense, revelation is occurring at all times and places. As Bahá'u'lláh writes, “Likewise hath the eternal King spoken: ‘No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it.’”¹⁷⁵ God is simply unavoidable for those who have “eyes to see.”¹⁷⁶

27) Being-Between

Further reflection reveals that human existence is characterized by being-between. We are in the paradoxical position of waiting at the door of ourselves caught between eternal anxiety and hope as we ponder both hopefully and anxiously what we shall disclose about our essence. As individuals and as a species, we are in eternal evolutionary development and, therefore, always ‘between’ a point of departure and a port of arrival. Indeed, every arrival is simultaneously a leave-taking; human beings have always just left and never quite arrived. This being-between is reflected even in our situation in creation. According to the Bahá'í Writings, humankind is the mid-point between matter and spirit: “the inner reality of man is a demarcation line between the shadow and the light, a place where the two seas meet; it is the lowest point on the arc of descent, and therefore is it capable of gaining all the grades above.”¹⁷⁷ We exist between animality and the divine¹⁷⁸ and while our nature or essence can be refined, it can never change.¹⁷⁹

28) Conclusion

We shall end this introduction to a Bahá'í existentialism not with an abstract summary but rather with an image that summarizes much of what we have discovered: human beings are not pilgrims headed for a final destination be it Paradise, or Nirvana or Valhalla, but rather, we are all mariners and our lives are a journey that never ends. Days and nights, in different weathers, on different seas and through changing climates we sail ever onward discovering new lands and our prows are aimed at the horizon and the Great Attractor whose brightness draws us forever onward. Each moment is an arrival and departure; a “Land-ho!” and “Anchors aweigh!”; a parting sigh and a welcoming smile, a discovery and a recognition, a being-toward-death and a being-toward-birth, a self-transcendence and a self-disappointment, a “Ready-aye-ready” and a “Not-yet”, a moment of knowledge and a moment of mystery, a falling into the troughs and a rising onto the crests. Like all mariners, we are ‘in-between’. We live between waves and winds, between sea and sky, between being ourselves and never being ourselves, between anticipation and anxiety, between here and not-here, between peace with ourselves and internal conflict, between being true and being untruth. Yet, through this all, we try as best we can to see the light of the Great Attractor and to guide our ships by that light.

Abbreviations

BN	Being and Nothingness
BT	Being and Time
MB	The Mystery of Being
PE	The Philosophy of Existentialism

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Notes

- 1) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 38. See also *Bahá'í World Faith*, 262.
- 2) *The Proumulgation of Universal Peace* 113.
- 3) *Ibid.* 23. See also *Bahá'í World Faith* 249.
- 4) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 23.
- 5) *Ibid.* 17. See also 49.
- 6) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXXII, 260.
- 7) *Some Answered Questions*, 187; see also *Bahá'í World Faith*, 305.
- 8) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 131.

- 9) *BT* 331. See also 185.
- 10) *BT*, 78. See also *BT* 246-250.
- 11) *BT* 78.
- 12) *BN* LXXIV. See also 95.
- 13) *BN* 89.
- 14) *BT* 137.
- 15) *BT* 458.
- 16) *MB* Vol. 1, 110.
- 17) *Some Answered Questions* 151. See also 208.
- 18) *Some Answered Questions* 208.
- 19) *Some Answered Questions* 153.
- 20) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CLI, 319. See also *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 95.
- 21) *BN* 89.
- 22) *BT* 137.
- 23) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 116. See also *Prayers and Meditations* 49; *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 4.
- 24) *MB* Vol. 2, 35.
- 25) *MB* Vol. 1, 111.
- 26) *MB* Vol. 1, 112.
- 27) See *BT* 53-4.
- 28) *BT* 305.
- 29) *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, 32.
- 30) *Some Answered Questions* 198.
- 31) *BT* 286.
- 32) *BT* 185.
- 33) *BT* 186.
- 34) *BT* 373. See also *BN* 43.
- 35) *Ibid.*
- 36) *BT* 372, italics added.
- 37) *BN* 21.
- 38) *BT* 197.
- 39) *BT* 119.
- 40) *BT* 197.
- 41) *BT* 286.
- 42) *MB*, Vol. 2, 101-2.
- 43) *MB* Vol. 1, 68.
- 44) *Ibid.*
- 45) *BT* 286.
- 46) *MB* Vol. 1, 52.
- 47) *BT* 353.
- 48) *Bahá'í World Faith*, 311.
- 49) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXII, 139.
- 50) *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* LXXXVIII, 175.
- 51) *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* #126, 280.
- 52) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 127.
- 53) *The Courage to Be* 59.
- 54) *BT* 368.
- 55) *Ibid.*
- 56) *Ibid.*
- 57) *BT* 164.
- 58) *Ibid.*
- 59) *BT* 167.

- 60) *BT* 220.
- 61) *BT* 222.
- 62) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXV, 143; italics added.
- 63) *BT* 368.
- 64) *BT* 220.
- 65) *BT* 344-5.
- 66) *BT* 399.
- 67) *BT* 343.
- 68) *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 11.
- 69) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXX, 254. See also CXLIVII, 316.
- 70) *Ibid.*
- 71) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXVI, 247. See also LXV, 124.
- 72) *Ibid.* CXIV, 236, italics added.
- 73) *BT* 393.
- 74) *BT* 321; italics added.
- 75) *BN* 53.
- 76) *Prayers and Meditations* 177. See also *Prayers and Meditations* 208, 251; *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XIV, 29; XCIV, 193; CXXII, 260.
- 77) *BT* 321.
- 78) *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* 217.
- 79) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 262.
- 80) *Some Answered Questions* 5.
- 81) *Ibid.*, 278.
- 82) *Paris Talks*, 85. See also *Some Answered Questions* 278.
- 83) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIV, 29.
- 84) *BT* 347.
- 85) *BT* 237.
- 86) *BT* 354.
- 87) *BT* 318.
- 88) *BT* 320.
- 89) *BT* 347.
- 90) *BT* 320.
- 91) *BT* 296.
- 92) *An Existentialist Theology* 139, italics added.
- 93) *Some Answered Questions* 233.
- 94) *BT* 310.
- 95) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 76.
- 96) *BT* 310.
- 97) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXIV, 236.
- 98) *BT* 310.
- 99) *The Hidden Words* #32, from the Arabic.
- 100) *Existentialism* 29.
- 101) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXXII, 260. See also *Some Answered Questions*, chp. 64.
- 102) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XC, 177.
- 103) *MB*, Vol. 1, 164.
- 104) *Truth and Revelation* 77.
- 105) *Existentialism* 29.
- 106) *Some Answered Questions* 186.
- 107) *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Bk. Four.
- 108) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 141.
- 109) *Ibid.* 136.
- 110) *BT* 236.

- 111) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CVI, 213.
- 112) *BT* 236.
- 113) *BT* 163.
- 114) *BT* 237.
- 115) *BT* 241.
- 116) *BT* 238.
- 116) *Some Answered Questions* 248.
- 117) *BN* 537.
- 118) *PE* 21-23.
- 119) *Ibid.*
- 120) *PE* 22.
- 121) *Ibid.*
- 122) *MB* Vol 1, 210. See also 168, 169.
- 123) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIV 29.
- 124) See *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXXIV, 262.
- 125) *The Kitáb-Íqán* 101. See also *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXXII, 160.
- 126) *Some Answered Questions*, 220.
- 127) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXII, 160, italics added. See also LXXXIII, 165; XCV, 195.
- 128) *MB* Vol. 1, 106.
- 129) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* LXXV, 143.
- 130) *Ibid.* LXXVII, 149.
- 131) *Ibid.* CI, 206.
- 132) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 332.
- 133) *Ibid.*
- 134) *BT* 325.
- 135) *BT* 223; 315.
- 136) *BT* 224; 307.
- 137) *Some Answered Questions* 220.
- 138) *Ibid.*
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- 140) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CXL, 306. See also *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XVII, 40; XXIX, 71; XLVI, 100; LXXVI, 149; *Paris Talks* 74; *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* 86, 177, 186.
- 141) *BT* 163.
- 142) *Ibid.*
- 143) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CVI, 213.
- 144) *BT* 237.
- 145) *BT* 227.
- 146) *Paris Talks* 18.
- 147) *The Bible, Mark*, 8: 36-38.
- 148) *Some Answered Questions* 220.
- 149) *Bahá'í World Faith*, 382.
- 150) *Ibid.*
- 151) *MB* Vol. 2, 86.
- 152) *Ibid.*
- 153) *Ibid.*
- 154) *Ibid.*
- 155) *MB* Vol. 2, 87.
- 156) *Ibid.*
- 157) *Bahá'í World Faith* 383.
- 158) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* from the Arabic, # 3.

- 159) *Bahá’í World Faith* 383.
- 160) *Ibid.*
- 161) See Kluge “*The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá’í Writings.*”
- 162) *BN* 57.
- 163) *BT* 264.
- 164) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* V, 9. See also XXV, 60; XXXV, 82; LXIV, 122.
- 165) *Some Answered Questions* 113.
- 166) *Some Answered Questions* 148. See also *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* XCIII, 187; XCIV, 193.
- 167) *BT* 269.
- 168) *BT* 266.
- 169) *Ibid.*
- 170) *Ibid.*
- 171) *Ibid.*
- 172) *BT* 269.
- 173) *BT* 267.
- 174) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* XCIII, 185.
- 175) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* XC, 178.
- 176) *The Bible, Deuteronomy, 29:4.*
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The Tablet to Hardegg (Lawḥ-i-Hirtík)

A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to the Templar Leader Georg David Hardegg¹

introduced and translated by Stephen Lambden

Mírzá Ḥusayn 'Alí Núrí entitled Bahá'u'lláh (the “Splendor of God”, 1817-1892) Who founded the Bahá'í Faith in the middle of the 19th century, addressed a number of scriptural tablets (*alwáh*) to Christians during the latest, West Galilean (Acre = Ar. 'Akká') period of His religious ministry (1868-1892 CE). Most notably His *Lawḥ-i-Páp* (Tablet to Pope Pius IXth c.1869) and *Lawḥ-i-Aqdas* (“Most Holy Tablet,” late 1870s?) which was most probably addressed to (“Dr.”) Fáris Effendi who had been converted to the Bahá'í religion by Mullá Muhammad Nabíl-i-Zarandí (1831-1892) in Alexandria (in 1868).

It is now clear that the letter of Bahá'u'lláh commonly referred to as the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík* was also addressed to a Christian named Georg David Hardegg (=Hirtík) (1812-1879). During the time of Bahá'u'lláh's imprisonment in 'Akká', Hardegg was the leader of the *Tempelgesellschaft* (Association of Templars [alternatively, 'Templars']) community in Haifa.

On first coming to know something of the nature of the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík* through the note on it in 'Abd al-Ḥamíd Ishráq Khávarí's *Ganj-i-sháygán*,² (and since it had not been published), I wrote to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa requesting a copy for detailed study. On receipt of a typed copy (cf. text below) I began to try to work out what the consonants H-R-T-K might signify, as they were evidently neither indicative of an Arabic nor a Persian construction. Ignoring the pointing and guessing that it might indicate the name of the recipient of the letter, the name Hardegg eventually sprang to mind. I then consulted Moojan Momen's *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* and was delighted to find that what was obviously a very garbled translation of the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík* had been forwarded by the missionary Rev. John Zeller (c.1830-1902) to the English Church Missionary Society and identified as a letter of Bahá'u'lláh to Hardegg.³ Furthermore, as Zeller's letter forwarding Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík* was dated July 8 1872, it may be inferred that the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík* was written between late 1868 (when both Bahá'u'lláh and Hardegg arrived in 'Akká' and Haifa respectively) and 8th July 1872. It was thus most probably between late 1871 and early 1872 (=1288-1289 AH) that Bahá'u'lláh addressed this Tablet to the Templar leader.

Hardegg and the Tempelgesellschaft

The *Tempelgesellschaft* was founded by the German theologian and polemicist Christoph Hoffmann (b. Leonberg 1815 d. Jerusalem 1885) whose religious orientation was rooted in German Pietism of an highly chiliastic nature. Influenced by the belief that God's judgement and the parousia ('presence', return) of Christ were at hand, and critical of the “conventional Christianity” of his day, he came, whilst residing in Ludwigsberg in the early 1850's, to advocate the creation of the “people of God” (*Ger. das Volk Gottes*). He was apparently influenced either by events of the Crimean War (1853-6) or the belief that the Ottoman Empire was crumbling, in such a way that he conceived the idea that he and his people might become heirs to the

biblical promises. He elaborated a theory centering upon the [Jerusalem] Temple and its restoration and dreamed of a mass emigration to Palestine.

In 1854 such visionary ideas led Hoffmann to establish the *Gesellschaft für Sammlung des Volkes Gottes in Jerusalem* (The Association for the Assembling of God's People in Jerusalem). In this he was aided by his associate Georg David Hardegg a native and merchant of Ludwigsberg, who had turned to mysticism after being imprisoned for revolutionary activities. By the mid-1850s Hoffmann and Hardegg had managed to enlist around 10,000 members. An attempt was made via the Frankfurt Assembly to petition Sultan 'Abd al-Majid (Ottoman Sultan from 1839-1861) for permission to settle in Palestine. This petition failed and the members of the association had to content themselves with the establishment of a settlement near Marbach (1856). Four of the leaders of the movement, including Hoffmann and Hardegg, visited Palestine in 1858. To some extent they came to realize the largely impractical nature of their eschatologically oriented ambitions. Then, in 1859, the leaders of "God's people" were formally expelled from the National Evangelical Church. Consequently, in 1861, they set up their own distinctive religious body at Kirschenhardhof, the *Deutsche Tempel* (The German Temple). Hoffmann acted as spiritual leader and Hardegg as provisional secular leader, with an advisory council of 12 elders.

By 1867, numbers had dwindled to just 3,000, including women and children. Despite this, in 1868 a group of Templer families made an abortive attempt to settle in the Nahalal area. Though by this time a bitter antagonism had come to exist between Hoffmann and Hardegg, it was decided to emigrate to Palestine and attempt to gain support for the movement from there. Thus, both Hoffmann and Hardegg arrived at Haifa on the 30th of October 1868. They began establishing, amidst considerable local opposition and difficulty, an initially agricultural settlement. A few dozen Templer families from Württemberg (S. Germany) settled at the foot of the western cape of Mt. Carmel. According to Katz they were "joined by kindred families of German origin from southern Russia, and by some who had emigrated to America and become citizens, mainly from New York state" (Katz 1994:263).

In 1869 Hoffmann migrated to Jaffa where he came to establish a school and a hospital. By 1874 the breach between Hoffmann and Hardegg was such that the latter founded his own Temple Unity having gained the support of about one third of the perhaps 200 (?) members of the Haifa community. These supporters of Hardegg subsequently returned to the (German) Evangelistic Church, though the Haifa Templers under new leadership continued to prosper. They contributed notably to the modernization and improvement of local Haifa conditions. Despite sometimes marked local opposition from Muslims and Christian Arabs, the number of Haifa Templers rose from about 300 in the early 1880s to around 750 at the time of the outbreak of the First World War (1914).⁵

Among the letters contained in J. M. Emerson's travelogue entitled *New York to the Orient* (1886) is one that includes details about local circumstances in Haifa and Acre including the position of the "German Colony" (=Templars):

One of the most noteworthy and interesting features of Haifa is the settlement here of group of Germans, known as the German Colony. They came here some twenty-five years ago, being prompted to emigrate thither by a religious sentiment. There are three distinct colonies of them in Palestine—at Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa—consisting of about one thousand members. The colony here [at Haifa] numbers some three hundred persons, and they are in many respects a remarkable people. The appearance of the part of the city they occupy is in striking contrast with the main town in that it is regularly laid out, and is

clean and orderly. These colonists are the only people who have ever come to live in Palestine who are self-supporting. (Emmerson 1887:113).⁶

Hardegg and the Bahá'í religion

As previously indicated, Bahá'u'lláh, along with over 60 followers and members of His family, arrived as prisoners at 'Akká' on August 31st 1868 some 40 days before Hoffmann and Hardegg arrived at Haifa to found their colony. Though at first subject to strict confinement within the barracks as decreed by Sulṭán 'Abd al-'Azíz, He had, by late 1871, managed to establish Himself in the house of 'Údí Khammár in the heart of the Christian quarter of 'Akká'. From there, Bahá'u'lláh succeeded in gaining the devotion of a number of local notables, including Shaykh Maḥmúd 'Arrábí (d. late 1890s, later Muftí of 'Akká').

Hardegg came into contact with the Bahá'ís in Haifa and 'Akká' before Bahá'u'lláh's move to the House of 'Údí Khammár. Jakob Schumacher (1825-1891; American consular agent for Haifa and Acre for almost twenty years), a naturalized American citizen of German origin (Katz, 1994:120) and Templer who became head of the Haifa colony after Hardegg, wrote the following (partially cited) letter published in the official Templer publication *Süddeutsche Warte* of June 29 1871:

I can give notice of yet another spiritual phenomenon which can strengthen our belief. This concerns 70 Persians, who have been banished to 'Akká' on account of their beliefs. Mr. Hardegg has already spent considerable time and effort trying to discover the actual basis of their belief, and had dealings with them through an interpreter just yesterday. (cited Momen, op. cit., 236).

Shortly after the publication of Schumacher's note on the Bahá'ís, an article by Hardegg himself, dated June 15 1871, was published in the same organ of the Templers for 20 July 1871. This article provides some details of Hardegg's efforts to understand Bahá'í doctrine and history. Hardegg also refers to an interview he had in 'Akká' on 2 June 1871 with Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), having failed to gain an interview with Bahá'u'lláh himself. He also notes his contacts with the Bahá'ís of Haifa and records his impression that "these people, despite all the obscurity of their knowledge, were seeking the truth" (cited, Momen, *ibid*, 237). Hardegg most likely made other trips to 'Akká' in order to investigate Bahá'í beliefs and attempt to interest or convert the Bahá'ís to Christianity.

The missionary James J. Huber (1826-1893), who resided at Nazareth during the 1870s, has recorded in a letter dated November 28 1872 that Hardegg had invited him to accompany him on a visit to the 'Akká' Bahá'ís. They travelled together to 'Akká' in October 1872 having been promised an interview with Bahá'u'lláh by some of the Bahá'ís. Perhaps as a result of Bahá'u'lláh's withdrawal in the house of 'Údí Khammár following Bahá'í-Azalí tensions and the misdeeds of certain Bahá'ís which culminated in the murder of several Azalís.⁷

Hardegg's desire to gain an interview with Bahá'u'lláh has been referred to by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in a scriptural Tablet (*Lawḥ*) which was perhaps written around 1875 and addressed to Ḥájjí Mírzá Ḥaydar 'Alí Isfahání (d. Haifa 1920) (cf. Ganj, 172-3). In it Bahá'u'lláh stated that all the [Holy] Books "make mention of the appearance of the Promised One in the Holy Land". He alludes to the Templers who came from afar to settle in the regions of the blessed Holy Land. Calling to mind the well-known German Templer inscription *Der Herr ist nahe* [1871], meaning, "God is nigh" (cf. Ruhe, op. cit. 193n) the Templers are represented as having said *zuhúr nazdík ast*, "The theophany [manifestation] is nigh and we have come that we might attain unto it (his presence)." Nevertheless, Bahá'u'lláh adds, they remain in great heedlessness.

None of the Templers had become Bahá’ís. Reference is then made to Hardegg and to the writing or revelation of the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík*:

A few years ago their leader [Hardegg] desired to attain [My] presence but this request did not find acceptance in the most-holy court.⁸ Nonetheless, a sublime and Most-Holy scriptural Tablet (Lawḥ-i-amna’-i-aqdas) was specifically sent down for him. In that Tablet was established that which enableth every righteous one to attain salvation and every wayfarer to reach the goal. Yet the confirmation of the utterance, “Let none touch it save those who are pure” was manifest for they did not attain even a drop of the ocean of its significances. (cited Ganj, 172-3)

Though Bahá’u’lláh represents the 19th century Templers as a people who failed to understand or respond to his message, the Bahá’ís seem to have had cordial relations with them. Bahá’u’lláh Himself, on several occasions, perhaps had personal contact with them in the course of His several trips to Haifa during the 1880s and early 1890s.

The Lawḥ-i-Hirtík*

[I]

In the name of God, the Most Holy.

[1]

Thy sealed letter arrived before the Wronged One.

[2]

There from did We catch a fragrance of thy sincerity towards God,
the Protector, the Self-Subsisting.

[3]

We entreat God that He might inform thee of that which is
concealed in an inscribed Tablet;

[4]

might enable thee to hearken
unto the cooing of the Dove upon the branches

[5]

and the murmuring of the Water of Life
which hath flowed with Wisdom and Explanation
from the spring of the Will of the King of Existence.

[II]

[1]

O beloved one!

It is necessary that thine eminence contemplate the Word of God,
the grandeur and sweetness of which sufficeth all the worlds.

[2]

The first of those who believed in the Spirit [Jesus]
was enraptured by the Word of his Lord
and through it turned and believed, detached from whatsoever
the people possess.

* This is a provisional translation for presentation and discussion at 'Irfán Colloquia. It is not to be reproduced or further distributed in any form or medium.

[3]

Such action is incumbent upon the
fishes of the Most Great Ocean.

[III]

[1]

O Thou informed mystic knower
and insightful religious leader!

[2]

Know thou that base passion hath hindered most mortals
from turning their faces unto God, the King of Names.

[3]

Such, however, as gaze with the eye of insight,
shall bear witness and seeing, exclaim,
'Praise be unto my Lord, the Most Exalted.'

[4]

Land and sea hath rejoiced at the Beneficence of God.

[5]

The nations were given the promise regarding
the appearance of the Healer of Infirmities.
He, assuredly, is the expected Builder of the Temple.

[6]

Blessed be such as are possessed of mystic knowledge.

[7]

When the appointed time came, Carmel cried out,
trembling as if shaken by the breezes of the Lord,
'Blessed be such as hearken!'

[8]

Should anyone incline with the ear of the inner nature,
the same would assuredly hear the cry from the Rock.

[9]

It, verily, proclaimeth in a most elevated voice
and beareth witness unto the Eternal God.

[10]

Blessed be such as catch a fragrance of the Utterance
and turn unto the Kingdom,
detached from the contingent world.

[11]

When that which is mentioned in the Holy Books
hath come to pass,
thou shalt see the people beholding but not understanding.

[IV]

[1]

O beloved one!
Behold the mystery of reversal
on account of the symbol of the Ruler
for He hath made their exalted ones their lowly ones
and their lowly ones their exalted ones.

[2]

And call thou to mind the fact that when Jesus came
He was rejected by the divines, the learned and the educated.

[3]

He who was a mere fisherman [Peter],
on the other hand, entered the Kingdom.

[4]

This is the mystery of what was mentioned
in the heart of the words
by means of intimations and allusions.

[V]

[1]

Great, great is the Cause!
Peter the Apostle,
in spite of his excellence and the eminence of his station,
held back his tongue when asked about it.

[2]

Shouldst thou consider sincerely
what hath heretofore come to pass,
for the sake of the Lord alone,
thou wilt assuredly see the Light shining before thine eyes.

[3]

The Truth is too manifest to be wrapped up in veils,
the Path too open to be enveloped in darkness
and the Certainty too evident to be obscured by doubts.

[4]

Those who have been held back are the ones who have
followed their lusts and are today slumbering, sleeping.

[5]

They shall wake up and run around but find no place to hide.

[6]

Blessed be such as catch the fragrance of Truth,
then awaken, that they might attain whatsoever the sincere
servants attained.

[VI]

[1]

Know thou that We saw the exterior letter *ṣád*
in the word "Peace" (Ar. *ṣulḥ*).

[2]

It, verily, was adorned with
the ornament of the upright letter "A" (*alif*)
and is what hath assuredly been mentioned
in an Outspread Tablet.

[3]

And upon the manifestation of the lights of
that Divine Word,
the Gate of Heaven was opened
and the Kingdom of Names appeared.

[4]

And this matter was completed through the letter “H” (*há*)
after which it was united to the leveled letter “A” (*alif*)
which was adorned with the Point (of the letter “B,” *bá*)
from which the Treasured Name, the Hidden Mystery
and the Guarded Symbol (*Bahá’*) emerged.

[5]

It, verily, is the Point
from which existence hath appeared
and unto which it hath returned.

[VII]

[1]

Then We saw the Word which uttered a Word
which every community found to be according to its own
tongue and language.

[2]

When that Word was uttered,
a Sun shone forth from the Horizon of its Announcement,
the Lights of which eclipsed the sun of the heavens.

[3]

It said,
‘The head of the seventy
hath been adorned
with the crown of the forty
and been united with
the seven before the ten.’

[4]

Then it lamented and it said,
‘What is this that I see?
The house doth not recognize its master
neither doth the son pay heed unto his father;
nor likewise is the hopeful seeker cognizant of his
place of refuge and haven.’

[VIII]

[1]

O thou who soarest in
the atmosphere of mystic knowledge!

[2]

Whoso knoweth the one in whose Logos-Person
what floweth yet exhibiteth solidity;

[3]

what soareth yet is at rest;

[4]

what is manifest yet concealed

[5]

and what is resplendent yet veiled,

[6]

shall be seized by the attraction of the divine Effulgences
to such an extent that he will fly on the wings of yearning
in the atmosphere of nearness, holiness and reunion.

[IX]

[1]

With regard to that which thine eminence hath mentioned
concerning the darkness.

[2]

We bear witness that it hath encompassed the creatures.

[3]

Blessed be he who hath been illumined by the Light
which shineth forth from
the horizon of the Mercy of his Lord, the Most Holy.

[4]

The darkness is the vain imaginings by virtue of which
the people were prevented from turning towards the Kingdom
when the King of the Divine Realm
appeared with the Cause of God.

[X]

[1]

As for what thou hast mentioned,
that a certain person hath supposed
that there are no differences between Us
with regard to the Spirit [Jesus].

[2]

This is indeed the truth inasmuch as the Spirit [Jesus]
is sanctified beyond being overwhelmed by differences
or encompassed by symbolic expressions.

[3]

He, verily, is the Light of Oneness among mankind
and the sign of the Ancient of Days among the peoples.

[4]

He who turneth unto Him [Jesus]
hath turned unto He [God]
who sent Him [Jesus]
and he who rejecteth Him hath
rejected He who caused Him
to be made manifest and to speak forth.

[5]

He hath ever been what He was
and will ever remain the same as what He was;
only the Effulgence of His theophany in the Mirrors
varies on account of Their different forms and colors.

[XI]

[1]

O beloved one!
Should a hint of the secret which was veiled in mystery be disclosed,
the hearts of those who cling unto what they possess
and cast away what is with God would be thrown into confusion.

[2]

If thine eminence would ponder upon what We have set forth for thee

and rise up according to what hath been mentioned with the greatest steadfastness,
there would, verily, be manifest from thee what was previously made manifest.

[XII]

[1]

O beloved one!

This Bird is ensnared betwixt
the talons of oppression and hypocrisy,
and seest no nest wherein He might dwell
nor any retreat unto which he might wing his way.

[2]

In such a state doth He summon mankind unto everlasting life.

[3]

Blessed be the attentive ear!

We ask God that He might bring us together in the same place
and might assist us in what He loveth
and is well-pleasing unto Him.

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Notes

- 1) This article and the provisional translation of the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík* was first published in the *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* vol. 2/1 (June 1983), 32-63 (© Hurqalya Publications). It has been very slightly revised since that time. This printing is without the detailed commentary which can be found in revised and expanded form on the author's (forthcoming) personal website which contains an electronic reprint of the whole *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* (1982).
- 2) Refer, *Ganj*, 172-3. Here Ishráq Khávarí mistakenly identifies the followers of the recipient of the *Lawḥ-i-Hirtík* with the Millerites, the followers of William Miller (1782-1849 CE).
- 3) Refer Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*. 216-8.
- 4) In 1871 Hardegg's son Ernst became US consular agent in Jaffa. There he remained in office until 1909 when he resigned at the age of 70 (Kark, 1994:114).
- 5) On the Tempelgesellschaft refer to the entries in the bibliography below and Whitley, 'Friends of the Temple,' in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (6:141-2; Kolb, 'Friends of the Temple'; Ussishkin, 'Templers (Tempelgesellschaft)' Enc. Judaica" 15:994-996 (this article is especially useful for details on 20th century Templer history); Carmel, *Die Siedlungen*; idem, 'The German Settlers in Palestine...' 442-465; cf. also Oliphant, *Haifa or Life in Modern Palestine*, 17ff; Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í religions* 215f, 503, 506f, 521. For some useful information on contacts between Bahá'ís and Templers see Ruhe, *Door of Hope*, index.
- 6) A recent booklet put out by the Haifa Tourist Board entitled, 'Bahá'í Shrine and Gardens on Mount Carmel, Haifa-Israel' contains two pages which illustrate the Haifa project, "the restoration and development of the main axis of the German Templar Colony". This small booklet contains some excellent photographs and details about the 19th century Templer building project and its anticipated restoration.
- 7) The Azalis are the followers of Bahá'u'lláh's younger half-brother Mírzá Yahyá (c.1830-1914) who was entitled Subh-i Azal (The Morn of Eternity) and had been exiled to Cyprus from Turkey in 1868.
- 8) The interview with Bahá'u'lláh did not materialise. Instead Hardegg and Huber conversed with 'Abdu'l-Bahá' (cf. Momen, op. cit., 218).

The Tablet of the Bell (*Lawḥ-i-Náqús*) of Bahá'u'lláh

or The Tablet of “Praised Be Thou, O ‘He’!”

(*Lawḥ-i-Subhánaka yá Hu[wa]*)

introduced and translated by Stephen Lambden

Introductory note

Miscellaneous Bahá'í sources indicate that the wholly Arabic *Lawḥ-i-náqús* (“Tablet of the Bell”) or (after the constant refrain) *Lawḥ-i-subhánaka yá-hú* (“Tablet of Praised be Thou, O He!) is to be dated to 1280/1863 CE or to the period of Bahá'u'lláh's residence in Istanbul (Constantinople). The title *Lawḥ-i-náqús* derives from the words “Strike the Bell” (*sing. náqús*) in the opening (post introductory) line (see below). Bahá'u'lláh wrote this work in his own hand on the evening of the (lunar) celebration of the declaration of the Báb on the 5th of *Jumádí al-Awwál* 1280 AH = October 19th 1863 CE. It was apparently on that occasion that Áqá Muhammad 'Alí Tambaku Furush-i-Işfahání precipitated this revelation through the intermediary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (letter of Shoghi Effendi to Mírzá Badí'u'lláh Ágahabadihi. cited *Ganj*, 71; *Revelation of Bahá'u'llah* 2:18).

The non-qur'anic Arabic loan-word *náqús* derives from (Christian) Aramaic-Syriac (*naposha/naqqús*) and indicates a pierced wooden clapper-board which had a gong or bell-like function in making a noise when hit with a stick. It was used in Eastern Christian regions for calling the faithful to worship or to other religious functions. Around (Eastern) Christian churches the *naqqús* was sounded or clapped and, like the Islamic *mu'adhdhin*, called the faithful to assemble for prayer. Perhaps this sound was heard by Bahá'u'lláh around Christian churches in Istanbul.

In Bábí-Bahá'í scripture and Shí'í/Shaykhí literatures there are various references to the eschatological *náqús*. In a number of His Writings Bahá'u'lláh personifies Himself as the “Bell” (*náqús*) which summons the faithful to enter the Abhá paradise or Kingdom of God (the Bahá'í Faith). His Revelation is the ringing of the “Bell” of his Person which invites humankind to the assemblage of paradise. One may recall, for example, the following opening lines from the second Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Napoleon III:

O King of Paris! Tell the priest to ring the bells (lit. ‘strike the clapper-boards’ = nawáqís) no longer. By God, the True One! The Most Mighty Bell (al-náqús al-afkham = Bahá'u'lláh) hath appeared in the form of Him Who is the Most Great Name (al-ism al-a'zam), and the fingers of the will of Thy Lord, the Most Exalted, the Most High, toll it out in the heaven of Immortality, in His name, the All-Glorious (al-abhá) . . .

trans. Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day is Come*, 29

In making the following tentative provisional translation I have consulted the Arabic texts of the *Lawḥ-i-náqús* published in *Adí'ah-yi hadrat-i-mahbúb* (Cairo 1339/1920-1) 141-153 and *Risálih-yi ayyám-i-tis'ih* (rep. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1981) 100-106 as well as various

unpublished manuscripts. I have also benefited from consulting the previous translations of ‘Alí Kuli Khan and Marzieh Gail (unpublished) and that of Denis MacEoin (*Rituals in Bábism and Bahá’ism* [London 1994] App. XXVI, pp. 169-172). The following translation is not, however, based upon a critically established text nor is it in any way superior to those just mentioned. As the translation is fairly literal it will at times be virtually identical to previous renderings.

In diverse ways and in cryptic, mystical, Sufistic language Bahá’u’lláh celebrates the power of His recently, Ridván-intimated (late April early May 1863) theophanic status. As the secreted “Monk of the Divine Unicity”, He is bidden by God to go some way toward disclosing His being a supreme heavenly Maiden possessed of the power of divine revelation.

In line [3] and elsewhere in the *Lawḥ-i-náqús*, Bahá’u’lláh alludes to that portion of the *Súrat al-huriyya* (‘Súra of the Maiden,’ the 29th sura of the *Qayyúm al-asmá’* mid. 1844 CE) in which the Báb makes reference to the partial yet stunning theophanic disclosure of a veiled, silken clad houri characterised by resplendent beauty (*al-bahá*). Both lines 4 and 5, furthermore seem to allude, for example, to the person of Bahá’u’lláh as a conjunction or incarnation of the letters “B and “H” which constitute that Beauty-Splendour (*Bahá*) which, according to a well-known prophetic *hadíth* (greatly beloved of Rúzbihán Baqlí Shírází d.1209 CE) is his pre-existent Reality—the Prophet Muhammad is reckoned to have said “The Red Rose is expressive of the Beauty-Splendour of God” (*al-ward al-aḥmar min bahá’ Alláh*).

Lawḥ-i-Náqús*

[0]

He is the Almighty

[1]

This [Tablet] is the Meadow of Paradise
wherein the melody of God,
the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting,
hath been exalted.

[2]

Therein hath Houris [Maidens] of Eternity (*huriyyát al-khuld*)
been empowered whom none hath touched save God,
the Almighty, the Sanctified.

[3]

Therein doth the Nightingale of Eternal Subsistence
warble upon the branches of
the Lote-Tree of the Extremity (*sidrat al-muntahá*)
with such a melody as hath
bedazzled discerning souls (*al-‘uqúl*).

[4]

Therein is that through which the poor and needy (*al-fuqará’*)
are made to approach
the shore of independent self-sufficiency (*shatí al-ghaná’*)
and the people obtain guidance unto the Word of God (*kalimát Alláh*). [5]

[5]

Such, indeed, is the certain Truth!

[1]

In Thy Name “He”
for Thou, verily, art “He,” O “He”!
O Monk of the Divine Unicity! (*ráhib al-aḥadiyya*)
Strike the Bell! (*al-náqús*)

* This is a provisional translation for presentation and discussion at 'Irfán Colloquia. It is not to be reproduced or further distributed in any form or medium.

for the Day of God hath been realized
and the Beauty of the Divine Might (*jamál al-'izz*)
been enthroned upon a Throne of Luminous Holiness.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[2]

O Húd of the Verdict! (*al-ḥukm*)
Sound the Bugle (*al-náqúr*)
in the name of God, the Mighty, the Noble,
for the Embodiment of Sanctity (*haykal al-quḍs*)
hath been established upon a Mighty,
Transcendent Seat (*kursí*).

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[3]

O Countenance Eternally Subsistent! (*ṭal'at al-baqá'*)
Pluck with the Fingertips of the Spirit (*anámil al-rúḥ*)
upon a wondrous, holy Rebec (*rabáb*)
for the Beauty of the Divine Ipseity (*jamál al-huwiyya*)
is manifested in resplendent silken attire.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[4]

O Angel of Light! (*malak al-núr*)
Sound the trumpet (*al-súr*)
in this theophany (*al-ṣuhúr*)
for the letter "H" (*al-há'*) rideth
upon a mighty, pre-existent letter ["B"] (*bi-harf 'izz qadím*).

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[5]

O Nightingale of Resplendence! (*‘andálib al-saná’*)
Warble upon the twigs in this Ridwán
according to the Name of the One Beloved (*al-ḥabíb*)
for the Roseate Beauty (*jamál al-ward*)
hath been manifested from behind a thick curtain.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[6]

O Nightingale of Paradise! (*bulbul al-firdaws*)
Sing out upon the branches in this wondrous era (*zamán badí’*)
for God hath divulged himself (*tajalla Alláh*)
unto all that inhabit the created dominion (*al-mulk*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[7]

O Bird of Eternity! (*ṭayr al-baqá’*)
Speed in this expanse (*al-hawá’*)
for the Bird of Fidelity (*ṭayr al-wafá’*)
hath flown in a munificent, divinely intimate firmament (*fada’*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[8]

O Denizens of Paradise! (*ahl al-firdaws*)
Hallow ye and chant with the most beautiful,
sweet voice for the melody of God (*naghmat Alláh*)
hath been uplifted from beyond an elevated,
sanctified Pavilion (*surádiq*).

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[9]

O Denizens of the Kingdom! (*ahl al-malakut*)
Chant ye in the Name of the Beloved One (*al-maḥbúb*)
for the Beauty of the Cause (*jamál al-amr*)
hath sparkled forth from behind
ornamented, luminous veils.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[10]

O Denizens of the Kingdom of Divine Names! (*malakút al-asmá'*)
Ornament ye the very uttermost Heights (*rafárif al-aqsá'*) [of Paradise]
for the Greatest Name hath ridden upon
a sanctified, mighty Cloud.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[11]

O Denizens of the Omnipotent Kingdom of Divine Attributes (*ahl jabarút al-sifát*)
in the Abhá horizon! (*ufuq al-abhá'*)
Be ye prepared for the Encounter with God (*liqá' Alláh*)
for the sanctified breezes (*nasmát al-quds*)
hath wafted from the Hidden Retreat of the Divine Essence (*makman al-dhát*)
which is indeed a manifest Bounty.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[12]

O Riḍwán of the Divine Unicity! (*riḍwán al-ahadiyya*)
Be enraptured within thyself

The Tablet of the Bell

for the Riḍwán of God (*Riḍwán Alláh*),
the Exalted, the Powerful, the All-Knowing
hath been made manifest.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[13]

O Heaven of Might! (*samá’ al-‘izz*)
Render thanks unto God in thy very being
for the Heaven of Sanctity (*samá’ al-quds*)
hath been raised up in that Firmament (*hawá’*)
which is a subtly refined heart (*qalb latíf*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[14]

O Sun of the worldly dominion! (*shams al-mulk*)
Eclipse thy countenance
for the Sun of Eternal Subsistence (*shams al-baqá’*)
hath shed splendor from a horizon
which is a brilliant Dawn.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[15]

O Earth of gnosis! (*ard al-ma’rifa*)
Engulf thy mystic learning (*ma’árif*)
for the Earth of Gnosis (*ard al-ma’rifa*)
hath been expanded through the Logos-Self of God (*nafs Alláh*),
the Transcendent, the Mighty, the Munificent.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[16]

O Lamp of the worldly dominion! (*siráj al-mulk*)
Extinguish thy very self, for the Lamp of God (*siráj Alláh*)
hath radiated within the Niche of Eternity (*mishkat al-baqá’*)
illuminating thereby the inhabitants of the heavens and of the earth.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[17]

O oceans of the earth!
Be stilled of thy tempestuous waves
for the Crimson Sea (*al-bahr al-ahmar*)
surgeth through an innovative directive (*bi-amr badí’*)

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[18]

O Peacock of the divine Oneness! (*táwús al-ahadiyya*)!
Shriek out within the thicket of the divine realm (*ajamat al-láhút*)
for the melody of God (*naghmat Alláh*)
hath become evident from every divinely proximate locale.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[19]

O Bird of Perpetuity! (*dík al-ṣamadiyya*)!
Be muted in the thicket of the Omnipotent Realm (*ajamat al-jabarút*)
for the Crier of God (*munádí Alláh*)
crieth out from every unassailable locale (*shatr maní’*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

The Tablet of the Bell

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[20]

O Concourse of enraptured lovers! (*malá’ al-ushsháq*)

Good news for thy selves

in that the separation (*al-firáq*)

is completed and the promised Testament (*al-mitháq*)

hath come to pass;

the Loved One (*al-ma’shúq*) hath been manifested

with a mighty, transcendent Beauty (*jamál ‘izz maní’*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[21]

O Concourse of Gnostic initiates! (*malá’ al-irfán*)

Rejoice within thine inner realities for era of Renunciation (*al-hijrán*) is terminated,

certitude (*al-íqán*) is realized

and the Beauty of the Youth (*jamál al-ghulám*)

hath beamed forth with an holy ornament (*bi-taraz al-quds*)

in a Paradise of matchless name (*firdaws ism makín*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[22]

Praised be Thou, O my God,

I supplicate Thee by Thy [eschatological] Day (*yawm*)

through which all [previous] Days have been raised up

and in view of the fact that through It

[matters rooted in] primordial (*al-awwalín*) and latter day

[eschatological] (*al-akharín*) eras

have been brought to account.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[23]

And by Thy Name which Thou didst make a Sovereign
in the Omnipotent sphere of Names (*jabarút al-asmá'*)
as well as a Judge (*hákím*) over
whomsoever are in the heavens and on the earth[s].

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

By this means make Thou such persons to be independent (*aghniyá'*)
of all except Thee, associated with Thee
and detached from whatsoever is other than Thee
for Thou indeed art One Powerful, Mighty, Compassionate.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[24]

Do Thou make them, O my God,
to be such as give assent to Thy Singleness (*wahdáníyya*)
and who willingly concede Thy Uniqueness (*firdáníyya*)
in such wise that they shall witness nothing but Thine Own Logos-Self
and envision none but Thee.
In this respect Thou, verily, art One Powerful, Mighty.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[25]

Establish then in their hearts, O my Beloved,
the fiery warmth of Thy love
in such measure that it may burn away
the remembrance of all save Thee.
This such that they may witness within themselves
that Thou hath ever been in the Sublime Apex of Eternity,

The Tablet of the Bell

that there hath never been anything alongside Thee,
and that Thou art now the like of what Thou hath ever been.
No god is there except Thee, the Munificent.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[26]

If such of Thy servants as desire to scale
the heights of Thy Divine Unity (*tawhíd*)
should content themselves with the mention of aught besides Thee,
confirmation of their realization of the Divine Oneness (*hukm al-tawhíd*)
would never be ratified
neither would the mode of the Divine Uniqueness (*simat al-tafríd*)
be truly affirmed within their being.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[27]

So praised be Thou, O our God! O my God!
given this situation do Thou send down from the clouds of Thy Mercy
that which will purify the breasts of Thy lovers
and that which will sanctify the hearts of such as are enraptured by Thee.
Then exalt them through Thy loftiness
and render them triumphant over such as inhabit the earth.
This indeed is what Thou promised Thy beloved ones
through Thine indubitable utterance,
“We desire to shower Our favour (*mann*) upon
such as are enfeebled on earth
and to make them leaders [Imams] (*a’imma*)
and to make them Our heirs (*al-wáarithín*)” (Qur’án 28:5).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

The Tablet of Maqsúd (Lawḥ-i-Maqsúd)

Guidance on human nature and leadership

Ramin Neshati

Introduction

The Tablet of Maqsúd is a monumentally significant missive in the corpus of Bahá'u'lláh's revelatory texts.¹ It is addressed to a certain Mírzá Maqsúd, a Persian Bahá'í residing in Syria. In this Tablet, transcribed² by Mírzá Áqá Ján circa late-1881³ at Bahjí, Bahá'u'lláh amalgamates advice and admonition drawn from earlier tablets with some uniquely instructive pronouncements on a host of noteworthy topics including human potential and its efflorescence through the knowledge of God, the achievement of peace by means of disarmament, the demand that leadership and political statesmanship be based on wisdom, equity and justice, and other related topics. As with most post-Aqdas era works, its tone is majestic and its themes are of universal significance and interest. Shoghi Effendi Rabbani numbered this Tablet as amongst those Bahá'u'lláh revealed to further explain the core precepts and principles of His teachings, to reiterate previously proclaimed truths and to augment some of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.⁴ In this paper, I intend to elaborate on some of Bahá'u'lláh's counsels and to examine their relevance vis-à-vis contemporary global circumstances. Following a synopsis of the Tablet, I will attempt to explore two of its overarching and inextricably-coupled concepts:

1. The innate nobility of human nature and the means for the full realization of its potential, and
2. The essential attributes of leadership, their relevance to the pursuit of justice and peace, and the duties devolved to a leader.

While these are not the only topics, nor do they comprise the sole arguments, of far-reaching interest advanced by Bahá'u'lláh in this weighty Tablet, yet they succinctly and comprehensively encapsulate its core message. Bahá'u'lláh touches on many intriguing topics which, owing to space constraints, will be omitted from this brief review to maintain focus on the selected themes.

Synopsis

The following is an abridged, sequential outline of the Tablet:

Prophets are necessary intermediaries between God and creation. Mankind stands in need of guidance from his creator, but God is invulnerable and self-sufficient. Without divine messengers humanity remains oblivious to the trust bestowed upon him. Mankind is recognized as the 'supreme Talisman' (*Tilism-i-a'zam*), but he needs divine education for his true worth to be uncovered and for his character to be polished and refined.

Bahá'u'lláh acknowledges the receipt of Maqsúd's letter after showering prolific praise upon Muḥammad, the prophet of Islam, and upon His kindred and companions.

Concerned about the dismal state of human affairs, Bahá'u'lláh regrets and is mystified by the irony of a heedless world turning a deaf ear to His healing message, while stigmatizing Him with mischief for its own misfortunes.

The graciousness and the unified action of world leaders are preconditions for justice. On a related note, reward and punishment form the twin pillars upon which world order is established and which usher in just and equitable conditions for all who dwell on earth.

Reaffirming the notion of collective security and the promotion of peace and tranquility, Bahá'u'lláh calls for a conclave of the world's rulers and statesmen, led by the 'Great Powers,' to put up a united front against nefarious and aggressive elements in society. Armaments are hence reduced and only maintained for defensive purposes. It is worth mentioning that He acknowledges the need for a deterrent force as a counter-balance to would-be rogue regimes.

Reflecting on the necessity for a universal language and script, instituted through a consultative process led by a representative group of scholars and leaders of thought, He makes its promulgation and promotion incumbent upon all 'men of insight.'

The exercise of justice, balanced by wisdom and common sense, is requisite to successful statesmanship.

Bahá'u'lláh underscores the plea for unity and the abandonment of discord, estrangement and the pursuit of selfish and self-preserving schemes.

Wisdom and common sense are the outcomes of consultation and compassion.

The pursuit of useful sciences, and not those that 'begin with words and end in words,' yield optimum benefits to the civilized world. In effect, Bahá'u'lláh puts a damper on ventures in mindless minutia such as those practiced by some Muslim ecclesiastics.

To avert injustice, moderation is mandatory upon all. This is especially applicable to those in positions of power and influence.

Tolerance and righteousness are required for a true understanding of divine mysteries.

Learning and wisdom are as eyes giving sight to the body of mankind.

Speech must be influential and penetrating. Words should accompany deeds and be moderated for best effect. Speech is endowed with a spirit and its misuse can be detrimental.

After responding to Maqúd's personal questions, Bahá'u'lláh ends the Tablet by urging and encouraging the adoption of a virtuous life.

Let us now inquire into the two aforementioned themes: the nobility of human nature, and the essential attributes and demands of leadership.

On human nature

Bahá'u'lláh hails mankind as the supreme talisman and reaffirms the divine conferral of a latent gift to every soul. The realization of human aptitude and potential—that is, the discovery of the latent gift—is contingent upon proper education. This education, by implication of a spiritual nature,⁵ is comprised of exhortations, guidance, instructions and teachings brought forth through the agency of the divine messengers, acting as intermediaries between the creator and the world of creation. The reason Bahá'u'lláh cites for the necessity of such an education is mankind's incapacity to fully comprehend (*idrák*) by himself that which is revealed in the heavenly books. Spiritual education is a fundamental and constant human need and does not vary with the appearance of successive messengers. Indeed, it is humanity's inability and impotence (*ghásir, ájiz*) to understand and comprehend the heavenly books sans the assistance

of God's prophets that gives rise to the need for his spiritual education. Man, whom Bahá'u'lláh has elsewhere termed 'the most noble of all creation' (*ashraf-i-makhlúqát*), is endued and entrusted with mysterious and latent gifts. The discovery of the possession and the full realization of that with which he is charged is not possible save through spiritual training and education. Bahá'u'lláh's emphasis on spiritual education through revealed religion is further augmented in the Tablet of Splendours, in particular the first Ishraq, where He says: "Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine."⁶

There is a delicate balance in Bahá'u'lláh's depiction of human nature: while man is termed the supreme talisman—the implication being that he trumps other forms of earthly life—yet in matters of the spirit he falls short in perception and understanding of the mystical realms by himself, and is in acute need of the assistance of divine messengers to fathom their inner meanings. Even in simple earthly matters, lacking such training, man is not immune from descending to base and beastly behavior. Commenting on this point, Abdul-Bahá brings to light that ". . . education is of three kinds: material, human and spiritual."⁷ The pinnacle of human achievement is the attainment of spiritual education, for it is through this alone that humanity can distinguish and differentiate itself from other forms of life. The role of the Educator is to impart divine knowledge so as to "educate the human reality that it may become the center of the divine appearance, to such a degree that the attributes and the names of God shall be resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man."⁸

What is the latent gift bestowed to mankind and what does the phrase supreme talisman signify? For the first answer, let us examine Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Words.⁹ As a representative sample (and not an exhaustive survey), we find that in the Arabic Hidden Words, number 12, He states: "O Son of Being! With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light." Again, in the Arabic Hidden Words, number 22 He says: "O Son of Spirit! Noble have I created thee . . ." and in number 69, He says: "O Ye Sons of Spirit! Ye are My treasury, for in you I have treasured the pearls of My mysteries and the gems of My knowledge." In the Persian Hidden Words, number 29, He states: "O Son of Bounty! Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of My command I made thee to appear, and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence of all created things." In His Will and Testament, Bahá'u'lláh declares: "Great and blessed is this Day—the Day in which all that lay latent in man hath been and will be made manifest. Lofty is the station of man were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast to the Cause."¹⁰ In the yet-to-be-translated Tablet to Manikjī, Bahá'u'lláh states (my provisional rendering): "The soul is the treasury of My Mystery; do not surrender it to avarice . . ." (*ján ganjīny-i rāz-i man ast ú rá bidast-i áz maspárid*).¹¹ Finally, in this and in other tablets of the same era, Bahá'u'lláh advises us to "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value."¹²

In the above passages, Bahá'u'lláh confirms the greatness of mankind and the nobility of his creation, yet He makes man's eminence conditional upon resolute faith in Him—in other words, spiritual training revealed through God's intermediaries. This notion is rooted in the Báb's Writings. In the Persian Bayán, commenting on man's inherent potentialities, He says: "Man's highest station, however, is attained through faith in God in every Dispensation and by acceptance of what hath been revealed by Him . . ."¹³ As for man being the supreme talisman, the reference has less to do with physical objects such as amulets (*hayákil*) and charms (*ahráz*), or to the science of gematria. Rather, it sustains the assertion that to everyone is given the potential to rise to the rank of the Perfect Man.¹⁴ Bábís and early Bahá'ís wore or carried with them

loquets, rings and other objects engraved with signs and symbols or containing fragments of holy writings, prayers and invocations expressly revealed for special occasions. These were deemed to have talismanic powers in repelling malevolent, evil spirits and in bringing protection and blessings to their bearer. In this Tablet, it is likely that Bahá'u'lláh uses talisman as a literary device to elevate the station of man to that of a higher form of life vested with mysterious elements—an enthralled being! The potential to rise above the baser self is only realized through spiritual education. In the Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh confirms that He has come to educate mankind “for naught but the protection of your own selves and the elevation of your stations.”¹⁵ He goes on to state that the mission of all the Prophets has been “to nurture the trees of human existence with the living waters of uprightness and understanding, that there may appear from them that which God hath deposited within their inmost selves . . . The purpose of these educators, in all they said and taught, was to preserve man’s exalted station.”¹⁶

We can deduce, therefore, that the latent gift bestowed to mankind is the ‘essence’ of divine Light, the ‘pearls’ of divine Mysteries and the ‘gems’ of divine Knowledge. In expounding on the purpose of creation, Bahá'u'lláh attests that it is for the attainment of the true understanding of God (*maqṣúd az áfarínish irfán-i ḥaq búdiḥ*).¹⁷

On leadership

Bahá'u'lláh’s poignant reflection on the state of human affairs, its forlorn leadership and its collective failure to settle conflicts peacefully and with due attention to justice, forms the other theme being examined in this brief review. There is an unambiguous connection between the demands of leadership with the disposition of those being led. Bahá'u'lláh’s sanguine vision for a peaceful, unified world is predicated on the graceful acquiescence of humanity to leadership that is itself informed by wisdom and humility, and driven with a keen sense of equity and justice.

The decades leading to the revelation of this Tablet were witness to violent clashes and conflicts around the world.¹⁸ The Great Powers of the time—Britain and Russia—were occupied with imposing their might and control far beyond their recognized borders. This rampant march of colonialism and the ensuing assertion of ethnic and nationalistic pride by those bearing the brunt of imperial exploitations was a major cause of regional unease.¹⁹ The self-serving, colonial games in which Britain, Russia, France and other major powers of the time indulged themselves heralded a rapid deterioration in the plight of the subjugated masses. Economically, conditions were slowly but surely improving for a greater share of the people in the West. As industrial expansion picked up steam and the decline of feudalism and dynastic rule gave way to more liberal and democratic governance, a renewed sense of optimism pervaded some Western nations and with it the hopeful signs of equitable and egalitarian prospects for a greater share of their denizens. The same, sadly, did not hold true for the rest of the world. In this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh expresses disappointment that the din and noise of wars and revolutions have drowned out His healing message. He calls for the establishment of a global conclave of world leaders to collectively engage in reforms, to cohesively put out rogue and unjust aggression, to consistently trim offensive armaments, retaining only minimal amounts necessary for defensive purposes, and to coherently promote universal peace (the ‘Great Peace’) through dialog and consultation. Bahá'u'lláh’s call is all-embracing and not hemmed in by the bounds of geographic or ethnic divides.

Over the past century we have witnessed the steady coalescence of the international community via the intercessions of the now-defunct League of Nations, the current United Nations (and its many affiliated agencies) as well as the various military and economic partnerships such

as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union, and so on.²⁰ These sputtering efforts at cooperation and the bringing together of human civilization have yielded a few tangible results. Among the pertinent examples of the united endeavors of world leaders is the manner in which conflicts have been dimmed in Europe and Africa, and more recently in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans and other trouble spots. Although not with entirely reliable or uniformly positive outcomes, yet most statesmen have taken resolute steps to address endemic global problems such as the alarming buildup of armaments, racism and discrimination, ethnic and religious tensions, environmental pollution and degradation, drug abuse, the rapid spread of deadly diseases, hunger and malnutrition, etcetera. They have introduced and maintained deterrents to curb the arbitrary belligerence of strongmen and dictators and have countered the naked aggression of some of the more flagrantly seditious tyrants and fanatics with decisive undertakings. In the process, they have come to fulfill Bahá'u'lláh's call that "Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him" (*agar malikí bar malikí bar khízad jamí' mottafighan bar man' ghíyám namáyand*).²¹ Their work is far from done but the machinery of communal action is in gear and, one would hope, irreversible—albeit at times faltering and beset with bias. Filtering the clashes and catastrophes of the past century through the lens of Bahá'u'lláh's predictions, we can begin to grasp the relevance and the urgency of His plea for impartial, graceful, just and balanced leadership.

In 1875 Abdul-Bahá penned a treatise known as "The Secret of Divine Civilization" addressed to the people and government of Persia.²² Referring to rulers who are known for their sense of justice and who champion the cause of human rights, Abdul-Bahá states that their station in the sight of God is second only to that of His prophets.²³ Abdul-Bahá recalls the horrific events of the Franco-Prussian War and laments over the senseless destructions and the tragic loss of human life. He is puzzled over mankind's inability to learn from these mistakes and expresses alarm at the invention of even deadlier armaments and instruments of warfare.²⁴ Appealing to the greatness of the Persian nation by alluding to its pre-Islamic glory, He argues for the redirection of resources into rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, reforming its educational system, renewing its social welfare apparatus, and so on. In short, Abdul-Bahá echoes the essence of Bahá'u'lláh's message of enlightened and progressive leadership rooted in the principles of justice and equity.

Bahá'u'lláh underscores the necessity for the leader to exercise self-moderation, wisdom and common sense in advancing the common good. The leader is one who makes judicious use of rewards and punishments to arbitrate and mitigate conflicts. In the eight Ishraq—an integral part of the Aqdas—He reiterates: "O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment"²⁵ Further, Bahá'u'lláh re-reveals many of the themes found in this Tablet, mainly the two discussed in this paper, in the Tablet of the World.²⁶

Conclusion

By reaffirming the necessity of spiritual education for the fulfillment of the intrinsic greatness of mankind, Bahá'u'lláh unfurls His vision for world peace by accentuating the attributes of enlightened leadership. In this Tablet, the former theme (nobility of creation) becomes the antecedent of and a prerequisite for the attainment of the latter (peace through progressive leadership). He unequivocally designates and commits to the leaders and statesmen the formidable task of training the nations under their charge and calls on them to cooperatively establish peace and security. Other themes such as the efficacy of moderated speech, the appeal for reforms, the need for long-term vision and planning, the abandonment of estrangement, the inexorableness of a common language and script and so on are, alas, omitted from considera-

tion due to the limited scope of this paper. Above all, His emphasis on the need for limits to liberty and civilization, the excess of which can exercise a “pernicious influence upon men,” requires meticulous attention and study. Further elaboration on this point appears in the ninth Leaf of the Words of Paradise.²⁷ It can be argued that in this and other tablets of the same era Bahá'u'lláh anticipates the fall of despotic, tyrannical rule and the rise of democratically elected governments and leaders. He awaits the “high endeavours” of political statesmen to lead humanity in beneficial pursuits. Correlating the concept of leadership as articulated here with some of His other writings, we find that in a final, remarkable gesture towards the rulers and kings (*mulúk*), Bahá'u'lláh calls on the trustees of God (i.e. the yet-to-be-formed Universal House of Justice) to pray for them and affirms that the rulership of the world is entrusted to their care, while the hearts of men are set aside for Himself.²⁸

With guidance to political leaders for the establishment of peace and tranquility through consultation and mutual respect, Bahá'u'lláh re-reveals and weaves together many of the themes He has enunciated in various other writings. This coherent collage of exhortations—for the spiritual education and advancement of humanity, for the reconciliation of nations and for unprejudiced leadership—stands out as the most distinguishing feature of this Tablet. What makes it all the more riveting is its bearing on global events in more recent times—its core message being as fresh and relevant now as it was over a century and half ago! More than a simple response to a private letter of a bewildered believer, the Tablet of Maqsúd surely ranks among the “choicest fruits” emanating from the Supreme Pen.

Notes

- 1) The original text is in *Majmú'ihí az Alváh-i Jamál-i Aqdas-i Abhá kih ba'd as Kitáb-i Aqdas názil shudih* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1980), pp. 95-111. The English translation is in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), pp. 159-178.
- 2) A. H. Ishraq-Khavari, *Muhaḍirát* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1994), pp. 448-454. See also the explanation of the translator preceding the text in *Tablets*.
- 3) A. Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1988), pp. 235-6. See also J. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 131 and *Call to Remembrance* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992), p. 283.
- 4) S. Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 216.
- 5) Unlike His emphasis on mandatory schooling (*tahsíl*) in numerous other writings, Bahá'u'lláh's reference to education (*tarbíyat*) in this Tablet is, in my belief, informed by an undertone of spiritual training and is distinct from the traditional secular or the Islamic madrasah tuition.
- 6) See *Tablets*, p. 125.
- 7) Abdul-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), pp. 7-11. For the original see *Mufávaḍát* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), pp. 5-9.
- 8) Ibid.
- 9) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994).
- 10) The translation of the Book of the Covenant appears in *Tablets*, pp. 217-223. The original is in *Ad'íyyih-i-Haḍrat-i-Mahbúb* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1980), pp. 410-420.
- 11) Bahá'u'lláh, *Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i Mubárah* (Cairo, 1920), p. 265.
- 12) See *Tablets*, p. 162.
- 13) The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976), p. 89.
- 14) For a full description of these and related concepts, see D. MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Baha'ism* (London: British Academic Press, 1994).
- 15) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), p. 26.
- 16) Ibid., p. 139. This passage appears in the Questions and Answers section.
- 17) Bahá'u'lláh, *Áyát-i-Iláhi*, vol. 2 (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1996), p. 41.
- 18) Revolutions in Greece (1821-1829) and Portugal (1820-1851), the Anglo-Russian Crimean War (1854-1856),

the American Civil War (1861-1865), revolutionary wars in South America, the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), the gradual waning of Catholicism's temporal powers, to mention but a few, attest to a period of sustained agitation, restlessness and general dissatisfaction with unjust, arbitrary and corrupt princely and priestly callousness.

- 19) British colonial interests stretched from Egypt to Iran to Afghanistan to India to Australia to China, and to many points in between. Similarly, the Belgians in Congo or the French in North Africa, Indo-China and Mexico, to name a few, were not to be deprived of their share of exploits.
- 20) The preamble to The Covenant of the League of Nations is noteworthy in that it states: "In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war, by the prescription of open, just and honourable relations between nations, by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as the actual rule of conduct among Governments, and by the maintenance of justice and a scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organised peoples with one another . . ." Available on the Internet at www.tufts.edu/departments/fletcher/multi/www/league-covenant.html.
- 21) See *Tablets*, pp. 165.
- 22) Abdul-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990).
- 23) Ibid., p. 20.
- 24) Ibid., pp. 62-63.
- 25) See *Tablets*, pp. 128-129.
- 26) Ibid., pp. 81-97.
- 27) Ibid., pp. 69-70.
- 28) See Kitáb-i-Ahd in *Tablets*.

The Uses of Genealogy and Genealogical Information in Select Persianate and Bábí/Bahá'í Sources

A Preliminary Survey¹

Sholeh A. Quinn

I. Introduction

Genealogy has long been an important aspect of Middle Eastern societies. Indeed, in his article on genealogy (*nasab*) in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Franz Rosenthal considers genealogy to be “the most fundamental organising principle of Arab society.”² He goes on to say that “genealogy provides the historical validation of kinship and all that it involves. Kinship always dominated group life in human society and to a large extent still does today.”³ Although primarily discussing genealogy in relationship to the Arab world, much the same can be said about Persian and Turkish cultures as well. It should come as no surprise, then, that this fundamental component of the Middle East should find expression in historical writing and other texts. The purpose of this paper is to outline scholarship on the genealogy of Bahá'u'lláh, founder of the Bahá'í religion. Since genealogical issues appear in numerous Bahá'í scriptures and texts, including those written by the Central Figures, it is important to address the related scholarship. In order better to understand the context in which discussions and interest in this genealogy took place, I will (1) present a brief overview of the use of genealogy in Islamicate history before the 19th century, with special emphasis on the Safavid period, (2) summarize some of the scholarship surrounding Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy, and (3) offer some concluding remarks. I would like to state at the start that although one finds genealogies in a variety of Islamicate texts, including, for example, Sufi treatises, religious scripture, biographical compendiums, etc, I am going to focus my discussion here on primarily one category of source: Persian chronicles.

II. Uses of Genealogy in Islamicate History before the 19th Century

A growing number of scholars interested in the origins of Islamic historiography have pointed to the importance of genealogy in relationship to historical writing. These include Franz Rosenthal, Albrecht Noth, Tarif Khalidi, Fred Donner, and Julie Meisami, among others.⁴ Indeed, as Tarif Khalidi has noted, the practice of recording genealogies dates back to the earliest period of Islamic historiography, when early Arab historians used genealogies in order to stress their Arab identity as the early Islamic empire expanded and began to incorporate diverse peoples.⁵ In the Persian historiographical tradition, genealogies served numerous purposes. Here I will just touch on one of the most important: that of royal genealogies being used to promote the legitimacy of a particular ruling dynasty. This historiographical convention can be seen, for instance, during the Ilkhanid period of Mongol rule in Iran, when the great historian Rashid al-Din Faql Alláh compiled his *Shu'áb-i-Panjgáneh* (completed ca. 681-706/1282-1305-6), a detailed family tree depicting the many descendants of Chingis Khan. Rashid al-Din

also included genealogical information in his famous world history, the *Jámi' al-tavárikh*. After Ilkhanid rule in Iran came to an end, Timurid historians, like their Mongol predecessors, also showed interest in genealogy. The 15th century anonymous Timurid work, the *Mu'izz al-ansáb* (completed 830/1426) both reproduces and extends Rashíd al-Dín's *Shu'áb-i-Panjánah* into the Timurid period, with important variations and digressions.⁶ Furthermore, several Timurid historians, such as Ḥafīẓ Abrú and Sharaf al-Dín 'Alí Yazdí, included versions of Timur's genealogy in their chronicles. In an article analyzing Timur's genealogy, John Woods has shown how these chroniclers invoked Timur's presumably fictitious genealogy in order to legitimize the warlord's rule.⁷

After the breakdown of Timurid rule, Iran witnessed a period of decentralization, ruled by various Turko-Mongol, Persian, and other small dynasties. The region did not witness centralized rule until the Safavids came to power, and Shah Ismá'íl, the first Safavid king, declared Twelver (*ithná 'ashara*) Shi'ism as the official state religion of Iran (imposing it upon a country whose population was primarily Sunni). Safavid historians, like their Timurid and Mongol predecessors, also played a significant role in the production and dissemination of their dynasty's family tree. The whole issue of the Safavid genealogy and its various versions has been the subject of a number of articles and monographs, which have primarily focused on the 14th century hagiography, the *Şafvat al-Şafá*, which records the miracles and accomplishments of Shaykh Şafí al-Dín (650-735/1252-1334), founder of the Safavid Sufi order. (The Safavid dynasty actually started out as a Sufi order in the Ardabil region of northern Iran). A number of scholars, including Aḥmad Kasraví, have noted how earlier versions of the Safavid genealogy trace Shaykh Şafí's genealogy back seven generations to a certain Pírúz al-Kurdí al-Sanjání, later known as Firúz Sháh "Zarrín Kuláh, whereas later versions were revised (19 generations) to indicate descent from the Seventh Imam of the Twelver Shi'ah, Musa al-Kazim."⁸ The discussion mainly involves the *Şafvat al-Şafá* and its two principal versions: the original written by Ibn Bazzáz in ca. 751/1350 with a genealogy not showing the Safavids as *sayyids*, and a later "updated" version undertaken by Abú al-Faṭḥ al-Ḥusaynî in 940/1533, presumably at the command of Shah Tahmásb, which alters the genealogy in various ways. This command to revise the *Şafvat al-Şafá* reflects the Safavids' preoccupation with their earlier history and legitimizing principles.

The first two chroniclers of the Safavid dynasty, Ibráhím Amíní Haraví, author of the *Futúḥát-i-sháhí* and Ghiyás al-Dín Khvándmír, author of the *Habíb al-siyar*, writing in the early 16th century during the reign of Shah Ismá'íl, both included genealogies in their texts, tracing Shaykh Şafí's ancestry back to Músá al-Kázim. Thus, by 926/1520, when Ibráhím Amíní started composing his *Futúḥát-i-sháhí*, the "extended" Safavid genealogy going back to Músá al-Kázim formed part of the official narrative of the early Safavids, and continued into the reign of Shah 'Abbas I and beyond.

Political legitimacy and claims of rival dynasties help explain this emphasis on genealogy. At the same time that the Safavids were presenting themselves and their ancestors as sayyids, 'Alids, and Shi'is, their neighboring rival dynasties to the East and West of the Safavid Empire, the Ottomans and the Mughals, respectively, were making their own genealogical claims. Thus, when placed in the greater context of the competing Islamic empires, the emphasis on genealogy becomes understandable. Under the Mughals, Abú al-Faḍl, (not to be confused with the Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Abú'l Faḍl Gulpaygání) historian to the emperor Akbar (r. 963-1014/1556-1605), a contemporary of Shah 'Abbas, traced Akbar's genealogy back to Adam through Humáyún, Bábur, Timur, and Alanqo'a, Chingis Khan's mother. Similarly, genealogy was also an important component of Ottoman chronicles. In the Ottoman historiographical tradition,

chroniclers initially traced the genealogy of Osman “Ghazi” (680-ca. 724/1281-ca. 1324), founder of the Ottoman dynasty and contemporary of Shaykh Šafí, back to Oghuz Khan, the great and legendary Turkish ruler.

III. Safavid Genealogies and Dream Narratives

We see genealogical information appearing not only in the form of a list of ancestors in the beginning of the Safavid chronicles, but also embedded in other aspects of the histories, most notably in dream narratives. Scholars have long been aware of the importance of dreams in Islamic history, and have outlined the many religious and political functions of dream episodes in historical and philosophical texts.⁹

Although space does not permit an extensive discussion of the pre-Islamic roots of dream narratives, it is important to note that Zoroastrian/Pahlavi texts contain such accounts. The dream sequences are all somewhat similar, and generally begin with an ancestor of the ruling house having a dream which most often includes visions of the sun, stars, and other celestial phenomena. Upon awakening, the individual relates the dream to a close relative or religious figure such as a shaykh, who interprets it as a sign of future greatness and sovereignty for either a later ruler or the entire dynastic house. This historiographical practice goes back at least to the 9th century Iranian Buyid and Tahirid dynasties, where dreams of sovereignty are found in various histories, and continues through the Ghaznavid period, when poet and historian Firdawsí in his *Sháhnámah*, relates a dream he had of Sultan Mahmud.¹⁰

The historian Ibráhím Amíní stresses genealogical descent in a dream narrative of Shaykh Šafí al-Dín. Amíní draws his account from the earlier *Šafvat al-Šafá*, which contains the original version of the dream, which goes something like this: Shaykh Šafí sees himself seated on top of Qaf mountain with a sable hat (*kuláh-i-samúr*) on his head and a sword at his waist. He tries to draw the sword to no avail, and then attempts to lift the hat off his head. When he does so, a sun shines from his head lighting up the entire world. When he places the hat on his head the sun becomes concealed. He does this three times with the same results. Shaykh Šafí asks Shaykh Záhíd, his “spiritual guide” (*pír* or *muríd*), to interpret this dream, and Shaykh Záhíd tells him that the sword represents the “mandate of sovereignty” (*ḥukm-i-viláyat*) and the sun stands for the “light of sainthood” (*núr-i-viláyat*).¹¹

After recounting this dream, Amíní follows with his own lengthy interpretation, which reflects the growing importance of genealogy in terms of legitimizing forces at the time of Shah Ismá‘íl. Amíní makes three main points in his discussion. For our purposes here, the third point is the most significant—namely, the importance of heredity. He states that

the light of the true prophet (núr-i-nabí-i-vafá) [i.e., Muḥammad] was shining from the descendents of the pure Adam (ádam-i-šafí) [i.e., Shaykh Šafí] such that it caused the angels to prostrate . . . were you to recognize the truth of heredity, and not scatter the seeds of doubt upon the grounds of thought, nor scratch the face of certainty with the nail of suspicion, [you shall know] that the children of Adam have been endowed with Safavid primacy (šafvat-i-šafaví), nor would you doubt that the offsprings of the pride of the world [i.e., Muḥammad], have inherited and passed down perfections and stations [even as it says:] ‘we each have our appointed place.’ [Q, 38: 164].¹²

According to Amíní, then, Shah Ismá‘íl earned legitimate political authority because of his accomplishments in *ghaza*, or holy war, and *inherited* spiritual authority because he was a descendent of Shaykh Šafí and the Prophet Muḥammad. This descent that Amíní refers to in the dream narrative was legitimized in the form of the Safavid genealogy found earlier in his

chronicle. This whole notion of inherited authority being used as a basis for ruling legitimacy actually seems to have been an unacceptable claim within the doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism. Although the Safavids had, even as a Sufi order, long been claiming descent from Músá al-Kázim, it was not until the reign of Shah Ismá'íl that they used their genealogy as a means of legitimizing rule over a state in which Twelver Shi'ism was the official religion. Moojan Momen suggests that in the absence of being able to claim designation (*naşş*) as a way of legitimizing their rule, the Safavids instead promoted claims of descent from Músá al-Kázim in order to disguise the fact that such claims were irrelevant.¹³

Although the focus of my discussion here has been genealogies in historical sources, I cannot resist mentioning one source of interesting Safavid genealogical notions appearing in Safavid non-historical texts—namely, the poetry of Shah Ismá'íl. Shah Ismá'íl's poetic corpus, written in a Turkish dialect under the pen-name Khatá'í, is one of the most important sources for our knowledge of early Safavid religious beliefs. Khatá'í (Shah Ismá'íl) writes:

My name is Shah Ismá'íl (adlm Shah Ismá'íl). I am God's mystery. I am the leader of all these ghazis.

My mother is Fatima (anam dur Fatimah), my father is 'Alí (atam 'Alí dur); and eke I am the Pir of the Twelve Imams . . .

I am the living Khiḍr and Jesus, son of Mary (Khizr zindah ilah 'Isa Maryam)

My sire is Şafi, my father Haydar. Truly I am the Ja'far of the audacious . . .

*I am a Husaynid and have curses for Yazid.*¹⁴

Elsewhere in his *divan*, he states:

Today I have come to the world as a Master. Know truly that I am Haydar's son.

*I am Faridun, Khosrau, Jamshid, and Zohak. I am Zal's son (Rustam) and Alexander (Firaydun Khusraw ve Jamshid ve Zahhak kih ibn Zal ham Iskandaram man).*¹⁵

Here, genealogical information imbedded in the poem is different from the genealogy appearing in the chronicles in the form of a long string of names, i.e. so-and-so ibn so-and-so ibn so-and-so, etc. Instead, Ismá'íl is appealing to his early Qizilbash supporters who were not orthodox Twelver Shi'is, but adhered to a type of belief known as *ghulúww*, or exaggerationism. These followers would not have been particularly interested or impressed with Shah Ismá'íl's later genealogical claims linking him back to Músá al-Kázim.

VI. Mughal Genealogies

Mughal genealogical accounts share similar motifs and themes with Safavid and earlier Timurid narratives. The *Akbarnámah* was just one of many works composed by one of Akbar's most prolific writers, Abú al-Faḍl, who was commissioned by the emperor Akbar to write an official history of the Mughal dynasty from its origins, which he continued working on until his death in (1011/1602).¹⁶

Included in Abú al-Faḍl's chapter on miracles are approximately eight dream narratives. The third dream narrative that Abú al-Faḍl relates is in response to a dream that originally appears in the introduction (*muqaddimah*) to Sharaf al-Dín 'Alí Yazdí's *Zafarnámah*, a major Timurid chronicle. Woods translates the dream of Qachulay, an ancestor of Timur whose father, Tumanay Khan, was also a direct ancestor of Chingiz Khan:

One night, Qachulay dreamed that he saw four stars ascend successively from the breast (jayb) of his brother Qabul. The last of these filled the entire world with its brilliance, diffusing light to other bodies which sprang forth from the fourth star and continued to glow

*even after it had set. He then saw seven stars rise one after another from his own breast followed by an eighth, a great star which cast its light everywhere and from which emanated lesser bodies, each illuminating a different region.*¹⁷

Qachulay then relates the dreams to his father, who interprets the first as foretelling “the initial paramountcy of the issue of Qabul” which includes most importantly Qabul’s great-grandson, Chingiz Khan. His father interprets the second dream as portending a world-conqueror in the eighth generation of Qachulay’s descendents, presumably Timur. Yazdí narrates this account in order to show that by virtue of Chingiz Khan and Timur’s common ancestry—the twin brothers Qachulay and Qabul—both were destined to rule.¹⁸

In his *Akbarnámah*, Abú al-Faḍl rewrote and reinterpreted Qachulay’s dream. He states that Yazdí was wrong and had “taken a superficial view of things.”¹⁹ According to Abú al-Faḍl, the true meaning of this dream, and in particular the eighth star, was not Timur, but “the auspicious Akbar.” He continues to explain that even though there were fifteen generations between Qachulay and Akbar, “among those [ancestors] there are seven stars of the zodiacal sign of greatness and having the light of this world-illuminating king of kings emblazoned on the foreheads of their biographies.”²⁰ Abú al-Faḍl does not state who, however, among the fifteen individuals are the seven great ancestors.

V. Afsharid Genealogies

In 1148/1736, some fourteen years after invading Iran, a new conqueror, Nádír, was crowned king. Nádír Shah (r. 1148-1160/1736-1747) had his start as a chieftan of the Afshars, one of the Qizilbash tribes that originally put Shah Ismá’íl in power. Ernest Tucker has analyzed historical writing under the reign of Nádír Shah, and pointed to the main concerns of Afsharid historians, namely Nádír’s relationship with the Safavid dynasty and his own political legitimacy.²¹ Mírzá Muḥammad Kázim Marvī, Nádír’s financial accountant, was author of the *‘Álam-ará-yi Nádírí* (1160/1747). Marvī devotes his first chapter to an explanation of the birth of Nadir Shah. Here, Marvī includes a dream narrative in which Imam Quli Beg, Nadir’s father, dreams of a sun rising from his neck. The rays of that sun lit the whole world, east and west. Imam Quli Beg related the dream to his brother, Bektash, who also coincidentally had the same dream. For several days later, Imam Quli Beg continued to have the same dream. The brothers related their experience to a poor mulla who was skilled in astrology. The mulla interpreted the dream to mean that a child would soon appear from the line of Imam Quli Beg who would conquer the whole world . . . Shortly after this, Nadir was born.²²

Genealogical manipulations also took place in the Qajar period—as seen in the case of Náṣir al-Dín Shah, whose temporary wife Jayran became a permanent wife in connection with a plot hatched in order to legitimize the succession of her son, Amír Qásim.²³ In order to accomplish this, in the face of “general ridicule” of the marriage with Jayran, a court chronicler, whom Abbas Amanat suggests was Riḍá Qulí Khán Hidáyat, was commissioned to construct a genealogy for Jayran’s father. Amanat states

*the pedigree that was made up traced the descent of the Tajrishi peasant back to the Sasanian monarchy and through them to the legendary Kayanid kings. Genghis Khan, too, may have been brought into the genealogical tree to make it sufficiently Turco-Mongolian, and thus Qajar, to make Jayran’s son an heir and to ensure her father and brother a place among the court dignitaries.*²⁴

VI. A Summary of Select Scholarship on Bahá'u'lláh's Genealogy

The purpose of this rather lengthy discussion is to show how prevalent genealogy was in the

consciousness of Persianate writers, and to demonstrate some of the forms in which genealogical information appeared. Thus in turn helps us to understand the cultural context for 19th century discussions of Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy. Given this history, it should come as no surprise that this subject would be of interest and concern both during Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime and after. Although Bahá'u'lláh Himself did not prepare a genealogy of his ancestors, and His claims were on theophanological lines as opposed to historiographically oriented writings, a number of individuals have written about various aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's family tree, including Mírzá Abú al-Faḍl Gulpaygání, Shoghi Effendi, Muḥammad 'Alí Malik Kusraví (Núrí), and Hasan Balyuzi. More recently, other important references and discussions about the genealogy have been made by Stephen Lambden and Shahriyar Razavi. What follows is only a very brief overview summarizing various aspects of scholarship on Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy. I must state at the outset that what I am presenting here are extremely tentative notes and comments, based only on a preliminary review of select sources.

Questions and scholarship surrounding Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy have served numerous purposes, depending on the interests and aims of the individual posing the question or writing the essay. In general, these purposes can be put into four categories: (1) Questions posed by Zoroastrians regarding Bahá'u'lláh's descent from Sassanian kings, (2) comments made by 'Abdu'l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi regarding Bahá'u'lláh's descent, and (3) interest on the part of Bahá'í writers from the Nur region.

1) Zoroastrian Questions

Hasan Balyuzi has neatly summarized the context of Zoroastrians questions regarding Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy.²⁵ The initial query was posed to Bahá'u'lláh himself by a Zoroastrian convert named Ustád Javánmard.²⁶ Ustád Javánmard asked Bahá'u'lláh a total of seven questions, and in response, Bahá'u'lláh composed the *Lawḥ-i-Haft Pursish* (Tablet of the Seven Questions) (*Lawḥ-i-Javánmard*). This Tablet was translated by Shahriar Razavi, with additional comments by Stephen Lambden, in the *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* (1993). The original text of Ustád Javánmard's questions appears to be lost, but we may gather that the seventh question was regarding Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy. Bahá'u'lláh in response refers Ustád Javánmard to Mírzá Abú'l Faḍl Gulpaygání, who had already put together a text in connection with the genealogy. The treatise by Mírzá Abú'l Faḍl, referred to by Bahá'u'lláh, also regrettably appears to be lost. However, after providing this reference, Bahá'u'lláh then tells Javánmard that if he could "obtain and peruse the *Súrah-yi Ra'ís* and the *Súrah-yi Mulúk*," he would no longer be in need of what he asked about "and would arise to render service to the Cause of God."²⁷

Interest in this question did not disappear, however. In 1320/1902-1903, again a question regarding Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy was posed to local Bahá'ís by Áqá Khusraw Bimán, a Zoroastrian Bahá'í visiting the Holy Land. The question related to some lines of poetry by Abí Ja'far Muḥammad ibn 'Alí al-Shalmaghání (322/934) that were being debated at the time.²⁸ 'Abdu'l Bahá, to whom the question was ultimately referred, like His father, also referred Bimán to Mírzá Abú'l Faḍl, who was in New York at the time. By this time, Abú'l Faḍl was no longer in possession of his original treatise, but instead provided Bimán a summary of that original essay, in which he explained the circumstances under which he came to compose it. This is the text which has survived today, and known by the title, "*Sharḥ-i-shajara-yi jamál-i-mubárah*."²⁹ In this tract, which Hasan Balyuzi almost completely translated in his book, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, Abú'l Faḍl explains that he came to research Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy as a result of the discussion surrounding a 10th century poem, and also some prophecies in the text *Dasátír* and other Parsi writings. He came to the conclusion that Bahá'u'lláh's family traced its descent back to the "ancient dynasties of Iran." He then lists a

number of dynasties that ruled in Tabaristan over the centuries and mentions some of the more well known poets and significant individuals from that region.³⁰ Realizing that he had uncovered a rich tradition of local historiography, Abu'l Faḍl thought that he could in all probability discover Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy. In this published treatise he provides two main sources of evidence for Bahá'u'lláh's descent. The first is a statement by 19th century historiographer Riḍá Qulí Khán Hidáyat, author of the well-known Qajar chronicle, the *Rawzat al-Ṣafá-yi Náṣirí* and a genealogical work entitled the *Nizhádnámah*. In the latter work, Hidáyat states that the "descent of the House of Nuris goes back to the just king, Anushirvan [i.e. Khusro I, r. 531-579]."³¹ At the same time, Gulpaygani met Ḥajjī Mírzá Riḍá Qulí, a half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh, who told them that copies of a Núrí family genealogical table were in the possession of various members of the family and this genealogy traced the family's ancestors back to Yazdigird, son of Shahriyar [i.e. Yazdigird III, son of Shahriyar, r. 632-651, last Sasanian monarch].³² When he presented this evidence to Bahá'u'lláh, He sent him a Tablet stating in part "O Abu'l Faḍl! Verily thou has spoken the truth . . ."³³

2) Shoghi Effendi's Research

In the early 1930's, Shoghi Effendi published a facsimile of Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy in the form of a family tree in volume 5 of the *Bahá'í World*, covering the years 1932-1934.³⁴ The chart is similar in format to Shoghi Effendi genealogical chart of the Báb, also placed in the same issue of the *Bahá'í World* but originally appearing in Shoghi Effendi's translation and interpretation of Nabíl's history, known in English as the *Dawnbreakers*, published in 1932. Interestingly, in this case, Shoghi Effendi seems to set aside issues of Bahá'u'lláh's descent from Sassanian kings and instead, traces his ancestors back only as far as the 17th century, to a certain Áqá Fakhr, son of Shahriyár Ḥasan, with a date of ca. 1028/1618-1619. This situates Bahá'u'lláh's earliest traced ancestors back to the Safavid period. I have not yet been able to discover from where, specifically, Shoghi Effendi obtained this information, how he went about doing the research for this family tree, or what were the circumstances of its publication.

In contrast to Shoghi Effendi's genealogical chart, his history of the first hundred years of the Bahá'í religion, entitled *God Passes By*, originally published in 1944, does not have an elaborate chart or even a list of Bahá'u'lláh's ancestors, but it does contain genealogical statements. The most important passage for our purposes is as follows:

*He derived His descent, on the one hand, from Abraham (the Father of the Faithful) through his wife Katúrah, and on the other from Zoroaster, as well as from Yazdigird, the last king of the Sasanian dynasty. He was moreover a descendant of Jesse, and belonged, through His father, Mírzá 'Abbás, better known as Mírzá Buzurg—a nobleman closely associated with the ministerial circles of the Court of Fatḥ-'Alí Sháh—to one of the most ancient and renowned families of Mazindaran.*³⁵

Although to some extent this passage echoes some of the comments made by Mírzá Abú'l Faḍl in his treatise, the genealogical claims in it are much more extensive than those made by Mírzá Abú'l Faḍl. Here, Shoghi Effendi presents aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy that, to the best of my knowledge, we do not see elsewhere, or at least we do not see commonly elsewhere. For example, whereas Mírzá Abú'l Faḍl states that Bahá'u'lláh was descended from Sasanian monarchs, Shoghi Effendi repeats that information yet adds that he was also descended from Zoroaster (and others). This quotation appears in a section of *God Passes By* where Shoghi Effendi explains how Bahá'u'lláh fulfilled the messianic expectations of several religious traditions, and refers to prophecies from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and Zoroastrian, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic writings.³⁶

3) Writers from Núr

Some thirty years after Shoghi Effendi's genealogical chart was published, in 1962, Muḥammad 'Alí Malikí-Kusraví published his historical work entitled the *Iqlím-i-Núr*. This work contains historical information about the Nur region in Mazandaran and genealogical material on Bahá'u'lláh's family.³⁷ The author states in his introductory notes that he wrote this book in order to correct certain mistakes on specific pages of 'Abdu'l Ḥusayn Áyátí Áváríh's historical work, the *Kavákibu'd Durriyah*, and other various errors.³⁸ The specific sections in *Kavákibu'd Durriyah* that Malikí-Kusraví mentions deal directly with Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy.³⁹ The author also lists his sources at the beginning of his work, which include a rather large number of items including various writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Nabil, the *Zuhúr al-Ḥaqq* vol. 3, the writings of Ishráq Khávarí, Shoghi Effendi's genealogical chart in the *Bahá'í World*, the copy of Bahá'u'lláh's marriage certificate in the same volume, and various papers and documents in the possession of his wife's family.⁴⁰ Obviously, time does not permit me to sort out the historiography that went into producing this volume. This is a complicated task, for aside from his introductory list of sources, the author does not cite his sources in the rest of his work, so it is impossible to know what information comes from where. For our purposes here, we can note that there are some differences from Malikí-Kusraví's genealogical chart at the end of his book and Shoghi Effendi's.⁴¹

Finally, in addition to the research of Malikí-Kusraví, the late Nusratulláh Majzub did a great deal of historical research on Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy, and composed a book manuscript on the subject, which has not yet been published.⁴² It should be noted that the sources I have mentioned here are not exhaustive. Other materials compiled and researched by various individuals that have not yet been published may certainly come to light. Here I have only mentioned those writings and texts which have been available to me.

Conclusion

I would like to make just a few points by way of conclusion, most of which relate to future research that needs to be done on this topic.

- 1) Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l Bahá and Shoghi Effendi all commented in some way on their family's genealogy. Bahá'u'lláh, while writing to Javánmard that the question of his ancestors was not particularly important, nevertheless indirectly answered the question by referring Javánmard to Mírzá Abú'l Faḍl. Similarly, 'Abdu'l Bahá referred another individual, Bimán, also to Abú'l Faḍl. Thus, in these two cases, neither Bahá'u'lláh nor 'Abdu'l Bahá provided specific answers of Their own to genealogical questions. Shoghi Effendi, on the other hand, made a variety of genealogical statements and we may therefore assume that he did have an interest in the question. What remains to be done in this connection is finding all of the genealogical statements made by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi, and examining the specific contexts in which they were made.
- 2) We know that genealogies have been invoked and used throughout Iranian history for a variety of purposes. The fact that different aspects of Bahá'u'lláh's genealogy were stressed by different individuals at different times is a continuation of that tradition, albeit in modified form.
- 3) Much of the historiography still needs to be sorted out. This cannot be done, however, until more material is uncovered and made more readily accessible to scholars and researchers, in particular family histories and documents.

Notes

I am grateful to Dr. Stephen N. Lambden and Dr. Iraj Ayman for their many valuable suggestions, comments, and assistance on this paper. I take full responsibility, of course, for all errors.

- 1) F. Rosenthal, *EI2*, s.v. "nasab."
- 2) Rosenthal, *EI2*, s.v. "nasab."
- 3) See, for example, Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998); Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Albrecht Noth, *Quellenkritische Studien zu Themen, Formen und Tendenzen frühislamischer Geschichtsüberlieferung*, trans. by Michael Bonner as *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, 2nd ed., in collaboration with Lawrence I. Conrad (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1994); and Julie Meisami, *Persian Historiography to the End of the Twelfth Century*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).
- 4) Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought*, 50.
- 5) See Sholeh A. Quinn, "The *Mu'izz al-Ansab* and *Shu'ab-i-Panjganeh* as Sources for the Chaghatayid Period of History: A Comparative Analysis," *Central Asiatic Journal* 33 (1990), 229-253.
- 6) See John E. Woods, "Timur's Genealogy," in *Intellectual Studies on Islam: Essays Written in Honor of Martin B. Dickson*, ed. Michel M. Mazzaoui and Vera B. Moreen, 85-125, (Utah: University of Utah Press, 1990).
- 7) See, for instance, Ahmad Kasravi, *Shaykh Safi va tabarash* (Tehran: Nashr va Pakhsh-i-Kitáb, 2535 [1976]); A. Z. V. Togan, "Sur l'origine des Safavides," in *Mélanges Louis Massignon III*, 3 vols. (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1957), 345-357, and Michel Mazzaoui, *The Origins of the Safawids* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1972), 46-51.
- 8) Of the various types of dream narratives that Von Grunebaum outlines, the dream as political prophecy is the most relevant in the study of Shaykh Safi al-Din's dreams. See, for instance, G. E. Von Grunebaum, "The Cultural Function of the Dream as Illustrated by Classical Islam," in *The Dream and Human Societies*, ed. G. E. Von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 3-21. See also *EnIr*, s.v. "Dreams and Dream Interpretation," by Hossein Ziai.
- 9) See Roy Mottahedeh, *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 69-72. Julie Meisami discusses Firdawsi's dream of Sultan Mahmud in the *Shahnamah*. See Julie Meisami, "The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia," *Poetics Today* (14): 1993, 247-275. For the actual account of the dream in the *Shahnamah*, see Firdawsi, *Shahnamah*, ed. Jalal Khaliqi Mutlaq, 6 vols. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1978), 1: 16-17.
- 10) Tavakkul ibn Ismá'il ibn Bazzáz, *Šafvat al-Šafá*, ed. Ghulám Riḍá Tabátábá'i Majd ([Tabriz: G. Tabátábá'i Majd, 1373 [1994]] 87-88.
- 11) Šadr al-Dín Sultán Ibráhím Aminí Haraví, "Futuḥát-i-sháhi," Ms., Dushanbe I, folio 246a.
- 12) "It was clearly impossible for the Safavids to claim designation [*nass*] (except in visions of the Hidden Imam) and the great stress in their propaganda on their descent from the Imams can only be seen as a smokescreen to hide the fact that this was an irrelevance." Momen, *Introduction*, 108. As already mentioned, there is a pre-Islamic precedent for such genealogical dream narratives. For a detailed discussion of Persian pre-Islamic influences on notions of kingship, see Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 89-95. In this connection it is interesting to note that the first section of the Pahlavi text known as the *Kárnámak-i-Ardashir-i-Pápakán* contains several dream narratives, one of which states that "Papak one night saw in a dream how the sun shone from the head of Sasan and made the whole world bright." The dream interpreters said "He who was seen in the dream, either he or one of his children will come to sovereignty over the world, since the sun and the white and caparisoned elephant [the elephant refers to another dream] are (a sign of) mastery and riches and victory." Quoted in Said Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 92, and *EnIr*, s.v. "Dreams and Dream Interpretation," by Hossein Ziai. For the full translation, see H. W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943; repr., 1971), 59-60. For the original text in Pahlavi, with a transcription and translation into modern Persian, see *Kárnámah-i-Ardashir-i-Bábakán*, ed. Muḥammad Javád Mashkúr ([Tehran]: Dunyá-yi Kitáb, 1369 [1990]), 44-45 (Pahlavi text); 116-118 (Persian transcription); and 176-177 (Persian translation). This dream narrative is repeated in the *Sháhnámah* in modified form.
- 13) V. Minorsky, "The Poetry of Shah Ismá'il I," *BSOAS* 10 (1942), 1007-1053. See poem no. 15, 1042a-1043a.
- 14) Minorsky, "Poetry of Shah Ismá'il," poem no. 195, 1047a.
- 15) *EnIr*, s.v., "Akbarnamah."
- 16) Woods, "Timur's Genealogy," 91.
- 17) See Woods, "Timur's Genealogy," 91.
- 18) Abú al-Faḍl, *Akbarnámah*, ed. Ghulám Riḍá Tabátábá'i Majd (Tehran, 1372 (1993): 31-32; translated by H.

- Beveridge as *The Akbar nama of Abu-l-Faḍl*. 3 Vols. Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1989), 47.
- 19) *Akbarnámah*, 32; Beveridge, 48. For more information on the genealogy, see Beveridge, 143-145, 205-206.
 - 20) Ernest Tucker, "Explaining Nadir Shah: Kingship and Royal Legitimacy in Muhammad Kazim Marvi's *Tarikh-i-'alam-ara-yi Nadiri*," *Iranian Studies* 26 (1993), 95-117. See esp. pg. 115
 - 21) *'Álam-ará-yi Nádirí*, 6-7; Tucker, "Explaining Nadir Shah," 103.
 - 22) See Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831-1896* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 323-324.
 - 23) Abbas Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, 324.
 - 24) See Hasan Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh, with Some Historical Background*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), 309-313.
 - 25) See Shahriar Razavi, "The Tablet of the Seven Questions of Bahá'u'lláh (*Lawh-i-haft pursish*): An Introductory Note and Provisional Translation," *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* 7: 3-4 (1993), 47-59. See also in the same issue, Stephen Lambden, "Appendix One: A Few Expository Notes on the Lawh-i-haft pursish." 60-68.
 - 26) Razavi trans., 52.
 - 27) Lambden has translated the poem as follows: "O claimant (*tálib[an]*) from the Hashimite house/And disclaimer (*jáhíd[an]*) from the house of Chosroes/Assuredly was he hidden in a non-Arab lineage/One Persian, of noble, agreeable descent." Lambden, "Appendix," 65.
 - 28) The summary was published in Bombay and also appears in R. Mehrábkháni's *Rasá'il va Raqá'im-i-Abú al-Fazá'il* (Tehran: BPT, 135/1978), 41-47.
 - 29) These include Kay Kábús of the *Kábúsnámah* and the poet Manúchihri. See Gulpaygani, 43-44 and the translation in Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís*, 311-312.
 - 30) Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís*, 312; Gulpaygani states, "*Riḍá Qulíkhán mulaqqab bi-Amí al-Shu'ará dar kitáb-i-Nizhád'námah mazkúr dáshtah kih silsilah-i-'aliyyah'-i-Núriyyah bi-malik-i-'ádil Núshiraván muntahá mishavad . . .*" 44-45.
 - 31) Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís*, 312-313. See also Appendix 3 in Richard Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*, (New York: Mentor Books, 1963), 320.
 - 32) Balyuzi, 312; Gulpaygani, quoting Bahá'u'lláh: "*yá Abu'l-Faḍl, qad nataqta bi-al-ḥaqq wa aẓharta má kána mastúran fi kalimátihi*." 46.
 - 33) See *The Bahá'í World: a Biennial International Record*, vol. 5 [89 and 90 of the Bahá'í Era April 1932-1934 A.D.] (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1936), insert between pp. 204-205.
 - 34) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944), 94.
 - 35) In this regard it is interesting to note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had earlier alluded to His father's Abrahamic descent, when He stated the following: "The Blessed Beauty is also a lineal descendant of Abraham, for Abraham had other sons besides Ishmael and Isaac who in those days migrated to the lands of Persia and Afghanistan, and the Blessed Beauty is one of their descendants." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, trans. Laura Clifford Barney (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981 [originally 1930]), 213.
 - 36) Notes on Mazandaran from EI2: province to the south of Caspian sea bounded on west by Gilan and east by Astarabad (formerly Gurgan). Now, Mazandaran and Gurgan form modern province of Mazandaran. Arabs know the region only as Tabaristan. The name Mazandaran only reappears in Seljuk times. See EI2, s.v. "Mazandaran," V. Minorsky [C. E. Bosworth].
 - 37) These consist of pages 253-254 of volume one, and page 4 of volume two. See Muḥammad 'Alí Malikí-Kusraví *Iqlím-i-Núr*, (Tehran, 1962), "dal."
 - 38) See Avari, *Kavákibu'd Durriyah*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Matba'at as-Sa'adah, 1923-1924), vol. 1, pg. 253-54; vol. 2, pg. 4. Reprinted East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 1999-2000 and available at: www2.h-net.msu.edu/bahai/areprint/vol4/kd/kd.htm.
 - 39) Specifically, these items are as follows: (1) various writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdul-Bahá, (2) Nabíl, (3) Fázil Mazandarání's *Zuhúr al-Ḥaqq* vol. 3, and (4) Ishráq Khávarí's *Rahiq-i-Makhtúm*. To this list he also adds the following: (1) the genealogical work of Mírzá Faḍl Alláh "Nizám al-Mamálik" (a companion of Bahá'u'lláh), (2) Shoghi Effendi's genealogical chart in the *Bahá'í World*, (3) the copy of Bahá'u'lláh's marriage certificate in the same volume, (4) the newspaper *Rúznámah-i-vaqáyi-i-ittifáqiyah* and some other documents from national archives (5) the memoirs of Nizám al-Mamálik and his Tablets in Nur, (6) family papers from the Bihzád clan from the author's mother's side of the family, and (7) the authors personal papers. *Iqlím-i-Núr*, "vav."
 - 40) One interesting difference is that Malikí Kusraví adds a generation between Áqá Fakhr and Hájji Muḥammad Riḍá Beg, namely Áqá Muḥammad 'Alí, known as (*ma'rúf bih*) Áqá'í. See *Iqlím-i-Núr*, genealogical tree at the end. It should also be noted that Malikí Kusraví had greatly expanded on his work and produced a large wall chart on this genealogy, documenting its sources at each point. Regretfully, his documents and other materials were confiscated during the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79. Personal communication, Iraj Ayman, February 24, 2003.
 - 41) Iraj Ayman, personal communication, February 24, 2003.

An Exposition of the Lawḥ-i-Dunyá

(Tablet of the World)

James B. Thomas

Introduction

In the waning years of the illustrious life of Bahá'u'lláh, an incident occurred in the city of Yazd, Iran so horrendous that He withdrew into seclusion for nine days. When He emerged He revealed The Lawḥ-i-Dunyá (Tablet of the World) in which He referred to this incident which involved heinous acts of persecution against seven of His loyal followers. The beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi described these events with unforgettable candor in *God Passes By*. "In Yazd, at the instigation of the mujtahid of that city, and by order of the callous Maḥmúd Mírzá, the Jalúlu'l-Dawlih, the governor, a son of Zillu's-Sultán, seven were done to death in a single day in horrible circumstances. . . ." The Guardian goes on to describe in mind numbing clarity the brutal, inhumane acts perpetrated on these innocent souls on May 19, 1891.¹

Their martyrdom culminated a near half century of brutal persecution of the Bábí, and later the nascent Bahá'í communities in Persia during the earthly lifetimes of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Whenever the Blessed Beauty would become cognizant of such acts of this magnitude He would reveal potent tablets that not only were sparked by the event itself but by the cumulative effects of such events that led up to their perpetration as well as the conditions of the times in which they occurred. The Lawḥ-i-Dunyá is such a tablet.

It was revealed in honor of Áqá Márzá Áqáy-i-Afnán, a nephew of Khadíjih Bagum, wife of the Báb. He learned about the new Faith from her and at the young age of thirteen recognized the station of the Báb. He revered his aunt and later became her protector with great devotion. When Nabíl-i-A'zam visited his home and informed the believers in Shíráz of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, Áqá Mírzá Áqá quickly embraced His Faith. He was also the one who helped the uncle of the Báb, Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh to find answers to his questions regarding the validity of the Báb's claim. As a result, Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid became the recipient of one of the greatest books in religious history, the Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude).²

In an effort to appreciate the historical significance of the Tablet of the World, this essay is presented in four parts: (1) It describes the difficulties in the world under the yoke of European powers that preceded the Lawḥ-i-Dunyá, (2) portrays the developing conditions in Persia, (3) expounds upon the salient points of the Tablet with respect to those conditions and (4) brings into bold relief the potential impact that this writing may have on the modern world.

19th Century Europe

In the span of the first half century of the Bahá'í era, the world was ruled by European powers wherein spectacular technological advances moved on a collision course with political corruption. The technological achievements were a product of the Industrial Revolution that actu-

ally occurred in two phases. The first began around 1760 and was an outgrowth of the Age of Enlightenment or of 'Reason', an age that was profoundly influenced by the extraordinary success of Isaac Newton a century earlier. He discovered basic laws of nature that remain provable by empirical evidence and mathematical certainty. From this a mechanical model of the universe was derived that presumably defined everything that happened materially within it. This was embraced by leading philosophers such as John Locke, the great rationalist who tried to apply scientific methods to the social life of man.³

Reason was also applied to religion such that God was depicted as the Great Watchmaker of The Universe, and had the effect of draining away most religious truths. This rationalistic approach called Deism however left many wanting for solace and salvation. Many began exploring the world of sensation and emotion that later resulted in the cultural movement called Romanticism.⁴ Thus three areas of human endeavor, scientific, social and religious were deeply influenced by the astonishing success of modern science in the 17th century.

In the first area, scientific achievement inspired the beginnings of technical innovation that by the late seventeen hundreds saw the emergence of the factory system with its scandalous child labor abuses. It also brought improved means of transport and this, coupled with new industry, greatly enhanced trade and commerce. The second area of applying scientific method to human activity saw the seeds planted for social science and political-economic theories. In the third area of religion, the rationalistic approach to faith found strong reaction in many hearts that resulted in a powerful sense of individualism within the protestant fold.⁵ The effect was a continuous process of schism over time that produced thousands of protestant sects.

But the breakdown of religious unity was not relegated solely to the protestant movement. The Catholic Church experienced similar discord within its ranks in the 19th century. This peaked after two decades of turmoil within the Church during the long pontificate of Pope Pius IX. He called into session the ecumenical council of 1869 shortly after he rejected a letter from Bahá'u'lláh.⁶ The letter is addressed to the Pope in powerful authoritative tones:

*O Pope! Rend the veils asunder. He Who is the Lord of Lords is come overshadowed with clouds, and the decree hath been fulfilled by God, the Almighty, the Unrestrained . . . Beware that thou dispute not with Him (Jesus) without a clear token or proof . . . Beware Lest any name debar thee from God, the Creator of earth and heaven. Leave now the world behind thee, and turn towards thy lord, through Whom the whole earth hath been illumined . . . Dwellest thou in palaces whilst He Who is the King of Revelation liveth in the most desolate of abodes? Leave them unto such as desire them, and set thy face with joy and delight towards the Kingdom . . . Arise in the name of thy Lord, the God of Mercy, amidst the people of the earth, and seize thou the Cup of Life with the hands of confidence, and first drink thou there-from, and proffer it then to such as turn towards it amongst the peoples of all faiths . . .*⁷

The great tragedy that befell Pius IX was based on his lack of recognition of the station of Bahá'u'lláh. He further pursued his own egoistic agenda of power and authority that in the end escaped him altogether. This culminated in 1869 when he declared Papal Infallibility as a new dogma of the Church. The consequences that Bahá'u'lláh warned him about followed quickly.

*On September 20, 1870, Italian troops occupied Rome, and in October a plebiscite was held in which an overwhelming majority of the votes cast were for the incorporation of Rome in the kingdom of Italy. Pius remained for the rest of his days a prisoner, as he regarded himself, in the Vatican . . . In the rest of Italy, church and state were to be separated . . .*⁸

These religious discords evolved in complex ways and digressed into agnosticism, fundamentalism,⁹ materialism and atheism.¹⁰ Conversely, the fields of social science, economics, political science, psychology and medicine emerged and developed in most of the countries of Europe. Within this palette of human effort to achieve the ideals of the Age of Enlightenment there emerged the ominous threat of militarism.¹¹

With the fall of the Bastille and French aristocracy in 1789, a new wave of political change swept Europe. The French Revolution¹² set the stage for ambitious leaders who would capitalize on every opportunity to aggrandize themselves through conquest by the sacrifice of countless thousands of conscripted soldiers.¹³ As technology advanced, militarism gained strength and, in spite of all the achievements of the second Industrial Revolution, the average citizen experienced an ever increasing sense of the terror of war. These signs brought forth grave warnings from Bahá'u'lláh in His famous letters to the leaders and divines of the world. His prophetic utterances came true in the fullness of time as witness Pope Pius IX. Napoleon III was a recipient of two of these letters and his rejection of Bahá'u'lláh's warnings brought on his ignominy with complete loss of power.¹⁴ Toward the end of the 19th century "The Imperialistic Impulse to War" became the dominate theme across the face of Europe.¹⁵ This brought to bear Bahá'u'lláh's direst warnings and culminated with World War I in the following century.

Meanwhile the first Industrial Revolution became dormant by 1830. Men thought that everything meant to be invented had been invented. Indeed, the U.S. Government was seriously considering the closure of the Patent Office. Then on the very day that the Báb opened a new epoch in human history in 1844 with the Declaration of His mission, Samuel Morse sent his first telegraph message "What hath God wrought?"¹⁶ This coincided with the emergence of the second Industrial Revolution that was in full swing by 1891 when Bahá'u'lláh wrote "this mighty and wondrous Tablet". These developments were in stark contrast to the backward looking conditions in Persia.

Iran — Its fall from grace (1795-1925)

The land of Persia, which had such a glorious past, fell into the pit of corruption and despotism under the Qájár Dynasty. Its first ruler, Ághá Moḥammad Khán, a leader of the Turkmen Qájár tribe had eliminated all of his rivals by 1794 and had regained territories in Georgia and the Caucasus. A year after he was formally crowned in 1796, he was assassinated and succeeded by his nephew, Fath 'Alí Sháh who lost all that had been gained by his predecessor plus Armenia and Azerbaijan to Russia. In 1834 he was succeeded by his grandson Moḥammad Sháh who died in 1848. Succession then passed to his son Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, the grandfather of the above mentioned Maḥmúd Mírzá (the Jalúlu'l-Dawlih). Naṣri'd-Dín was assassinated in 1846 and the crown was passed to his son Mozaffar'd-Dín Sháh, a weak and incompetent ruler who relinquished his rule to his son Moḥammad 'Alí Sháh in 1907. He was deposed in 1909 and succeeded by his son Ahmad Sháh at the age of eleven. He proved to be effete, pleasure loving and unable to preserve the integrity of Iran. In October of 1925 Ahmad Sháh was formally deposed and the Qájár dynasty came to an end.¹⁷

It was Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh who was ultimately responsible for the immense pain and suffering that befell Bahá'u'lláh and the embryonic Bahá'í Faith throughout the forty-eight years of his reign. Ironically western scholars consider Náṣiri'd-Dín to be the most successful Qájár monarch in terms of modernization as he tried to introduce western technology and educational methods. But what was really happening in Iran at that time was not apparent to western eyes. Shoghi Effendi characterized this in no uncertain terms.

Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, stigmatized by Bahá'u'lláh as the "Prince of Oppressors," as one who had "perpetrated what hath caused the denizens of the cities of justice and equity to lament," was . . . surrounded by "venal, artful and false" ministers whom he could elevate or abase at his pleasure; the head of an administration in which "every actor was, in different aspects, both the briber and the bribed"; allied, in his opposition to the Faith, with a sacerdotal order which constituted a veritable "church state"; supported by a people pre-eminent in atrocity, notorious for its fanaticism, its servility, cupidity and corrupt practices, this capricious monarch, no longer able to lay hands upon the person of Bahá'u'lláh, had to content himself with the task of attempting to stamp out in his own dominions the remnants of a much-feared and newly resuscitated community.¹⁸

In spite of the great injustices heaped upon Bahá'u'lláh and His followers by Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh and his Vizier in collusion with the leading mullás over the years—retaliation, verbal or otherwise, was utterly discouraged by Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, He always left the door open for wrong-doers to change their ways, and did in fact acknowledge their somewhat limited contributions to society. Concerns about the spiritual and human conditions in Persia moved Bahá'u'lláh to encourage His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá to write *The Secret of Divine Civilization* as early as 1875 to deal with those issues in the Cradle of the Faith, Iran. The Sháh had by then tried to introduce western concepts in the country but compromises among his advisors were made that inevitably defeated any meaningful advantage of such action. The leading Divines objected to any thing western in spite of obvious technological achievements that might bring about improved conditions. Nevertheless, the stage was set for the infant Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to address the abominable conditions facing humanity not only in Persia but also in the world at large. Ensuing years would see the continuing rise of European powers based on technological advancement and military ambitions.

A Voice in the Darkness

In the very first word of the first sentence in the *Lawḥ-i-Dunyá*, Bahá'u'lláh establishes a mindset that breaks the bonds of human frailty. "Praise," praise to God followed by "thanksgiving," thanksgiving to the "Lord of manifest dominion." He is expressing this in the face of great tribulations that are imposed upon Himself and His faithful followers. At the time of the writing of the Tablet, the days of warning the leaders of the world had passed. In this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh is foisting His affirmations, lamentations, proclamations and warnings upon the people. He is also sharing His admonitions, invocations, commandments and praise with the individual believer.

The Tablet first places honor on Hand of the Cause Hájí Mullá 'Alí-Akbar Sháh-mírzadí and Trustee of Bahá'u'lláh, Hájí 'Abdu'l-Ḥasan-i-Amin who had been thrown into the 'mighty prison' of Qazvín to appease the enemies of the Cause.¹⁹ Bahá'u'lláh follows with a reaffirmation of the ultimate authority that rests with God alone. He then addresses the people of Persia, a land of such great knowledge and erudition, with a question: How have they come to such a pass of self-destruction?

After appealing to the Afnán, descendants of the two brothers of the Báb's wife and of His maternal uncles, to arise to service in the Cause through the power of utterance, Bahá'u'lláh expresses three distinct lamentations:

(1) Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth, and enveloped its peoples; (2) Strife and conflict befit the beasts of the wild; (3) They that perpetrate tyranny in the world have usurped the rights of the peoples and kindreds of the earth and

*are sedulously pursuing their selfish inclinations.*²⁰

To justice He proclaims that through His Pen of glory, new life has been breathed into every human frame and into every word a fresh potency. He asks His followers “Wherefore fear ye, O My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? . . . The mere act of your gathering together is enough to scatter the forces of these vain and worthless people.”²¹ He likens this to how a few drops of moisture can soften hardened clay. To strife and conflict He emphasizes how the hearts of men are won over by goodly words and praiseworthy deeds. He uses the example of how the Bábís returned their swords to their scabbards and then commands us not to forsake prudence. To tyranny Bahá’u’lláh, in referring to the aforementioned ‘Seven Martyrs of Yazd’, addresses the governor of the city of Yazd, Maḥmúd Mírzá the Jalúlu’l-Dawlih: “The tyrant of the land of Yá (Yazd), committed that which hath caused the Concourse on High to shed tears of blood.”²²

Bahá’u’lláh returns to the demise of Persia after beseeching His followers to gaze upon the horizon of His Revelation. He observes “How strange that the people of Persia, who were unrivalled in sciences and arts, should have sunk to the lowest level of degradation among the kindreds of the earth.”²³ The consequences of corruption during the Qájár Dynasty had taken its toll. Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh had for many years attempted to improve the lot of Iran but every effort was stillborn due to the bickering among his advisors and their intractable objections to anything western. In fact it was the very corruption of his own administration that constituted its worst barrier to modernization. It was rumored that western manufacturers found it impossible to approach the court by virtue of the ‘path of gold’ resulting from bribery at every level of government. To this deplorable condition Bahá’u’lláh responds: “O people! In this blessed, this glorious Day, deprive not yourselves of the liberal effusions of bounty which the Lord of abounding grace hath vouchsafed unto you.”²⁴

In this Tablet a stark contrast is continually drawn between what the people are preoccupied with and what their proper focus should be that reveals a deep spiritual problem in Persia:

*Arise, O people, and by the power of God’s might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies—gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of their wretched worshippers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection.*²⁵

Bahá’u’lláh then extends this to humankind in general with the hope that the Hand of divine power may lend assistance to deliver mankind from “grievous abasement”. He then refers to admonitions in a former Tablet:

*O people of God! Do not busy yourselves in your own concerns; let your thoughts be fixed upon that which will rehabilitate the fortunes of mankind and sanctify the hearts and souls of men. This can best be achieved through pure and holy deeds, through a virtuous life and a goodly behaviour.*²⁶

It is always with the well being of humanity in mind that Bahá’u’lláh addresses the problems of Persia and of the world. “O friends! It behoveth you to refresh and revive your souls through the gracious favours which in this Divine, this soul-stirring Springtime are being showered upon you.”²⁷ He admonishes that we should let our vision be world embracing for this is a new Day with new laws. For example a new law is that we are forbidden to engage in contention and conflict: “It is incumbent upon every man, in this Day, to hold fast unto whatsoever will promote the interests, and exalt the station, of all nations and just governments.”²⁸ He says that the doors of love are now open and that we should “Consort with the followers of all religions

in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.”²⁹ Whatever caused dissension in the past has been abolished. Loving one's country is no longer enough; we should learn to love the world. We are admonished to observe courtesy and to become “attired with the vesture of uprightness.” In this Day, constancy must become a reality among the people of justice. Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes that His summons and message were never intended to benefit one land or one people only. He declares, “The whole earth is illuminated with the resplendent glory of God's Revelation.”³⁰

Western powers were far removed from such spiritual invocation. Though they dominated the world with technological superiority, Europe and America had become so caught up in ‘heroic materialism’ that their spiritual eyes and ears were closed. Power, military or economic, drove every aspect of life. This, coupled with spiritual corruption in Islam, particularly in Shí'ih Persia, produced a truly darkened world. On this stage of human depredation and against the background of ill-guided secularism, Bahá'u'lláh addresses the world of man.

Impact on the World

As a prisoner in the city of 'Akká, Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Book of laws that He referred to as ‘The Most Holy Book’. In the Tablet of the World He makes mention of the Aqdas as being conducive to the reconstruction of the world and points out five of the principles for the administration of the affairs of men:

*(1) It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. (2) Languages must be reduced to one common language to be taught in all the schools of the world. (3) It behoveth man to adhere tenaciously unto that which will promote fellowship, kindness and unity. (4) Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice. (5) Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others.*³¹

The last one particularly applied to Persia because under the Qájár dynasty its agriculture had been severely neglected.

More than material needs plagued Persia. Its spiritual descent found no seekers of truth or of equity. But the counsel and exhortation by Bahá'u'lláh did prove effective when the friends interceded on behalf of their enemies with high authorities. He said that “righteous deeds testify to the truth of one's deeds.” In His deep concern He exclaims:

*O people of God! Countless are the realms which Our Pen of Glory hath revealed and manifold the eyes to which it hath imparted true enlightenment. Yet most of the people in Persia continue to be deprived of the benefits of profitable counsels and remain sorely lacking in useful sciences and arts.*³²

Even more disturbing:

*The unbelievers and the faithless have set their minds on four things: first, the shedding of blood; second, the burning of books; third, the shunning of the followers of other religions; fourth, the extermination of other communities and groups.*³³

Hence, Bahá'u'lláh maintains that all these barriers have been abolished through the potency of the Word of God. He asks us to beseech God to guide the followers of the Shí'ih sect to purge them of unseemly conduct.

Again He appeals to the 'People of God' to listen to His call for new laws that are indispensable to Persia. He emphasizes that the Sháh's views should be considered in consultation with other leaders without which chaos would result. He considers the government of Britain to be a good example because it has both kingship and consultation of the people. Still, regarding law and its penalties, He maintains that it is the fear of God that restrains man both inwardly and outwardly more than laws alone. Then Bahá'u'lláh looks beyond Persia to the world under European domination in His admonitions. The west, which is the very source for material advancement of which Persia is advised to partake, has its own inadequacy with regard to spiritual advancement. The solution to this can only be found in the east under the purview of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. In His innermost heart He asks God to sanctify the souls of His servants and to deliver them from the fire with which they are beset at all times. "Aid them, O Lord, to acquire such virtues as will exalt their stations among the peoples of the world . . ."³⁴

In this new dispensation the people of God are admonished to listen to the counsels of Bahá'u'lláh speaking with the voice of God Whose word is like a sapling with roots planted in the hearts of men. We are called to foster its growth through the living waters of wisdom and holy words. Social laws of the past that were the source of malice have been abrogated and replaced with prerequisites of concord and unity. Great astonishment is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh as to how the nobility in Persia had stooped to boundless shame by embracing the ingratiating behavior of a certain individual. Their sense of resolve, dignity and honor had sunk so low that some had "allowed themselves to become playthings in the hands of the foolish."³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh admonished this individual to say a prayer that is enshrined within this Tablet:

O God my God! Thou seest me standing before the door of thy forgiveness and benevolence, turning my gaze toward the horizon of Thy bountiful favours and manifold blessings. I beg of Thee by Thy sweet accents and by the shrill voice of Thy Pen, O Lord of all mankind, to graciously aid Thy servants as it becometh Thy days and beseemeth the glory of Thy manifestation and Thy majesty. Verily potent art Thou to do whatsoever Thou wilt. All they that dwell in the heavens and on the earth bear witness to Thy power and Thy might, to Thy glory and Thy bounteousness. Praise be to Thee, O Lord of the worlds and the Well-Beloved of the heart of every man of understanding!

*Thou beholdest, O my God, the essence of poverty seeking the ocean of Thy wealth and the substance of iniquity yearning for the waters of Thy forgiveness and Thy tender mercy. Grant Thou, O my God, that which beseemeth Thy great glory and becometh the loftiness of Thy boundless grace. Thou art in truth the All-Bountiful, the Lord of grace abounding, the Ordainer, the All-Wise. No God is there but Thee, the most powerful, the All-Compelling, the Omnipotent.*³⁶

More admonitions are expressed in the Lawḥ-i-Dunyá:

*Do not forsake prudence. Incline your hearts to the counsels given by the Most Exalted Pen and beware lest your hands or tongues cause harm unto anyone . . . deprive not yourselves of liberal effusions of bounty . . . Well is it with them who judge His Cause with fairness . . .*³⁷ *Watch over yourselves, for the Evil One is lying in wait, ready to entrap you. Gird yourselves against his wicked devices, and, led by the light of the name of the all seeing God, make your escape from the darkness that surroundeth you.*³⁸

Bahá'u'lláh also expresses affirmations such as "Sovereignty is God's . . .³⁹ Valiant acts will assure the triumph of this Cause, and a saintly character will reinforce its power."⁴⁰ He further appeals to God on behalf of His creatures to shield them from His enemies. And He praises the

Hands of the Cause. Examples of His lamentations were given earlier with reference to the Afnán. He proclaims to them and those that have branched from His ancient stock: "How vast is the tabernacle of the Cause of God . . . Thy day of service is now come . . . Arise for the triumph of My Cause, and, through the power of thine utterance, subdue the hearts of men."⁴¹

Conclusion

The technological supremacy of Europe which evolved as an outgrowth of modern science had the unfortunate effect of undermining spiritual priorities that had reigned long on the continent. The second Industrial Revolution accelerated so rapidly that moral, ethical and spiritual values simply could not keep pace with resultant materialism. Political revolution and militarism combined with old hatreds to produce a powder keg of precarious uncertainty among the nations of Europe, who literally ruled the world under the colonial system.

Persia in the meantime had sunk to its lowest ebb, spiritually and economically. It desperately needed the aid of western technology but the corruption endemic to the Qájár Dynasty had produced an impasse to progress that secular forces could not overcome. Still the people of the region had a strong proclivity toward spiritual matters regardless of their misdirection.

In 1891, the last year of His life, Bahá'u'lláh faced this strange enigma regarding secular and spiritual tensions that threatened the well being of mankind by writing the Tablet of the World. In It He directly related the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the basis of law for any future world order. He simultaneously addressed the need for justice on a grand scale and for rectitude of conduct on the individual level. He specifically made the Universal House of Justice responsible for promoting the Lesser Peace and reiterated the need for a common language. Through a series of admonitions, affirmations, commandments, invocations, lamentations, proclamations, questions and warnings, He laid out the solutions that would direct the world toward peace.

Bahá'u'lláh has provided the key that unlocks the doors of science, of art, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and of wealth. The oppressors have not silenced his shrill voice and He has not been hindered by the perverse or seditious from revealing the Word of God. He asks God to protect and purge the Bahá'ís from corrupt imaginings of the followers of the former Faith. Lastly, He Bestows a great honor on the people of Bahá with the following words:

*The glory which proceedeth from God, the Lord of the Throne on High and of the earth below, rest upon you, O people of Bahá, O ye the companions of the Crimson Ark, and upon such as have inclined their ears to your sweet voices and have observed that whereunto they are bidden in this mighty and wondrous Tablet.*⁴²

Finally, believers in those early days of the Faith, though small in number, were heroes of steadfastness in the embryonic stage of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. That tiny, vulnerable community was the hope of the future for man and 'The Blessed Beauty' spared no effort in sustaining their spirit. Believers in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation must always keep before themselves the beneficent gift of His vision that He has graciously presented to mankind. Within the context of His Revelation lie the secret things that can bring about the uplifting of the spirit of every human being and the subsequent advancement of civilization.

Notes

- 1) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 201-2.
- 2) Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh Volume 4*, 329.
- 3) John H. Randall, *The Making of The Modern Mind*, 253.
- 4) Encyclopedia Britannica 2001, Standard Edition CD, *Enlightenment*.
- 5) John H. Randall, *The Making of The Modern Mind*, 415.
- 6) *ibid.*, 544.

- 7) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, 81-83.
- 8) Encyclopedia Britannica 2001, Standard Edition CD, *The Roman Question*.
- 9) Ernst Troeltsch, "Protestantism and the Industrial Revolution," *Protestantism*, 162-165.
- 10) John H. Randall, *The Making of The Modern Mind*, 301-302.
- 11) Encyclopedia Britannica 2001, Standard Edition CD, *European Expansion Since 1763*.
- 12) *ibid*, *French Revolution*, also called "Revolution of 1789." Hence the conventional term "Revolution of 1789," denoting the end of the ancient regime . . . Although historians disagree on the causes of the Revolution, the following reasons are commonly adduced: (1) France had the largest population in Europe and could not feed it adequately, (2) the rich and expanding bourgeoisie was excluded from political power more systematically than in any other country, (3) the peasants were acutely aware of their situation and were less and less inclined to support the anachronistic and burdensome feudal system, (4) the Philosophers, who advocated social and political reform, had been read more widely in France than elsewhere, and (5) French participation in the American Revolutionary War had completed the ruin of the states finances.
- 13) Hammerton and Barnes, *The Illustrated World History*, 831.
- 14) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of The Lord of Hosts*, 67.
- 15) Hammerton and Barnes, *The Illustrated World History*, 932.
- 16) Encyclopedia Britannica 2001 Standard Edition CD, Carlton Mabee, *Life of Samuel F. B. Morse*.
- 17) *ibid.*, *Qajar Dynasty*.
- 18) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 197.
- 19) Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh Volume 4*, 338.
- 20) Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, 84-85.
- 21) *ibid.*
- 22) *ibid.*, 85.
- 23) *ibid.*
- 24) *ibid.*
- 25) *ibid.*, 86.
- 26) *ibid.*
- 27) *ibid.*
- 28) *ibid.*, 87.
- 29) *ibid.*
- 30) *ibid.*, 89.
- 31) *ibid.*, 89-90.
- 32) *ibid.*, 91.
- 33) *ibid.*
- 34) *ibid.*, 92.
- 35) *ibid.*, 95.
- 36) *ibid.*, 95-96.
- 37) *ibid.*, 85.
- 38) *ibid.*, 87.
- 39) *ibid.*, 83.
- 40) *ibid.*, 86.
- 41) *ibid.*, 84.
- 42) *ibid.*, 97.

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Bahá'u'lláh's First Tablet to Napoleon III

Ismael Velasco

The first Tablet to Napoleon III, together with the Suriy-i-Muluk, the Kitáb-i-Badí', the Prayers for Fasting, the Lawh-i-Sultán, and the Suriy-i-Ra'ís, are listed in *God Passes By* (p. 171) not only as the six "most outstanding among the innumerable Tablets revealed in Adrianople, but as occupying a foremost position among all the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation." And yet, notwithstanding its significance, it has never been published in its original language.¹ Its historical circumstances are likewise less than self-evident, and existing discussions of this Tablet tend to raise more questions than they answer.²

Content

Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet to Napoleon III (1808-1873) is altogether unique among His tablets to the monarchs of the world. Its contents are summarised by Shoghi Effendi as follows:

*To Napoleon III Bahá'u'lláh addressed a specific Tablet, which was forwarded through one of the French ministers to the Emperor, in which He dwelt on the sufferings endured by Himself and His followers; avowed their innocence; reminded him of his two pronouncements on behalf of the oppressed and the helpless; and, desiring to test the sincerity of his motives, called upon him to "inquire into the condition of such as have been wronged," and "extend his care to the weak," and look upon Him and His fellow-exiles "with the eye of loving-kindness."*³

Shoghi Effendi's descriptions of other tablets in the same book shows that these descriptions are in fact codifications of their contents and major themes, and so we can assume that the above summary is not missing any features which the Guardian thought worthy of particular notice.

While Shoghi Effendi translated extracts of this Tablet in *The Promised Day is Come*, Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney's partial translation of this Tablet in *L'Oeuvre de Bahaou'llah*, is the most complete published version of this Tablet to date, which remains otherwise inaccessible. The Dreyfus translation contains all the salient features identified by the Guardian in *God Passes By*. On these grounds, and based on the similarities of translation (see appendix 2) it seems likely they were working to the same manuscript, and that we have in the Dreyfus translation an almost complete text.

When Bahá'u'lláh compiled the Suratu'l-Haykal He included His second Tablet to Napoleon, but left out the first one. This makes this Tablet distinctive and may explain why it has not drawn much scholarly notice or been published in publications relating to Bahá'u'lláh's messages to the kings and rulers. In *Modernity and Millenium*, Juan Cole suggests that in this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh was "announcing himself as the world messiah and asking the French to put pressure on the Ottomans to stop their persecution of the Bahá'ís."⁴ In his paper on Bahá'u'lláh's letters to the kings, Cole further holds that Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet to Napoleon III was "seeking recognition of the new Bahá'í religion".

On the basis of both the Dreyfus translation and Shoghi Effendi's summary of this Tablet, it seems in fact highly improbable that this Tablet includes a direct messianic proclamation by Bahá'u'lláh or a call to embrace His faith, such as He would voice emphatically in His second Tablet to Napoleon. Certainly, there is nothing in the published translations to suggest such a proclamation. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi writes of this Tablet:

*In His first Tablet Bahá'u'lláh, wishing to test the sincerity of the Emperor's motives, and deliberately assuming a meek and unprovocative tone . . .*⁵

Nor is there any indication in Shoghi Effendi's description of a proclamatory passage. Thus, while it is impossible to be completely certain in the absence of an original manuscript or even a full translation, it seems almost definite that this Tablet did not, in fact, involve a messianic announcement. This is the likely reason for its exclusion from the Suratu'l-Haykal, which is in essence a proclamatory text, incompatible with a tablet written in "a meek and unprovocative tone".

This leaves the question of what is missing from the current translation. On the basis of Shoghi Effendi's descriptive summaries and Dreyfus' own introduction, the answer would seem to be very little. All the themes and passages described or translated by the Guardian are included in the Dreyfus translation. This would suggest that what is missing is an opening invocation and possibly a brief preamble, addressing Napoleon. It is possible that such a preamble makes allusive reference to His divine claim and station, but probably not forcefully enough (or at all) to draw the Guardian's or Dreyfus' notice. Also missing is an ending, almost certainly quite brief, perhaps invoking in typical manner the divine names.

The Tablet breathes pathos and urgency, while retaining a sense of dignity. It narrates in heartbreaking language twenty five years of privations and sufferings afflicting the followers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, including pillage, violence, exile, slavery, imprisonment, even though they were innocent of any crime. "Sucklings have well nigh drank the cup of martyrdom,"⁶ He laments, and pity hath been shown to neither men nor women!" The tone of Bahá'u'lláh's appeal to Napoleon amidst such oppression is not one of supplication. Rather, Bahá'u'lláh elevates His address to the level of principle, by celebrating Napoleon's statements regarding his sense of obligation towards the oppressed and the helpless. Bahá'u'lláh then confirms the validity of such principles, and unambiguously lays out the duty incumbent upon the Emperor: "It beseemeth the king of the age to inquire into the condition of such as have been wronged, and it behooveth him to extend his care to the weak."⁷ On the basis of this spiritual principle, assumed by the Emperor himself, Bahá'u'lláh makes clear the necessity for Napoleon to extend upon His community "the shelter of royal protection".⁸

The Tablet was written in the throes of what Shoghi Effendi described as a "supreme crisis",⁹ and which Bahá'u'lláh named the 'most great separation', the 'Days of stress' (*Ayyam-i-Shidad*), when Mirza Yahya, whom He designated the "Most Great Idol", openly defied Him, calumniated Him, humiliated Him and finally made the attempt on His life which left its marks upon His health until the end of His days.¹⁰ In the final passages of His Tablet to Napoleon, Bahá'u'lláh touchingly evokes the condition of His followers in the aftermath of these events: "Their strength hath reached its limit, and there remains in their hearts neither patience nor endurance."¹¹

Date of Revelation

We know from Bahá'u'lláh's own testimony (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* p. 45) that this Tablet was revealed in Adrianople. Shoghi Effendi, moreover, relates the revelation of this Tablet, together with the significant tablets mentioned at the beginning of this paper, to the

period “Almost immediately after the ‘Most Great Separation’ had been effected”.¹² Building on this statement Jonah Winters estimates the revelation of this Tablet to have taken place in 1866-1867.¹³ On the basis of both internal and circumstantial evidence, however, the 1866-1867 dating of Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet to Napoleon must be revised.

In the Tablet Bahá'u'lláh recounts in heartbreaking language twenty five years of suffering and oppression inflicted on the Bábí-Bahá'í communities. This date must refer, in order to tally with the Adrianople dating, to the year 1260 A.H./1844 A.D. and the declaration of the Bab, which makes the date of Revelation sometime in 1285 A.H./1868 A.D. Furthermore, since this Tablet does not mention the Ottoman decree of exile to Gallipoli and thence to ‘Akká, the Tablet must have been written before the fifth of Rabí'u'th-Thání 1285 A.H. (July 26, 1868), the date of the Farman.¹⁴ Given its theme, the likelihood is that the Tablet was written as the government opposition that would eventuate in Bahá'u'lláh's exile began to make itself felt in spring-summer of 1868. In all likelihood, the Tablet was written during the turmoil of the Commission of Investigation, following hostile reports from the Vali of Adrianople to the Sublime Porte.

The Porte received the Vali's report on the 20 Dhi'l-Hijj 1284 (14 April 1868) after a series of interrogations of Bahá'ís and Azalis between April 1 and April 7 of that year. It was found, and recorded on 5 Muharram 1285 (28 April 1868), that Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Yahyá had put forth claims to high religious station which could constitute a threat to public order. The ensuing intervention of a Commission of Investigation culminated in a report dated 26 Safar 1285 (18 June 1868) on which the edict of exile was based.¹⁵

On the basis of the above, we can be confident in dating the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet to Napoleon to the period between late April and early June, and most likely May of 1868. The Tablet must have been written around the same time as the Tablet to the Shah, to judge from striking similarities with paragraph 20 of that Tablet.¹⁶

Transmission

The matter of the transmission of this Tablet to Napoleon the III is more elusive. In the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (p. 45), Bahá'u'lláh narrates:

Addressing Himself unto the kings and rulers of the earth—may God, exalted be He, assist them—He imparted unto them that which is the cause of the well-being, the unity, the harmony, and the reconstruction of the world, and of the tranquillity of the nations. Among them was Napoleon III, who is reported to have made a certain statement, as a result of which We sent him Our Tablet while in Adrianople. To this, however, he did not reply. After Our arrival in the Most Great Prison there reached Us a letter from his Minister, the first part of which was in Persian, and the latter in his own handwriting. In it he was cordial, and wrote the following: “I have, as requested by you, delivered your letter . . .”

Likewise, ‘Abdu'l-Baha in *Some Answered Questions* (p. 32), stated:

Upon His arrival in prison He addressed an epistle to Napoleon, which He sent through the French ambassador. The gist of it was, “Ask what is Our crime, and why We are confined in this prison and this dungeon.”

By prison, a footnote in the authorised English translation clarifies, Adrianople is meant, in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's own witness. For our purposes the essential point is that the Tablet was sent “through the French ambassador”. The Persian reads “*va ba-vásita safír farán-siya ársál shud*” (Mufáwadát, p. 24), where *safír* means ambassador. Bahá'u'lláh's account, which states the letter was sent from Adrianople through a minister, uses the word *wázir*.¹⁷ In

an unpublished tablet to Sulaymán Khán in private hands, it is mentioned that the first Tablet to Napoleon was sent through a minister (*vázir*) that was friendly to Bahá'u'lláh.¹⁸

- 1) Who was this minister/ambassador who transmitted Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet to Napoleon? Dreyfus' suggestion that this letter was delivered by Cesar Cattafago, consular agent for France in 'Akká, although correct for Bahá'u'lláh's second Tablet, is anachronistic for the first Tablet, given its Adrianople dating. We can exclude this option. Three further possibilities present themselves:
- 2) Following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's usage of the word *safir*, we might think of the French ambassador to Constantinople, Monsieur Bouree. This seems unlikely, for two reasons. First, Bahá'u'lláh being located in Adrianople, and in contact with the acting French vice-consul there, it would make less sense for Him to rely on a French representative based in Constantinople. Second, a letter from the vice-consul at Adrianople, F. Ronzevalle, to the Ambassador at Constantinople,¹⁹ about Bahá'u'lláh's exile to 'Akká includes a basic introduction to the situation and person of Bahá'u'lláh, assuming no prior knowledge, which would add to the likelihood of no previous contact.
- 3) Vice-Consul F. Ronzevalle at Adrianople. This seems a more likely candidate, as his letter demonstrates some contact with the Bahá'í community, and it was to him and not to the Ambassador that the Bahá'ís turned after the decree exiling Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akká was pronounced. It would make sense to assume that an earlier letter would have pursued similar channels. On the other hand, it is one thing to convey a message to the Ambassador in Constantinople, and quite another to deliver it to Napoleon the III himself.

Finally, there is the Comte de Gobineau, who first drew attention to the Cause of the Báb in Europe.²⁰ Thomas Linard hypothesized some years ago²¹ that Gobineau might have been the minister in question, on the basis of the Gobineau-Prokesch letters published by Beverige and MacEoin in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, vol.1, issue 4; as well as from the fact that Gobineau was French plenipotentiary minister in Athens at the time and thus in proximity to 'Akká.

Linard's preliminary hypothesis may be further strengthened by Gobineau's last published letter to Prokesch, dated 31 August 1868.²² In this letter, Gobineau tells Prokesch "confidentially" that Bahá'u'lláh had written to him "some months ago", which would fit with the likely time of composition of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet. Gobineau wrote a response, to which he received no reply from Bahá'u'lláh. He then wrote again to Bahá'u'lláh, enclosing a translated copy in his letter to Prokesch, in which he confirms that the unanswered letter to Bahá'u'lláh had been sent "through the intermediary of the Greek Consul". He then tells Bahá'u'lláh of his lobbying of the Austrian Ambassador on behalf of Bahá'u'lláh and His followers resulting in a "very insistent" exchange with Fu'ad Pasha and the Ottoman government, before concluding: "As for myself, I will act similarly in Paris with respect to the Government of the Emperor."²³ The mention of a minister friendly to Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet reported by Dr. Momen, would apply most strongly to Gobineau, whose explicit and implicit expressions of sympathy and advocacy are unmatched by any other European minister in the Adrianople period.

From the above it seems that we can be fairly confident in identifying Gobineau as the vehicle for the transmission of Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet to Napoleon III. First, the timescales fit well together, with Bahá'u'lláh's letter arriving sometime in summer or late spring of 1868, towards the concluding months of Gobineau's stay in Athens. The fact that Gobineau used the French consul to Athens as intermediary for his reply further strengthens the Greek connection. Secondly, at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's letter, Gobineau would have fitted 'Abdu'l-Bahá's designation of a *safir*, and as minister plenipotentiary, could also be described as a *vazir*. Thirdly, the fact that he feels impelled to say to Prokesch that Bahá'u'lláh's letter to him was confiden-

tial, would support the idea of a message from Bahá'u'lláh of some import and sensitivity. Fourthly, the tone of this first Tablet to Napoleon is similar to that found in the Prokesch-Gobineau papers published by Beveridge and MacEoin cited earlier. Finally, Gobineau's efforts to make clear his political lobbying on behalf of Bahá'u'lláh, with a very clear reference to Paris and the Government of the Emperor make it extremely likely that Gobineau is sensitively alluding to Bahá'u'lláh's letter. From this perspective the urgency with which Gobineau asks for Bahá'u'lláh's response to his previous letter, would point to Gobineau's letter being the self-same one as is cited by Bahá'u'lláh in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf to which we now return:

After Our arrival in the Most Great Prison there reached Us a letter from his Minister, the first part of which was in Persian, and the latter in his own handwriting. In it he was cordial, and wrote the following: "I have, as requested by you, delivered your letter, and until now have received no answer. We have, however, issued the necessary recommendations to our Minister in Constantinople and our consuls in those regions. If there be anything you wish done, inform us, and we will carry it out."

At the very least, as Bahá'u'lláh's citation informs us, the minister in question delivered the Tablet to Napoleon and issued instructions to the French Ambassador in Constantinople as well as the various consuls in the region. This may account in some measure for the willingness of the French Consular Agent in France, Cesar Cattafago, to deliver Bahá'u'lláh's second Tablet to Napoleon. If, as we surmise, the minister in question was Gobineau, he went even further since he wrote the letter cited by Bahá'u'lláh, lobbying the Austrian ambassador and through him Fu'ad Pasha. In addition he mobilised Baron Prokesch for the same purposes.

However, Bahá'u'lláh explains that the minister in question misunderstood the purpose of His Tablet, following His citation above with the following comment:

From his words it became apparent that he understood the purpose of this Servant to have been a request for material assistance.

If Gobineau was the author of this letter, this explains why Bahá'u'lláh left the letter unanswered. Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet to Napoleon III was clearly aimed at triggering a response equivalent to Napoleon's vaunted emancipation of the oppressed Turks. It was for Napoleon to use his power as the mightiest monarch in Europe to effect the emancipation of the Bahá'í community from the oppression of the Turkish and Persian governments. The minister took the Tablet to be a request for personal assistance for Bahá'u'lláh, possibly of a pecuniary nature (this is before it became apparent that Bahá'u'lláh and His companions in Adrianople faced their most trying exile to date into the fortress town of 'Akká). This, Bahá'u'lláh implies, was not His purpose, which would explain His lack of response to such an offer and to such a letter.

One note of caution to this identification might be the statement in Momen's book of Western accounts of the Bahá'í Faith, questioning on the basis of handwriting and style the authenticity of purported tablets of Bahá'u'lláh in the Gobineau collection in Strasbourg University.²⁴ In fact, Momen has reversed his judgement on the authenticity of these tablets in the light of further research, not only affirming their authenticity, but suggesting they support the identification of Gobineau as the conduit of the first Tablet to Napoleon III.²⁵

Reception

Our sole confirmation that the Tablet reached its recipient comes from the Minister's letter quoted in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. This Tablet would have been delivered sixteen years into the Second French Empire, and one year after the disastrous end of Napoleon's Mexican venture, which left the noble Maximilian dead and his wife Charlotte bereft of her

wits for the rest of her long life. The political context was changing swiftly, in the wake of Napoleon's alignment with the Papal states against the Italian troops of Garibaldi. He remained, at this time, the preeminent ruler in Europe, "Emperor of the French, the most powerful ruler of his day on the European continent, Napoleon III."²⁶

Already, the seeds of his destruction were being sown, as prophesised so dramatically by Bahá'u'lláh's second Tablet to Napoleon. As Bismarck laid Prussian troops into the fortress of the coveted city of Luxembourg, which Napoleon was in process of purchasing from the king of the Netherlands, impending conflict loomed. It was less than two years to the fated Battle of Sedan that would destroy his fortunes.

Shoghi Effendi, in *Promised Day is Come* (p. 51), recounts the following:

It is reported that upon receipt of this first Message that superficial, tricky, and pride-intoxicated monarch flung down the Tablet saying: "If this man is God, I am two gods!"

Shoghi Effendi does not identify the source of this report. As the Bahá'í World Centre Research Department explains:²⁷

much historical research can be done, and indeed needs to be done, before we have a better understanding of the reaction of the Monarchs to the Tablets addressed to them by Bahá'u'lláh. In this regard, the following statement from a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice may be of interest:

We do not know at the present time of any particular material about Napoleon III with reference to his reported exclamation, "If this man is God, I am two Gods." Such matters will undoubtedly be investigated by Bahá'í historians in the future. (28 July 1971 to an individual)

What is certain is that the Tablet received no reply. Napoleon's response is discussed in several instances in Bahá'í writings:

Hadst thou been sincere in thy words, thou wouldst have not cast behind thy back the Book of God, when it was sent unto thee by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. We have proved thee through it, and found thee other than what thou didst profess.²⁸

He it was who cast the Tablet of God behind him when We made known unto him what the hosts of tyranny had caused Us to suffer.²⁹

During His exile and imprisonment He wrote Tablets of authority to the kings and rulers of the world, announcing His spiritual sovereignty, establishing the religion of God, upraising the heavenly banners of the Cause of God. One of these Tablets was sent to Napoleon III, Emperor of France. He received it with contempt and cast it behind his back.³⁰

Significance

The significance that Shoghi Effendi ascribed to this Tablet by naming it among those "occupying a foremost position among all the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation" may be somewhat puzzling, given its "meek and unprovocative" tone. The awe-inspiring theological meaning invested into this mild Tablet, however, is only understood when placed in the context of both Bahá'u'lláh's second Tablet to Napoleon, and the events that followed in Napoleon III's reign.

It was as a direct consequence of Napoleon's indifference and tacit rejection of this first Tablet, that Bahá'u'lláh wrote His second and most famous Tablet to Napoleon, giving him a chance to make amends but announcing his demise should he persist in ignoring Bahá'u'lláh.

The contrast between the first and second Tablets could not be greater. If the first one is meek, the second is majestic. If the first one is conciliatory, the second is uncompromisingly challenging. The subject of Napoleon's intervention in the Crimean war is again treated in the second Tablet to Napoleon, as is his altruistic statement of his motivations for waging war on the Czar, but this time the tone in which these common subjects are addressed is altogether different:

O King! We heard the words thou didst utter in answer to the Czar of Russia, concerning the decision made regarding the war (Crimean War). Thy Lord, verily, knoweth, is informed of all. Thou didst say: 'I lay asleep upon my couch, when the cry of the oppressed, who were drowned in the Black Sea, wakened me.' This is what we heard thee say, and, verily, thy Lord is witness unto what I say. We testify that that which wakened thee was not their cry but the promptings of thine own passions, for We tested thee, and found thee wanting. Comprehend the meaning of My words, and be thou of the discerning. It is not Our wish to address thee words of condemnation, out of regard for the dignity We conferred upon thee in this mortal life. We, verily, have chosen courtesy, and made it the true mark of such as are nigh unto Him. Courtesy, is, in truth, a raiment which fitteth all men, whether young or old. Well is it with him that adorneth his temple therewith, and woe unto him who is deprived of this great bounty. Hadst thou been sincere in thy words, thou wouldst have not cast behind thy back the Book of God, when it was sent unto thee by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. We have proved thee through it, and found thee other than that which thou didst profess. Arise, and make amends for that which escaped thee. Ere long the world and all that thou possessest will perish, and the kingdom will remain unto God, thy Lord and the Lord of thy fathers of old. It behoveth thee not to conduct thine affairs according to the dictates of thy desires. Fear the sighs of this Wronged One, and shield Him from the darts of such as act unjustly.

For what thou hast done, thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought. Commotions shall seize all the people in that land, unless thou arisest to help this Cause, and followest Him Who is the Spirit of God (Jesus Christ) in this, the Straight Path.³¹

From this Tablet, as from Shoghi Effendi's interpretations cited already, it becomes evident that Bahá'u'lláh's first Tablet to Napoleon III was, in Bahá'u'lláh's eyes, in the nature of a test of unimagined and altogether vast consequences. Napoleon III's failure to meet the test of sincerity implied in Bahá'u'lláh's demand for restitution of the rights of the Bahá'í community, according to Bahá'u'lláh and later Shoghi Effendi's interpretation, would precipitate the confusion of his kingdom and the passing of his sovereignty. It is implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's second Tablet that, had Napoleon responded differently to His first missive, had He demonstrated that justice and altruism was the driving force of his vast enterprises, be it the Crimean war or the hoped for emancipation of the Bahá'í community, then this dreadful and at the time inconceivable debacle of his reign would not, according to Bahá'u'lláh, have taken place. On the touchstone of this first Tablet to Napoleon the fate of the imperial world was judged and anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh. Thus have the Bahá'í writings invested into this mild and relatively brief Tablet a preponderant theological significance which predicate vast social and historic consequences, ensuring it a high place in the canon of Bahá'í scripture.

Epilogue

It is fitting to close this paper with an extended citation of Shoghi Effendi's theological retelling, so reminiscent in their tone of the essays of Carlyle, of the tale of him whom Victor Hugo named "the man of December":

Napoleon III, son of Louis Bonaparte (brother of Napoleon I), was, few historians will deny, the most outstanding monarch of his day in the West. "The Emperor," it was said of him, "was the state." The French capital was the most attractive capital in Europe, the French court "the most brilliant and luxurious of the XIX century." Possessed of a fixed and indestructible ambition, he aspired to emulate the example, and finish the interrupted work, of his imperial uncle. A dreamer, a conspirator, of a shifting nature, hypocritical and reckless, he, the heir to the Napoleonic throne, taking advantage of the policy which sought to foster the reviving interest in the career of his great prototype, had sought to overthrow the monarchy. Failing in his attempt, he was deported to America, was later captured in the course of an attempted invasion of France, was condemned to perpetual captivity, and escaped to London, until, in 1848, the Revolution brought about his return, and enabled him to overthrow the constitution, after which he was proclaimed emperor. Though able to initiate far-reaching movements, he possessed neither the sagacity nor the courage required to control them.

To this man, the last emperor of the French, who, through foreign conquest, had striven to endear his dynasty to the people, who even cherished the ideal of making France the center of a revived Roman Empire—to such a man the Exile of 'Akká, already thrice banished by Sultan Abdu'l-Aziz, had transmitted, from behind the walls of the barracks in which He lay imprisoned, an Epistle which bore this indubitably clear arraignment and ominous prophecy: "... For what thou hast done, thy kingdom shall be thrown into confusion, and thine empire shall pass from thine hands, as a punishment for that which thou hast wrought."

... The significance of the somber and pregnant words uttered by Bahá'u'lláh in His second Tablet was soon revealed. He who was actuated in provoking the Crimean War by his selfish desires, who was prompted by a personal grudge against the Russian Emperor, who was impatient to tear up the Treaty of 1815 in order to avenge the disaster of Moscow, and who sought to shed military glory over his throne, was soon himself engulfed by a catastrophe that hurled him in the dust, and caused France to sink from her preeminent station among the nations to that of a fourth power in Europe.

The Battle of Sedan in 1870 sealed the fate of the French Emperor. The whole of his army was broken up and surrendered, constituting the greatest capitulation hitherto recorded in modern history. A crushing indemnity was exacted. He himself was taken prisoner. His only son, the Prince Imperial, was killed, a few years later, in the Zulu War. The Empire collapsed, its program unrealized. The Republic was proclaimed. Paris was subsequently besieged and capitulated. "The terrible Year" marked by civil war, exceeding in its ferocity the Franco-German War, followed. William I, the Prussian king, was proclaimed German Emperor in the very palace which stood as a "mighty monument and symbol of the power and pride of Louis XIV, a power which had been secured to some extent by the humiliation of Germany." Deposed by a disaster "so appalling that it resounded throughout the world," this false and boastful monarch suffered in the end, and till his death, the same exile as that which, in the case of Bahá'u'lláh, he had so heartlessly ignored.³²

Napoleon III's downfall recalls the Old Testament words to the fallen angel: "how low art thou fallen, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" His fate evokes something of awe, the historian's somber wonder aptly voiced by Alistair Horne:

*History knows of perhaps no more startling instance of what the Greeks called peripateia, the terrible fall from prideful heights. Certainly no nation in modern times, so replete with apparent grandeur and opulent in material achievement, has ever been subjected to a worse humiliation in so short a time.*³³

APPENDIX 1

Bahá'u'lláh's First Tablet to Napoleon III

From H. Dreyfus, L'OEUVRE DE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH, vol. 2, pp. 97-98, Editions Ernest Leroux, Paris, 1924

Dreyfus Intro

Many months before this [second Tablet to Napoleon III] was written, and upon arriving at Saint-Jean-d'Acre, Bahá'u'lláh had addressed, through the intermediary of the French Consul, Cesar Cattafago, a letter to Napoleon III which had remained unanswered. We think it of interest to publish its essential contents:

. . . For twenty five years an entire group of God's servants hath not had a single restful night nor an instant's tranquility, and hath been continuously exposed to the assaults of calumny and the workings of violence. How many the children that have been made into orphans! How many the mothers who have lost their child! How many more weep to find themselves separated from their children! How many children do lament and groan in search of their mother! Sucklings have well nigh drank the cup of martyrdom, and pity hath been shown to neither men nor women!

How many the nights when, while the savage beasts and birds of prey reposed peacefully in their forests, these servants could not, in their distress and exhaustion, find safe retreat or shelter! How many the people who, in the eve, were possessed of rank and fortune, yet in the morrow woke in poverty and misery, their goods pillaged and their possessions taken! No land remains untinged by the blood of these oppressed ones, nor soil where the graves of these wretched ones may not be found. How many the women that have been ravished and taken from country to country and town to town, and how many the men that have been sold to slavery! How many have fled into the deserts, with none apprised of their whereabouts! How many others still remain imprisoned! The sighs of these wronged ones rise up night and day, and their appeals for succour can be heard incessantly. And yet they have perpetrated no crime.

[Shoghi Effendi's translation begins below (from The Promised Day Is Come, pp. 51-2)]³⁴

Two statements graciously uttered by the king of the age have reached the ears of these wronged ones. These pronouncements are, in truth, the king of all pronouncements, the like of which have never been heard from any sovereign. The first was the answer given the Russian Government when it inquired why the war (Crimean) was waged against it. Thou didst reply: "The cry of the oppressed who, without guilt or blame, were drowned in the Black Sea wakened me at dawn. Wherefore, I took up arms against thee." These oppressed ones, however, have suffered a greater wrong, and are in greater distress. Whereas the trials inflicted upon those people lasted but one day, the troubles borne by these servants have continued for twenty and five years, every moment of which has held for us a grievous affliction.

The other weighty statement, which was indeed a wondrous statement manifested to the world, was this: "Ours is the responsibility to avenge the oppressed and succour the helpless."

The fame of the Emperor's justice and fairness hath brought hope to a great many souls. It beseemeth the king of the age to inquire into the condition of such as have been wronged, and it behooveth him to extend his care to the weak. Verily, there hath not been, nor is there now, on earth any one as oppressed as we are, or as helpless as these wanderers. [*End of Shoghi Effendi's translation*]

For all living beings, even the savage beasts and birds of prey, have a corner in which to find shelter. These wronged ones, alone, are constantly captive in the chains of violence, their necks prisoned in the bondage of hatred and passion. Their strength hath reached its limit, and there remains in their hearts neither patience nor endurance. They call upon thee to look upon them with the eye of loving-kindness³⁵, that they might enjoy the shelter of royal protection . . .

APPENDIX 2

A Comparison of Shoghi Effendi's translation into English with Dreyfus' translation into French, rendered in English by Velasco

Shoghi Effendi's translation (*Promised Day is Come*)

Two statements graciously uttered by the king of the age have reached the ears of these wronged ones. These pronouncements are, in truth, the king of all pronouncements, the like of which have never been heard from any sovereign. The first was the answer given the Russian Government when it inquired why the war (Crimean) was waged against it. Thou didst reply: "The cry of the oppressed who, without guilt or blame, were drowned in the Black Sea wakened me at dawn. Wherefore, I took up arms against thee." These oppressed ones, however, have suffered a greater wrong, and are in greater distress. Whereas the trials inflicted upon those people lasted but one day, the troubles borne by these servants have continued for twenty and five years, every moment of which has held for us a grievous affliction.

The other weighty statement, which was indeed a wondrous statement manifested to the world, was this: "Ours is the responsibility to avenge the oppressed and succour the helpless." The fame of the Emperor's justice and fairness hath brought hope to a great many souls. It beseemeth the king of the age to inquire into the condition of such as have been wronged, and it behooveth him to extend his care to the weak. Verily, there hath not been, nor is there now, on earth any one as oppressed as we are, or as helpless as these wanderers.

Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney's translation into French, rendered by Velasco into English*

Two words, pronounced by the King of the age, have reached their ears, so beautiful that no sovereign hath ever uttered their like. The first was the response to the Russian government who demanded wherefore was war waged against it. Thou hast said: "the cries of the wretched innocents thrown into the Black Sea have, in the morn, woken me from my sleep, and it was this that decided me to battle." Behold, these oppressed ones are more wretched still and more miserable, since the trials of those lasted but a day, whereas the calamities we endure have not ceased for one moment in twenty five years!

The other remarkable word which, verily, astonished the world, was: "It is for us to avenge the oppressed and succour the wretched." The royal voice of justice and retribution thereupon raised the hopes of a great multitude. It behoveth indeed the rulers of this world to inquire into the condition of the oppressed; sympathy towards the feeble is among the duties incumbent upon them. Verily, there is not, nor hath there ever been any upon the earth more sorely oppressed than us, nor hath there ever been seen any more feeble.

* Translations by Dreyfus-Barney into French and then by Ismael Velasco into English are both to be considered Provisional Translations, not for further distribution.

Notes

- 1) See McGlinn (ed.), *Leiden Bibliography of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets*. The bibliography overlooks Shoghi Effendi's translation in *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 51 as well as that in H. Dreyfus' *L'Oeuvre de Bahaou'llah*, vol. 2, pp. 97-98
- 2) Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 45, 47; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 32; Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* p. 171, 173, and *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 51; *L'Oeuvre de Bahaou'llah*, vol. 2, pp. 97-98; Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 2 pp. 368-369 (which merely repeats the latter reference); Jonah Winters "Overview of the Tablets to Napoleon", online at www.bahai-library.org/study; Juan Cole, *Modernity and the Millenium*, p. 63, and "Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets to the Rulers", www-personal.umich.edu/jrcole/bhking.htm
- 3) *God Passes By* (p. 173)
- 4) Juan Cole, *Modernity and the Millenium*, p. 63
- 5) *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 51
- 6) My translation from the Dreyfus text.
- 7) Cited by Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 52
- 8) My translation from the Dreyfus text.
- 9) *God Passes By*, p. 163.
- 10) Ibid. chapter X.
- 11) Ibid.
- 12) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 171. The Most Great Separation refers to Bahá'u'lláh's seclusion in the house of Ridhā Bey for two months beginning March 10, 1866, marking His final break of relations with Mirza Yahya. Cf. Shoghi Effendi, *ibid.* p. 160ff.; Glenn Cameron and Wendy Momen, *Basic Bahá'í Chronology*; Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 2 pp. 165ff.; Juan Cole, "The Surah of God: Introduction and translation", www-personal.umich.edu/jrcole/bhallah.htm
- 13) Jonah Winters "Overview of the Tablets to Napoleon", he follows Cameron and Momen in dating the Most Great Separation to 1866.
- 14) Cf. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 186; Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, p. 199
- 15) See Momen, *ibid.*, p. 199-200
- 16) Cf. "Summons of the Lord of Hosts", para 20.
- 17) Cf. *Lawh-i Mubárák khítáb bih Sháykh Muhammad Taqí*, bahai.com online version, p. 32
- 18) As reported by Moojan Momen, personal communication
- 19) Cited in Moojan Momen, *op. cit.*, p. 190
- 20) See his *Religions et Philosophies Dans L'Asie Centrale*. See also biographical information in Momen,
- 21) e-mail communication
- 22) Cited in Momen, *op. cit.* p. 208
- 23) Ibid. pp. 208-209.
- 24) Ibid. p. 191
- 25) Personal communication
- 26) *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 20
- 27) Cited in letter of the Universal House of Justice, 1997 Nov 06, "Responses of Napoleon III and Queen Victoria"
- 28) Second Tablet to Napoleon III, cited in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 47
- 29) *Kitab-i Aqdas*, para 86.
- 30) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 211
- 31) Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 50-51
- 32) Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 49-52
- 33) Alistair Horne, *The Fall of Paris*, p. 34, Macmillan, London, 1965.
- 34) Shoghi Effendi's translation makes it almost certain that Dreyfus was working from an identical manuscript, and shows the remarkable closeness of his French translation to the Guardian's own, which may mean that the Guardian may have used Dreyfus' work as a starting-point to his own translation. See the Appendix 2 for a comparison between my original translation of Dreyfus' French, and Shoghi Effendi's English translation cited here.
- 35) "with the eye of loving kindness" inserted here on the basis of Shoghi Effendi's translation in *God Passes By*, p. 173

Celestial Pavilion, Inmates of

by / on behalf of [Universal House of Justice](#)

published in [Lights of Irfan](#), 4, pages 163-64
Wilmette, IL: Irfan Colloquia, 2003

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 15 June 1994

From: Research Department

Inmates of the Celestial Pavilion

The Research Department has considered the questions about the meaning of a passage from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh raised by Mr. . . . in his electronic mail message of 20 May 1994. The passage in question appears in Adib Taherzadeh's *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*.¹ Bahá'u'lláh states:

These are the days in which God hath proved the hearts of the entire company of His Messengers and Prophets, and beyond them those that stand guard over His sacred and inviolable Sanctuary, the inmates of the celestial Pavilion and dwellers of the Tabernacle of Glory. How severe, therefore, the test to which they who join partners with God must needs be subjected!

Mr. . . . enquires about the meaning of a number of phrases in this extract. We provide the following response.

By way of introduction, we wish to note that, as Mr. . . . undoubtedly knows, authoritative interpretation of the Writings is the exclusive province of the designated interpreters, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. To date, the Research Department has not been able to locate any reference in the Writings or the letters of Shoghi Effendi which interprets this particular passage from Gleanings. It is not, therefore, possible for us to state with any certainty what the text means. Mr. . . . is encouraged to arrive at his own understanding of the statement.

1. "God hath proved the hearts. . ."

To assist Mr. . . . in thinking about the meaning of the above phrase, it is suggested that it might well be helpful to consider the phrase within the context of the overall passage. The passage appears to underline the power of God, the greatness of the Revelation and the judgment to which all will be subjected in these "days". As if to emphasize the pervasiveness of this "test", it seems that Bahá'u'lláh is calling attention to the fact that, not only are "they who join partners with God" to be "subjected" to a "severe" test, but also that "God hath proved the hearts" of the other souls mentioned in the passage.

For additional statements about "they who join partners with God", Mr. . . . is referred to *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*; see, for example, pp. [99](#)-100, p. [166](#), p. [192](#), pp. [197](#)-198,² and *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. [124](#) and p. [185](#).³

2. "those that stand guard over His sacred and inviolable Sanctuary, the inmates of the celestial Pavilion and dwellers of the Tabernacle of Glory"

With regard to the identity of "those that stand guard. . .", the Research Department has not been able to find any statement in the Writings which helps to clarify their identity. While we also have not been able to locate any references in the Writings or letters of Shoghi Effendi which identify the other entities mentioned above, there are many references to "inmates" and "dwellers". Such entities would appear to inhabit the spiritual realms. It is suggested that Mr. . . . might well gain a deeper understanding of this subject by studying the Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in which these terms appear.

3. Spiritual "locations"

Mr. . . . enquires whether different spiritual "locations" or "stations" are implied in Bahá'u'lláh's reference to "His sacred and inviolable Sanctuary", "the celestial Pavilion", and "the Tabernacle of Glory".

While the Bahá'í Writings contain many references to the spiritual worlds, this subject tends to remain shrouded in mystery. Indeed, with regard to the "worlds of God", Bahá'u'lláh affirms that:

. . . the worlds of God are countless in their number, and infinite in their range. None can reckon or comprehend them except God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.[4](#)

Further, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the Kingdom of God

is not a material place; it is sanctified from time and place. It is a spiritual world, a divine world, and the center of the Sovereignty of God; it is freed from body and that which is corporeal, and it is purified and sanctified from the imaginations of the human world. To be limited to place is a property of bodies and not of spirits. Place and time surround the body, not the mind and spirit.[5](#)

Notes

[1](#)) The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh (Oxford: George Ronald, 1992), p. 55. The extract, taken from Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. [VIII](#), is also quoted by Shoghi Effendi in God Passes By (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. [99](#).

[2](#)) Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983

[3](#)) Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988

[4](#)) Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. [151](#)-152

[5](#)) Some Answered Questions (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. [241](#)

Letters of the Quranic Dispensation and Letters of the Living (*huruf*)

by / on behalf of [Universal House of Justice](#)

published in [Lights of Irfan](#), 4, page 165
 Wilmette, IL: Irfan Colloquia, 2003
 first written or published 1994-10-02

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice
 Date: 2 October 1994
 From: Research Department

Letters of the Quranic Dispensation

In an electronic mail message dated 30 August 1994, Mr. . . . requested information on a quotation from Bahá'u'lláh, cited by the Guardian in *God Passes By*:

. . . the Letters of the Bayán, whose station is ten thousand times more glorious than that of the letters of the Qur'anic Dispensation. . . 1

Mr. . . . wishes to know if the "Letters of the Bayán" are the same as the Letters of the Living. Also, he asks the identity of the "Letters of the Qur'anic Dispensation". These questions were referred to the Research Department, and we offer the following response.

The word "Letters" (*hurúf*), used in the quotation above, has a definite background in the Writings of the Báb. The Báb used the term *hurúf* in a number of ways that are similar but not identical in meaning. For instance, He used *hurúf* to indicate all followers of a religion. As an example, in the Persian Bayán, Váhíd 2, chapter 4, we find "*Hurúf-i-Alif*" as a reference to the generality of the followers of Jesus Christ. In the same chapter, the term "*Hurúf-i-Qur'án*" is a reference to Muslims in general.

The term *hurúf* is also used in the Persian Bayán (Váhíd 4, chapter 6) to describe the earliest believers of the Prophet Muhammad, i.e., those followers through whom other people accepted Islám. In the same manner, the Báb identified his own earliest believers as the "*Hurúf-i-Hayy*" or Letters of the Living.

In addition, *hurúf* is found in the Persian Bayán as an appellation of the Shí'ih Imáms. In Váhíd 2, chapter 17, for example, Imám Husayn is referred to as the "*Harf-i-Khámis*" or the "Fifth Letter" (*Harf* is the singular form of *Hurúf*).

The Research Department has not, to date, found any authoritative interpretation of the quoted passage from *God Passes By* and therefore Mr. . . . is free to decide for himself in which context the term should be understood.

Note:

- 1) *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 98.

The ‘Akká Traditions in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

A Research Note

Moojan Momen

Towards the end of the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Bahá'u'lláh quotes a number of Traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad regarding the city of ‘Akká. I list and number these below in the order that they appear in the text and giving Shoghi Effendi's translation:

In this connection it hath been deemed necessary to mention such traditions as have been recorded regarding the blessed and honored city of ‘Akká, that haply thou mayest, O Hadi, seek a path unto the Truth, and a road leading unto God.

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

The following hath been recorded concerning the merits of ‘Akká, and of the sea, and of Aynu'l-Baqar (The Spring of the Cow) which is in ‘Akká:

1. ‘Abdu'l-‘Azíz, son of Abdu’-Salam, hath related unto us that the Prophet—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon him—hath said: “‘Akká is a city in Syria to which God hath shown His special mercy.”
2. Ibn-i-Mas’ud—may God be pleased with him—hath stated: “The Prophet—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: ‘Of all shores the best is the shore of Askelon, and ‘Akká is, verily, better than Askelon, and the merit of ‘Akká above that of Askelon and all other shores is as the merit of Muḥammad above that of all other Prophets. I bring you tidings of a city betwixt two mountains in Syria, in the middle of a meadow, which is called ‘Akká. Verily, he that entereth therein, longing for it and eager to visit it, God will forgive his sins, both of the past and of the future. And he that departeth from it, other than as a pilgrim, God will not bless his departure. In it is a spring called the Spring of the Cow. Whoso drinketh a draught therefrom, God will fill his heart with light, and will protect him from the most great terror on the Day of Resurrection.’”
3. Anas, son of Malik—may God be pleased with him—hath said: “The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: ‘By the shore of the sea is a city, suspended beneath the Throne, and named ‘Akká. He that dwelleth therein, firm and expecting a reward from God—exalted be He—God will write down for him, until the Day of Resurrection, the recompense of such as have been patient, and have stood up, and knelt down, and prostrated themselves, before Him.’”
4. And He—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: “I announce unto you a city, on the shores of the sea, white, whose whiteness is pleasing unto God—exalted be He! It is called ‘Akká. He that hath been bitten by one of its fleas is better, in the estimation of God, than he who hath received a grievous

blow in the path of God. And he that raiseth therein the call to prayer, his voice will be lifted up unto Paradise. And he that remaineth therein for seven days in the face of the enemy, God will gather him with Khidr—peace be upon Him—and God will protect him from the most great terror on the Day of Resurrection.”

5. And He—may the blessings of God—exalted be He—and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: “There are kings and princes in Paradise. The poor of ‘Akká are the kings of Paradise and the princes thereof. A month in ‘Akká is better than a thousand years elsewhere.”
6. The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—is reported to have said: “Blessed the man that hath visited ‘Akká, and blessed he that hath visited the visitor of ‘Akká. Blessed the one that hath drunk from the Spring of the Cow and washed in its waters, for the black-eyed damsels quaff the camphor in Paradise, which hath come from the Spring of the Cow, and from the Spring of Salvan (Siloam), and the Well of Zamzam. Well is it with him that hath drunk from these springs, and washed in their waters, for God hath forbidden the fire of hell to touch him and his body on the Day of Resurrection.”
7. The Prophet—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—is stated to have said: “In ‘Akká are works of supererogation and acts which are beneficial, which God vouchsafed specially unto whomsoever He pleaseth. And he that saith in ‘Akká: ‘Glorified be God, and praise be unto God, and there is none other God but God, and most great is God, and there is no power nor strength except in God, the Exalted, the Mighty,’ God will write down for him a thousand good deeds, and blot out from him a thousand evil deeds, and will uplift him a thousand grades in Paradise, and will forgive him his transgressions. And whoso saith in ‘Akká: ‘I beg forgiveness of God,’ God will forgive all his trespasses. And he that remembereth God in ‘Akká at morn and at eventide, in the night-season and at dawn, is better in the sight of God than he who beareth swords, spears and arms in the path of God—exalted be He!”
8. The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath also said: “He that looketh upon the sea at eventide, and saith: ‘God is Most Great!’ at sunset, God will forgive his sins, though they be heaped as piles of sand. And he that counteth forty waves, while repeating: ‘God is Most Great!’—exalted be He—God will forgive his sins, both past and future.”
9. The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: “He that looketh upon the sea a full night is better than he who passeth two whole months betwixt the Rukn and the Maqam. And he that hath been brought up on the shores of the sea is better than he that hath been brought up elsewhere. And he that lieth on the shore is as he that standeth elsewhere.”

Verily, the Apostle of God—may the blessings of God, exalted be He, and His salutations be upon Him—hath spoken the truth. (Bahá'u'lláh: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pages 177-181)

In my book *Islam and the Bahá'í Faith*, I have quoted a number of these Traditions regarding ‘Akká. While I was writing the book I did a considerable amount of research to try to locate the source of these traditions. There were several factors indicating that the source of these Traditions was a work entitled *Faḍá'il ash-Shám wa Dimashq* by a Syrian scholar Abu'l-Ḥasan ‘Alí ibn Muḥammad ar-Ruba'í al-Málikí, known as Ibn Abi'l-Hawl, who died in

444AH/1052AD. Ar-Ruba’i himself was a well-respected scholar resident in Damascus who had travelled to various parts of the Islamic world including Egypt and Mecca and had collected Traditions in these places. He is relied upon by many later authors including Ibn ‘Asákir in his History of Damascus. The indications for this identification were as follows:

1. The Iraqi Bahá’í scholar Aḥmad Hamdí al-Muḥammad (*Ad-Dalíl wa’l-Irshád*, 3rd printing, Matábi’ al-Bayán, Beirut, 1966, pp. 166-9) quotes several of these Traditions and identifies the source as “Faḍá’il ‘Akká wa Asqalán” from the book “*Faḍá’il ash-Shám wa Dimashq* by Abu’l-Ḥasan ar-Ruba’i” (p. 167).
2. The Iranian Bahá’í scholar Hisam Noghabai (*Bishárát Kutub Ásmání*, 2nd edition, privately printed, pp. 183-6) quotes several of these Traditions and states that they are from “Faḍá’il ‘Akká wa Asqalán of Ibn Abi’l-Hawl” (p. 183).
3. I made enquiries from the Bahá’í World Centre to see if they had a copy of this work by ar-Ruba’i and they sent a copy of a photocopy that they had received from Habibu’llah Derakhshání that has a date on it which may be 127 (i.e. 1970). It appears to be a manuscript or lithograph. On the first page is the title and author *Kitáb Faḍá’il ash-Shám wa Dimashq* compiled by Abu’l-Ḥasan ‘Alí ibn Muḥammad ibn Shujá’ ar-Ruba’i al-Málikí, known as Ibn Abi’l-Hawl, from the oral transmission of Abu’l-Ḥasan ‘Alí ibn Aḥmad ibn Zuhayr al-Málikí. On the following sheets all of the Traditions that Bahá’u’lláh quotes appear (except the first) and they appear almost in the same order as in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. There are minor textual variations (see analysis of this at the end of this paper). On looking at the photocopies, however, it becomes clear that the compiler of this item had taken the title page and one further page from the work and then gone straight on to the pages relating to ‘Akká which occupy pp. 3-23 and then he has added the final page. He has numbered these consecutively but it is clear they are not consecutive.
4. I discovered that a manuscript of *Faḍá’il ash-Shám wa Dimashq* by ar-Ruba’i existed in the library of Núr Aḥmadiyya Madrasa attached to the al-Jazzár Mosque in ‘Akká—see ‘Abdu’lláh Mukhlis, “Majmú’ Nádír” in *La Revue de l’Academie Arabe*, vol. 10, no. 9-10 (Sept.-Oct. 1930), pp. 577-83. This would give a means for Bahá’u’lláh to have had access to the work.

Of course the final piece of evidence that would be needed would be to locate a copy of ar-Ruba’i’s *Faḍá’il ash-Shám wa Dimashq* in order to confirm that the relevant Traditions are indeed in that book. This proved difficult. The current published version of the book (4th ed., Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islamí, 1405) does not have these Traditions but turns out, on closer examination, to be extracts from the *Faḍá’il ash-Shám wa Dimashq*, an abbreviated version of the book by Shaykh Muḥammad Násir ad-Dín al-Albání. I tried to obtain an older 1950 publication of the book which is mentioned in the introduction to the above edition, but was unable to obtain a copy despite making enquiries from book-dealers in Lebanon and elsewhere.

Manuscripts of this work appeared to be equally difficult to locate. Various manuscripts that exist are of other abbreviated versions of this work. Three manuscripts in Germany are of Burhán ad-Dín Ibrahim ibn Taj ad-Dín ‘Abd ar-Raḥmán al-Fazárí’s abridgement of this work (Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, p. 331—copies in Berlin, no. 6074, Gotha, no. 54/21, Tübingen Wetzst, no. 26/2; see also W. Ahlwardt, *Verzeichniss der Arabischen Handschriften der Königlich Bibliothek zu Berlin*, Berlin: A. Asher & Co, 1893, vol. 15, p. 391, no. 6074). The only definite manuscripts of the work that I was able to locate were described in the following two publications:

1. The manuscript in the Núr Aḥmadiyya Madrassa attached to the al-Jazzár Mosque in ‘Akká—see above
2. A copy in the library of the Aya Sophia mosque in Istanbul, mss no. 3340/1—described in Felix Tauer, “Geographisches aus den Stambuler Bibliotheken (Arabische Handschriften)”, *Archiv Orientalní*, vol. 6 (1934), pp. 95-6.

Unfortunately, access to neither of these manuscripts was available immediately. It was at this point that I needed to come to a decision about the source of these Traditions for publication in my book, *Islam and the Bahá’í Faith*. I decided to identify the source of the Traditions as *Faḍá’il ash-Shám wa Dimashq* by ar-Ruba’í. Since the Haifa photocopies were very clearly written and there was an elaborate title page, I identified this as pages from a “an old lithographed edition of this work that does not show a date of publication and has no page numbers.” This proved an unfortunate decision as even before the book was published, but too late to make any alteration in the text, I discovered that my conclusions were erroneous. A closer reading of some of the material that I had as well as some new material revealed several pieces of information that contradicted my conclusions:

1. I found that the photocopy document sent to Haifa by Mr. Derakhshani contained two dates when the author had heard these Traditions. The writer states that he heard these Traditions from Bahá ad-Dín Abu Muḥammad al-Qásim ibn Abu’l-Qásim ‘Alí ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Hibatulláh ibn ‘Abdu’lláh ash-Shafi’í in Damascus in 581 and 585. Since these dates were more than a century after the death of ar-Ruba’í in 444AH/1052AD, it would appear to rule out the latter as the author.
2. I was informed by Necati Alkan that a copy of a printed version of ar-Ruba’í’s book was in the SOAS library. I went there and found that this was the older 1951 edition (ed. S. Munajjid, *Matbú’át al-Jámi’ al-‘Ilmí al-‘Arabí bi Dimashq*, Damascus) and appeared to be the complete text and did not contain a section with these ‘Akká Traditions in it. This book gave a third location for a manuscript of this work—the Dár al-Kutub az-Záhiriyya in Damascus.
3. A closer reading of the above article by Felix Tauer on the Istanbul manuscript revealed that this manuscript was in a compilation manuscript with several other works. Ar-Ruba’í’s *Faḍá’il ash-Sham wa Dimashq* was the first item (fol. 1-83) and the seventh work in the compilation was named as *Faḍá’il ‘Akká wa ‘Asqalán* (fol. 215-225). The opening and closing words of the volume as given by Tauer correspond exactly with the Derakhshani photocopy. Tauer gives no indication of the author of the piece about ‘Akká and Askelon and since the other items in the compilation are by various authors or anonymous, there is no contextual evidence in the compilation for authorship. The whole compilation was written out in Dhu’l Qa’da 921 AH by a certain ‘Abd al-Rahmán aṣ-Ṣáliḥí ibn Muḥammad in the Umayyad Mosque [in Damascus].

This seemed sufficient evidence to be now certain that the *Faḍá’il ‘Akká wa ‘Asqalán* was a separate work composed about 140 years after ar-Ruba’í’s *Faḍá’il ash-Sham wa Dimashq* and therefore certainly not by ar-Ruba’í himself. A further reading of the Derakhshani photocopies revealed that they were most likely actual photographic copies of the Aya Sophia manuscript described by Tauer. This for the following reasons:

1. On the front page of the Derakhshani photocopies, there was some writing in the top left hand corner. It looks somewhat like two capital “F”s followed by the Arabic numeral 40. I now realised that this was probably the number 3340, which of course

is the number of the Aya Sophia manuscript described by Tauer.

2. Tauer describes what is written on the title page of the manuscript and it accords exactly with the Derakhshani photocopies.
3. Tauer describes what is written at the end of the compilation—i.e. that it was written in Dhu’l Qa’da 921 AH by a certain ‘Abd al-Rahmán aṣ-Ṣāliḥī ibn Muḥammad in the Umayyad Mosque [in Damascus]—and this corresponds exactly to the last page of the Derakhshani photocopies.

Thus we may be reasonably certain that the Derakhshani photocopies are copied from the Aya Sophia mss. no. 3340.

It was obviously now necessary to try to ascertain the authorship of the *Faḍā’il ‘Akká wa ‘Asqalán*. The opening words of the work state that these Traditions were heard from al-Háfiz Bahá ad-Dín Abú Muḥammad al-Qásim ibn Abu’l-Qásim ‘Alí ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Hibatullah ibn ‘Abdullah ash-Shafi’i in 581 and 585 in Damascus and that he heard them from Abu al-Barakát al-Khiḍr ibn Shibl al-faqíh.

Bahá ad-Dín Abú Muḥammad al-Qásim ibn Abu’l-Qásim ‘Alí ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Hibatullah ibn ‘Abdullah ash-Shafi’i can be identified as the son of the much more famous Ibn ‘Asákir, who is described as the leading compiler of Traditions of his age (“*imám ahl al-ḥadīth fi zamanihī*”, ‘Abd al-Qádir an-Na’ímí, *ad-Dárus fī Taríkh al-Madaris*, Matbú’at al-Jámi’ al-‘Ilmí al-‘Arabí bi Dimashq, vol. 1, 1367/1948, p. 100). He was the author of the very well known, *Taríkh Dimashq* (History of Damascus), the first part of which contains a compilation of prophetic Traditions relating to Syria in general and Damascus in particular (much of which comes from ar-Ruba’i’s *Faḍā’il ash-Sham wa Dimashq* as noted above). Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim ibn ‘Asákir himself was born in 527. He was a prominent scholar of his generation and known as being reliable as a compiler of Traditions. He succeeded his father as the head of the college, Dár al-Ḥadīth an-Núriyya on the latter’s death in 571. He gave lectures on his father’s History of Damascus and himself compiled a book of Traditions relating to Jerusalem and the Masjid al-Aqṣá called *al-Muqtaá fi Fadá’il al-Masjid al-Aqṣá*. He died in 600 AH. (Biographical information from ‘Abd al-Qádir an-Na’ímí, *ad-Dárus fī Taríkh al-Madaris*, Matbú’at al-Jámi’ al-‘Ilmí al-‘Arabí bi Dimashq, vol. 1, 1367/1948, p. 100-3)

It would appear that the compiler of the *Faḍā’il ‘Akká wa ‘Asqalán* was a student of Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim ibn ‘Asákir who heard these particular Traditions from him during the years 581 and 585 in Damascus. Interestingly, we know that Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim visited ‘Akká and taught some classes there in 586. This is because there is a record of one of his students Badhal ibn Abi al-Mu’ammār at-Tabrízí taking notes of his teaching his father’s book in ‘Akká that year (*Taríkh Madína Dimashq*, ed. Ṣalah ad-Dín al-Munjid, Matbú’at al-Jámi’ al-‘Ilmí al-‘Arabí bi Dimashq, Damascus, 1371/1951, vol. 1, p. 629).

The period of time in which *Faḍā’il ‘Akká wa ‘Asqalán* was written was a time in which there was a great deal of activity in the compiling of traditions about particular cities and regions. These compilations of prophetic Traditions were often compiled under the name “*Faḍā’il . . .*”, which can be translated as “The Excellences of . . .”. These volumes would consist of Traditions of the prophet Muhammad regarding that city and sometimes also material relating to shrines and sacred sites there, companions of the Prophet who are buried there and famous ‘ulamá who have lived there. Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim ibn ‘Asákir himself, as we have noted, compiled such a work on Jerusalem—*al-Muqtaá fi Fadá’il al-Masjid al-Aqṣá*. His father included such material in the first part of his History of Damascus. Several of Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim ibn ‘Asákir’s students also compiled such works and any of these could also have been the compiler of

Faḍá'il 'Akká wa 'Asqalán (these students are based on the list given in an-Na'imí, *ad-Dárus fí Taríkh al-Madaris*, vol. 1, p. 103):

Ḍiyá ad-Dín Muḥammad ibn 'Abdu'l-Wáḥid al-Maqdisí (d. 643) wrote *Faḍá'il ash-Shám* on Damascus (Khayr ad-Dín Ziriklí, *al-A'lám*, 2nd ed., Cairo, 1954-9, 10 vols, vol. 7, p. 134; Brockelmann, *Supplement*, vol. 1, p.690)

Abu al-Muwahhib al-Ḥasan ibn Hibatulláh Ṣaṣrí ar-Rubá'í wrote *Faḍá'il Bayt al-Muqaddas* about Jerusalem (Ziriklí, *al-A'lám*, vol. 2, p. 304)

'Abd al-Qádir ibn 'Abdulláh ar-Ruháwí (d. 612) wrote a compilation of forty traditions (Ziriklí, *al-A'lám*, vol. 4, p. 165)

Among others who are known to have been students of Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim ibn 'Asákir and therefore possible compilers of *Faḍá'il 'Akká wa 'Asqalán* are:

Zayn al-'Umaná Abu al-Barakát al-Hasan ibn Muhammad ibn 'Asákir (d. 627), a cousin of Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim and his successor as head of the Dár al-Ḥadíth an-Núriyya (an-Na'imí, *ad-Dárus fí Taríkh al-Madaris*, vol. 1, pp. 104-5).

Táj ad-Dín 'Abd al-Wahháb ibn Zayn al-Umaná (d. 660), son of the previous scholar and his successor as head of the Dár al-Ḥadíth an-Núriyya. (an-Na'imí, *ad-Dárus fí Taríkh al-Madaris*, vol. 1, pp. 106-6. His brother 'Abdu'llah Niẓám ad-Dín, who probably also studied under Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim wrote *Faḍá'il al-Quds* on Jerusalem, Brockelmann *Supplement* vol. 1, p. 568)

Yusuf ibn Khalíl ibn Qarájá (d. 648, Ziriklí, *al-A'lám*, vol. 7, p. 253-4)

Indeed a listing of more than fifty names of students of Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim could be compiled from the lists of those attending his lectures (see lists in Ibn 'Asákir *Taríkh Madína Dimashq*, see for example vol. 1, pp. 627-717)

In considering the identity of this work, *Faḍá'il 'Akká wa 'Asqalán*, as a source for the Traditions quoted by Bahá'u'lláh, it is useful to compare the text and the order of these traditions as given in the manuscript of *Faḍá'il 'Akká wa 'Asqalán* and by Bahá'u'lláh in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. The following is a comparison between the Traditions given in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (illuminated ed. Hofheim-Langenhain, 1982) and the Traditions given in the Ayá Sophia manuscript:

‘Akká Traditions in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

Translation of the Tradition	Epistle to the Son of the Wolf	Faḍa’il ‘Akká wa ‘Asqalán
A lengthy tradition with a lengthy chain of transmission beginning: “They will meet in the depth (‘amq) of ‘Akká, and they fight one another and they will be in fear of one another . . .”	Not present	Present, p. 3-5
A lengthy tradition with a lengthy chain of transmission beginning: “God will have a banquet of the flesh of the Byzantines on the plains of ‘Akká . . .”	Not present	Present, p. 5-6
1. ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz, son of Abdu’-Salam, hath related unto us that the Prophet—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon him—hath said: “‘Akká is a city in Syria to which God hath shown His special mercy.”	Present, p. 115	Not present
2a. Ibn-i-Mas’ud—may God be pleased with him—hath stated: “The Prophet—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: ‘Of all shores the best is the shore of Askelon, and ‘Akká is, verily, better than Askelon, and the merit of ‘Akká above that of Askelon and all other shores is as the merit of Muḥammad above that of all other Prophets.	Present, p. 115	Present, pp. 6-7, but without “Ibn-i-Mas’ud—may God be pleased with him—hath stated” and with the following changes: begins: “The Messenger of God . . .” and ends: “. . . and ‘Akká is, verily, better than it, and the merit of ‘Akká above that of other shores is as my merit above that of the Prophets.”
2b. I bring you tidings of a city betwixt two mountains in Syria, in the middle of a meadow, which is called ‘Akká. Verily, he that entereth therein, longing for it and eager to visit it, God will forgive his sins, both of the past and of the future. And he that departeth from it, other than as a pilgrim, God will not bless his departure. In it is a spring called the Spring of the Cow. Whoso drinketh a draught therefrom, God will fill his heart with light, and will protect him from the most great terror on the Day of Resurrection.	Present, p. 115 <i>rāghiban</i> (Longing for it) <i>ghayr zá’ir</i> <i>lam yabáarak Allah lahu</i> <i>Inna fihá ‘aynan yuqál lahu</i> <i>qalbahu</i>	Present, pp. 7-8 with long isnád ending: “Anas, son of Malik—may God be pleased with him—hath said: ‘The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: “a city betwixt two mountains, upon the sea, which is called . . .” <i>raghbatan</i> <i>and omits wa fī ziyáratihá</i> (and eager to visit it). <i>raghbatan ‘an-há.</i> Has <i>lam yubáarak lahu</i> <i>Wa bihá ‘aynun tusammí</i> ends: will fill his heart (<i>batnahu</i>) with light and he who pours forth its waters upon himself, will remain pure until the Day of Resurrection.

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<p>3. Anas, son of Malik—may God be pleased with him—hath said: “The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: ‘By the shore of the sea is a city, suspended beneath the Throne, and named ‘Akká. He that dwelleth therein, firm and expecting a reward from God—exalted be He—God will write down for him, until the Day of Resurrection, the recompense of such as have been patient, and have stood up, and knelt down, and prostrated themselves, before Him.’”</p>	<p><i>tahta sáq al-‘Arsh</i> <i>iḥtasában</i> <i>thawab</i> <i>al-qá’imín wa’l-ráki’ín wa’l-sájidín</i></p>	<p>Omits isnád but has this at beginning of previous Tradition.</p> <p>Omits “By the shore of the sea”</p> <p><i>tahta ‘arsh alláh ‘azza wa jalla</i> <i>muḥtasaban</i> <i>ajr</i> <i>al-qá’imín ar-rukka’ as-sujúd</i></p>
<p>4. And He—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: “I announce unto you a city, on the shores of the sea, white, whose whiteness is pleasing unto God—exalted be He! It is called ‘Akká. He that hath been bitten by one of its fleas is better, in the estimation of God, than he who hath received a grievous blow in the path of God. And he that raiseth therein the call to prayer, his voice will be lifted up unto Paradise. And he that remaineth therein for seven days in the face of the enemy, God will gather him with Khidr—peace be upon Him—and God will protect him from the most great terror on the Day of Resurrection.”</p>	<p>Present, p. 116</p> <p><i>hasan bayḍihá ‘ind Alláh</i> <i>wa inna man qaraṣahu barqúthun min baráqithihi</i> <i>adhdhana</i></p>	<p>Present, p. 9-10. Begins: “The Messenger of God . . . hath said: ‘A city, on the . . .’”</p> <p><i>hasanan ‘ind Alláh</i> <i>qaraṣat al-barquth fihá</i></p> <p>is equivalent to a spear wound (<i>ṭa’na as-sinán</i>) in the path of God Almighty. He who glorifies God (<i>kabbara</i>) there, God will grant him to reinforce his voice. And he who takes up a sword, aiming it at the vainglory of the enemy, God Almighty will gather him up with my brother my brother Khidr—peace be upon him—and God will protect him from the most great terror</p>
<p>God will build a house of light for the one who has seen the site of the martyrs of ‘Akká. And it was said: where is the site. He said: Between two mountains in the midst of a plain—that is to say between Mount Carmel and Mount Jubayl</p>	<p>Not present</p>	<p>Present, p. 10</p>
<p>5. And He—may the blessings of God,—exalted be He—and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: “There are kings and princes in Paradise. The poor of ‘Akká are the kings of Paradise and the princes thereof. A month in ‘Akká is better than a thousand years elsewhere.”</p>	<p>Present, p. 116, but much abbreviated</p>	<p>Present, p. 11-12. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭáb addressed Ka’b al-Aḥbar, saying to him: I bring you good news, O Abú Isháq! When you enter Syria and meet the people of ‘Akká, help them for they are the ones who will be looked to on the Day of Resurrection. O Abú Isháq! I heard the Messenger of Allah (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say that there will be kings and princes at the Last Days, and the poor of ‘Akká and Askalon will be the kings and princes of the Last Days.</p>

‘Akká Traditions in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

‘Uthmán ibn ‘Afán (may God be pleased with him) said: To keep watch for one night in ‘Akká is better than one thousand nights of waking and days of fasting (elsewhere).	Not present	Present, pp. 12-13, with a long isnád
‘Áishah, the mother of the believers (may God be pleased with her) said that the Messenger of God had said: He who keeps watch for three nights in ‘Akká has the reward of keeping watch for one year	Not present	Present, p.13, with a long isnád
<p>6a. The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—is reported to have said: “Blessed the man that hath visited ‘Akká, and blessed he that hath visited the visitor of ‘Akká.</p> <p>6b. Blessed the one that hath drunk from the Spring of the Cow and washed in its waters, for the black-eyed damsels quaff the camphor in Paradise, which hath come from the Spring of the Cow, and from the Spring of Salvan (Siloam), and the Well of Zamzam. Well is it with him that hath drunk from these springs, and washed in their waters, for God hath forbidden the fire of hell to touch him and his body on the Day of Resurrection.”</p>	<p>Present, p. 116</p> <p>same Tradition</p>	<p>Present but much later in the order, pp. 21-22. Verb used throughout is <i>ray</i>’ (see) rather than <i>zár</i> (visit)</p> <p>separate Tradition: I heard the Messenger of God saying that he who drinks from the Spring of the Cow and he who washes (in water) from it and from the Spring of Salwán which is in Jerusalem and from the Spring of Zamzam which is in Mecca, God will protect his body from (Hell-)fire.</p> <p>A separate statement within a lengthy Tradition preceding this on p. 21 states: “black-eyed damsels quaff the camphor of Paradise, which is in a spring named the Spring of the Cow which is in ‘Akká”</p>
<p>7a. The Prophet—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—is stated to have said: “In ‘Akká are works of supererogation and acts which are beneficial, which God vouchsafed specially unto whomsoever He pleaseth.</p> <p>7b. And he that saith in ‘Akká: ‘Glorified be God, and praise be unto God, and there is none other God but God, and most great is God, and there is no power nor strength except in God, the Exalted, the Mighty,’ God will write down for him a thousand good deeds, and blot out from him a thousand evil deeds, and will uplift him a thousand grades in Paradise, and will forgive him his transgressions. And whoso saith in ‘Akká: ‘I beg forgiveness of God,’ God will forgive all his trespasses.</p>	<p>Present, p. 116</p> <p>Present</p>	<p>First part not present</p> <p>Present, p. 13 Has only “Glorified be God, and praise be unto God”, not “and most great is God, and there is no power nor strength except in God, the Exalted, the Mighty”. In each case has <i>alf alf</i>—thousand thousand—i.e. a million.</p> <p>Has: “. . . will uplift him a thousand thousand grades. He who magnifies (God), God will magnify him, and he who seek forgiveness, God will forgive him.</p>

Lights of ‘Irfán Book Four

7c. And he that remembereth God in ‘Akká at morn and at eventide, in the night-season and at dawn, is better in the sight of God than he who beareth swords, spears and arms in the path of God—exalted be He!”	Present	Not present
8a. The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath also said: “He that looketh upon the sea at eventide, and saith: ‘God is Most Great!’ at sunset, God will forgive his sins, though they be heaped as piles of sand. 8b. And he that counteth forty waves, while repeating: ‘God is Most Great!’—exalted be He—God will forgive his sins, both past and future.”	Present, pp. 116-7 <i>‘inda az-zawál</i> <i>mithl raml</i> same Tradition adds: <i>Allah after yukabbara má taqadama min dhunúbihi wa má ta ‘Akhira</i>	Present, pp. 14-5, <i>hína tagharabat (?) ash-shams fatakabbara ‘inda ghurúbihá</i> <i>akthar min ar-raml</i> separate Tradition adds: <i>fi’l-bahr</i> <i>dhunúbihi má taqadama min min há wa má ta ‘Akhira</i> Adds at the end: <i>wa inna al-amwáj latahta adh-dhunúb hattán</i>
9a. The Apostle of God—may the blessings of God and His salutations be upon Him—hath said: “He that looketh upon the sea a full night is better than he who passeth two whole months betwixt the Rukn and the Maqam. 9b. And he that hath been brought up on the shores of the sea is better than he that hath been brought up elsewhere. And he that lieth on the shore is as he that standeth elsewhere.”	Present, p. 117 <i>man nazara fi’l-bahr laylatan kámilatan kána afḍal min shahrayn kámilatayn</i> Present	Present, p. 15-16 <i>man ṭala’a fi’l-bahr laylatan támatan kána afḍal min ‘ibáda shahrayn</i> Not present
Traditions: - stating that keeping watch by the shore is better than a month of fasting. - stating that saying “God is most great” once or twice while looking to the sea is better than a spear wound received in the path of God - he who says “God is most great” while looking to the sea is better than one who travels from east to west upon horseback in the path of God - no rising by night or fasting by day is equivalent to the guard who says “God is most great” once or twice while looking to the sea - long Tradition which begins by recounting the station of ‘Aishah and goes say that when ‘Aishah learned that a man was from ‘Akká, she raised her veil and said: “Praise be to God that I have seen one of the people of Paradise.” She then asks whether he has drunk from the Spring of the Cow and there then occurs the statement and the Traditions relating to the Spring of the Cow noted above (in a different order in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf). She then says that the Messenger of God said that walking upon the paths of ‘Akká is better than saying prayers in any other mosque and that keeping watch in ‘Akká is as if one received a spear wound in the path of God.	Not present (except as noted)	Present, p. 16-23

The above comparison seems to me to indicate that Bahá’u’lláh was indeed quoting from this work but from another manuscript that had differences due to transcription variations. Not only the close resemblance of the text of the Traditions indicates this but also, perhaps more significantly, the fact that the Traditions are in almost exactly the same order in both texts.

It is surprising that Bahá’u’lláh does not cite the much more well-known Tradition “Well is it with him who hath seen ‘Akká” which is recorded in many books including the celebrated geography of Yáqút ibn ‘Abdulláh in his entry on ‘Akká (*Mu‘jam al-Buldán*, Maṭba‘a as-Sa’áda, Cairo, 1324/1906, vol. 6, p. 206) and in many dictionaries such as the *Mukhtár aṣ-Ṣiḥāḥ* of Muhammad ibn Abú Bakr ar-Rázi in the entry under “*ayn káf káf*” (ed. Maḥmúd Kháṭir, Cairo: al-Hay’Ah al-Misriyyah al-‘Ámmah li’l-Kitáb, 1976, p. 449) and the *Lisán al-‘Arab* of Ibn Manzúr, also under “*ayn káf káf*” (Beirut: Dár Ṣádir, 1956, vol. 10, p. 470).

In conclusion then, the ‘Akká traditions quoted by Bahá’u’lláh at the end of Epistle to the Son of the Wolf probably came from a work named *Faḍá’il ‘Akká wa ‘Asqalán*. This work was compiled in the late 6th century C.E. based on Traditions transmitted by Bahá ad-Dín Abú Muḥammad al-Qásim, the son of the famous historian Ibn ‘Asákir, in lectures that he gave in Damascus in 581 and 585 C.E. The compiler was one of the students of Bahá ad-Dín al-Qásim.

“Thee” and “thee” in the translation of Suriy-i-Haykal

Khazeh Fananapazir

Question

Are the antecedents of the different thee/Thee, in the English translation of Suriy-i-Haykal, different? This may seem a minor question, but if it is intentional, which I would guess it is, there must be a more profound reason for it.

Explanation

1. The translation of the Universal House of Justice is most faithful and that one should not interpret the thee and Thee as theological as essentially all refer to the One. BUT the small thee is used for example about the *lisán* [tongue of this Temple]:

21 O Tongue of this Temple! We, verily, have created thee through Our name, the All-Merciful, have taught thee whatsoever had remained concealed in the Bayán, and have bestowed upon thee the power of utterance, that thou mayest make mention of Mine exalted Self amidst My creatures. Proclaim, then, this wondrous and mighty Remembrance, and fear not the manifestations of the Evil One. Thou wert called into being for this very purpose by virtue of My transcendent and all-compelling command. Through thee have We unloosed the Tongue of Utterance to expound . . .

2. The small thee is also used for a letter of the Haykal. For example: the third letter [*káf*] or the fourth letter [*lám*]:

39 O Third Letter of this Temple, betokening My name, the All-Bountiful! We have made thee the dawning-place of Our bounty amidst Our creatures . . .

and again

46 O Fourth Letter of this Temple, betokening the attribute of Grace! We have made thee the manifestation of grace betwixt earth and heaven. From thee have We generated all grace in the contingent world, and unto thee shall We cause it to return. And from thee shall We manifest it again, through a word of Our command. Potent am I to accomplish whatsoever I desire through My word “Be”, and it is!

3. When the WHOLE TEMPLE is intended capital T is used, “Thee”:

63 O Temple of Holiness! We, verily, have cleansed Thy breast from the whisperings of the people and sanctified it from earthly allusions, that the light of My beauty may appear therein and be reflected in the mirrors of all the worlds. Thus have We singled Thee out above all that hath been created in the heavens and the earth, and

above all that hath been decreed in the realms of revelation and creation, and chosen Thee . . .

4. Therefore, a small 't' as in 'thee' is used for the parts (*ajzá*) of Haykal and a capital 'T' as in 'Thee' for the Whole of Haykal:

72 O Living Temple! We have made Thee the Dayspring of each one of Our most excellent titles, the Dawning-Place of each one of Our most august attributes, and the Fountainhead of each one of Our manifold virtues unto the denizens of earth and heaven. Thereafter have We raised Thee up in Our own image betwixt the heavens and the earth, and ordained Thee to be the sign of Our glory unto all who are in the realms of revelation and creation, that My servants may follow in Thy footsteps, and be of them who are guided aright. We have appointed Thee the Tree of grace and bounty unto the dwellers of both the heavens and the earth. Well is it with them who seek the shelter of Thy shade and who draw nigh unto Thy Self, the omnipotent Protector of the worlds.

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