

## COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

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### *A LOOK AT HARMONY AND UNITY AS COMMON PRINCIPLES IN THE CONFUCIAN SYSTEM AND THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH*

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#### **Introduction**

One may well ask the purpose of a comparison of two systems of philosophy or belief. More particularly, why a comparison of the Confucian system and the Bahá'í Faith, especially given the existence of a book that looks at this very subject, with Confucianism in the broader context of Chinese belief systems?<sup>1</sup> To answer the latter question first: This paper focuses exclusively on Confucianism, in part because Confucianism can be considered the driving philosophy – even if it is not always articulated consciously – at the root of most East Asian cultures.<sup>2</sup> In many ways, it is more fundamental in shaping the ethics and even daily practices of East Asian cultures than Buddhism, Daoism, or the various animist beliefs that continue to exist either independently or in a syncretic form in those cultures.<sup>3</sup>

As for the formalized comparison of the Confucian thought with the Bahá'í Faith presented here, the rationale lies in the continuing need to understand these kinds of systems as attempts to create cohesive, living

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1. Phyllis Ghim Lian Chew, *The Chinese Religion and the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1993).

2. For one look at the development of Confucian thought in China, Korea, and Japan, see John H. Berthrong, *Transformations Of The Confucian Way* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

3. I wish to thank Prof. Mikhail Sergeev for giving me the opportunity to explore this subject through the present paper.

social structures, rather than simply abstract “sets of beliefs.” If one looks at Confucian ethical principles and those of the Bahá'í Faith, it is clear that they are sophisticated attempts to bring rational and – in the case of the Bahá'í Faith – spiritual teachings to bear in organizing human behavior. The ultimate goal of both systems – and many other systems, of course – is for human beings to live in a society characterized by *harmony*, a goal achieved by the *unity* of a shared ethical practice.

The reader should understand that in the Bahá'í Faith, this concept of “unity” also exists beyond the idea of shared ethical practice (although this paper will focus on the latter). In the Bahá'í Faith, the concept of unity relates directly to the single nature of humanity as a whole (“Oneness of Mankind”), and reflects a truly universal vision:

Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind – the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve – is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. . . . Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family.<sup>4</sup>

Note that the declarations here are of a broader vision, but at the same time there is – as in the writings of Confucius – a pragmatic element: this is, Shoghi Effendi states, “no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope”. As one commentator puts it, “The Bahá'í vision is not some utopian fantasy – it is the next inevitable stage in the long process of human social evolution.”<sup>5</sup> The overall message, moreover, is that this is not just about the “individual”; Shoghi Effendi goes on to say:

It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. . . .

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4. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, as quoted in Kenneth E. Bowers, *God Speaks Again: An Introduction to the Bahá'í Faith* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2004), p. 227; also see William S. Hatcher and J. Douglas Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith: The Emerging Global Religion* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998), p. 76.

5. Bowers, *God Speaks Again*, p. 227.

It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world – a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language. . . .<sup>6</sup>

Again, the concept is visionary and broad, even as the terms – “political machinery,” “spiritual aspiration,” “trade and finance,” and so on, are quite practical.

Confucius outlines specific virtues, examined in detail in this paper, to build his model of ethical practice, while the Bahá'í Faith in some sense works in reverse, providing broad principles – such as love and tolerance – under which humans can then practice particular ethical behaviors, such as being free from prejudice.

Both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith represent complex and multifaceted systems of philosophy, practice, and belief, and the reader is asked here to accept a somewhat simplified representation of those systems for the sake of a clear and concise study. Moreover, for Confucianism, this paper will draw almost exclusively from the *Analects* (論語 *Lún yǔ*), again for the sake of presenting what one might call the “core” ethical system of Confucius.<sup>7</sup> We will not explore, for example, the philosophy of Neo-Confucianism and its parallels with the Bahá'í Faith – which could indeed, however, serve as the basis for an interesting subsequent study.<sup>8</sup> In terms of the Bahá'í Faith, we will draw primarily from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh here.

Finally, this paper is not a “survey” comparison of Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith; that has been done well elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Rather, we focus here — through a close reading of the texts — on particular aspects of each system that resonate most strongly with each other.

### **Confucian Thought and the Bahá'í Faith: Origins and Contexts**

Given the importance of Confucius and his philosophy, it is remarkable how little is known about him. In Chinese, he is typically known as 孔子 (*Kǒngzǐ*), which simply means “Master Kong.” Another appellation is

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6. *Ibid.*

7. All reference to the *Analects* in this paper are from Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., eds., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998).

8. For a good introduction to Neo-Confucianism, see Anne D. Birdwhistell, *Transition to Neo-Confucianism: Shao Yung on Knowledge and Symbols of Reality* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989).

9. See Chew's *The Chinese Religion and the Bahá'í Faith*, cited in fn. 1.

孔夫子 (*Kǒngfūzǐ*), the source of the Latinized version of his name, “Confucius.”

The actual dates of his life are uncertain, although they are traditionally given as 551 - 479 B.C.E. It seems that Confucius came from an aristocratic family, but one which was no longer wealthy in his lifetime. Confucius himself never held a high political post, although he indeed was an educated man. In fact, his goal was to realize his philosophy through serving a ruler, and so much of his life was spent moving from place to place, looking for the head of a feudal state who might be interested in his principles. Yet Confucius never gained any fixed role or position, and in the end he returned to his native state of Lu (魯國 *Lǔ guó*).

Confucius lived during a time of marked instability, with various states engaged in escalating internecine violence, driven by the knowledge that no state was exempt, and that all comers were competing in a zero-sum game – to fail to win was to perish. The accelerating ferocity of battle was like the increasing frequency and severity of labor pains, anticipating the eventual birth of the imperial Chinese state.<sup>10</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Bahá'í Faith appeared at a similar nexus of historical change. The fertile, even volatile, period of the mid-nineteenth century saw the rise of the Bábí movement, that later led to the founding of the Bahá'í Faith. The founder of the Bábí movement, Siyyid `Alí Muḥammad Shírází (1819 - 1850), later known as the *Báb* (literally, “gate”), was similar to Confucius in his awareness of his location in history, and the need for societal change. One study notes:

His principle book, the *Bayán*, envisioned a time when Persia's accumulated legacy of misspent energy would be entirely destroyed and the intellectual capacities of its people liberated from superstition. He spoke of a coming age in which entirely new fields of scholarship and science would emerge and in which the knowledge of even young children would far surpass the learning current in his own time.<sup>11</sup>

Confucius, as we shall see, similarly rejected superstition, and as to youth, he similarly wrote:

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10. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 2.

11. Hatcher and Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith*, p. 24.

The young should be held in high esteem. After all, how do we know that those yet to come will not surpass our contemporaries?<sup>12</sup>

As in Confucian thought, the Bábí movement drew from the past while envisioning a very different future:

The Báb's way . . . was to create the concept of an entirely new society, one that retained a large measure of cultural and religious elements familiar to hearers, but which, as events were to show, could arouse powerful new motivation. He called upon the Shah and the people of Persia to follow him in the establishment of this society . . . [and] he elaborated a system of laws for the conduct of public affairs [and] for the maintenance of peace and public order. . . .<sup>13</sup>

The Bábí leader who was to found the Bahá'í Faith was Bahá'u'lláh (meaning "Glory of God"), born Mírzá Ḥusayn-`Alí Núrí (1817 - 1892).<sup>14</sup> Again, much like Confucius, he had a "reputation for personal integrity"<sup>15</sup> and lived in a period of complex geopolitical and social change – the beginnings of the slow death of the Ottoman Empire, struggles between the European powers for influence in the Middle East and Central Asia, and the broader conflict between the modernity wrought by the nineteenth-century Western ideas and traditional beliefs.

As with many remarkable thinkers, Confucius gained renown posthumously. His idealized role as a teacher developed during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E. - 220 A.D.). Eventually, of course, his philosophical principles became deeply influential in education and even political philosophy, not just in China but also other parts of East Asia. Bahá'u'lláh was much more influential in his own lifetime, although he seemed to have been little known to Westerners.<sup>16</sup>

Confucius' ideas are framed on a basic model that includes both the universe and mankind's role in that universe. Confucian philosophy draws from the fundamental idea that the universe is ordered and has a pattern, and second, that mankind can exist in natural harmony with this pattern. Moreover, Confucius considers humans to be social beings, who have to engage in the world and in relationships with each other. Such re-

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12. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 131.

13. Hatcher and Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith*, p. 25.

14. For a brief overview of Bahá'u'lláh's life, see *ibid.*, pp. 28-49.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

relationships will be harmonious, Confucius notes, if they are clearly articulated and bound by “authoritative conduct.” The key relationships are five in number: (1) sovereign-subject; (2) husband-wife; (3) parent-child; (4) elder brother-younger brother; and (5) friend-friend. These relationships require each individual to carry out their role to the utmost, in terms of responsible behavior, so that one is an integral part of a community – in short, “role ethics.”<sup>17</sup> The connection between relationships and this “authoritative conduct” is nicely defined by the Chinese term for the latter, 仁 (*rén*), which is “the foremost project taken up by Confucius.”<sup>18</sup> The character itself is composed of two Chinese characters: for “person” 人 (*rén*) and the character for “two” 二 (*èr*). As one study notes:

This etymological analysis underscores the Confucian assumption that one cannot become a person by oneself – we are, from our inchoate beginnings, irreducibly social.<sup>19</sup>

Confucius thus believes both that mankind should adhere to proper conduct and that any kind of unified society would arise only through harmonious relationships. In such a society, moreover, a ruler’s primary role was to be a model in terms of conduct, and have strong relationships to both the divine order of the universe and the subjects of the earthly realm. The ruler was to serve in some sense as an exemplar for the people, and as a conduit between the people and the divine order.

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh do not have such an explicit emphasis on relationships, although there is the similar idea that our individual spiritual growth happens in a social context. In other words, because, “we are social beings, our greatest progress is made through living in association with others.”<sup>20</sup> This idea of association, even communality, is clearly outlined in the three basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith: “(1) the oneness of God; (2) the oneness of mankind; and (3) the fundamental unity of religion.”<sup>21</sup> In this paper, we will focus particularly on the Bahá'í idea of “the oneness of mankind,” as that is where Bahá'í thought is most akin to Confucian philosophy.

Despite what appears to us to be the profoundly novel way of thinking exhibited by Confucius, he viewed himself not as an originator, but as a

17. On this concept, see Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2011)

18. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 48.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Hatcher and Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith*, pp. 104-05.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

transmitter – he claimed that he was simply passing on the wisdom of the ancients. In *Analects* 7.1, Confucius says, “I do not forge new paths; with confidence I cherish the ancients.”<sup>22</sup> This claiming of a heritage from a lost “golden age” is not unusual in Chinese thought, nor is it particular to Chinese culture. However, that is not to dismiss its importance in this particular case: Confucius wished to apply a “corrective” to the decadent practices and abuses of power that he saw around him, and by harkening back to the past he could put some weight behind his critiques. For Confucius, the past supplied a sound, irrefutable standard.

In a similar manner, the founders of the Bahá'í Faith – while presenting some quite new ideas – at the same time saw themselves as part of the continuum of the Islamic tradition.<sup>23</sup> In a broader sense than in the Confucian system, the Bahá'í see a very particular place for themselves, moreover, not only in that Islamic history, but also in the religious history of the world.” Indeed, the “interventions by God in human history” are seen as “progressive, each revelation from God more complete than those which preceded it, and each preparing the way for the next.”<sup>24</sup> In this continuum, Islam is the result of the most recent such intervention before the Báb, and historically served as the background for the rise of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>25</sup> More particularly, just as Confucius wished to correct the decadence of his age, the Bábí movement that preceded the formalized Bahá'í Faith arose in opposition to a world that, as one study describes it, “had changed little from medieval times, except to become more obscurantist, isolated, and fatalistic.”<sup>26</sup>

### Some Contrasts

The most fundamental contrast between Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith, perhaps, is their place in history. Simply put, viewed from the present, Confucianism is old, while the Bahá'í Faith in some sense is “new,” so that the latter addresses directly several contemporary issues, such as the equality of men and women; the elimination of prejudice; and the use of spiritual approaches to the solving of economic problems. Confucian principles certainly can be applied to these issues, but Confucius himself in the *Analects* does not quite address them directly. In terms of historical contexts, however, both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith arose in similarly unstable, troubled times, as highlighted earlier.

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22. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 111.

23. See the comments in Hatcher and Martin, *The Bahá'í Faith*, p. 2 et ff.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

The other key contrast, of course, is that Confucian ethics are not drawn directly from any complex theological structure, although there is an idea of the transcendent in the *Analects* and in other Confucian and Neo-Confucian works.<sup>27</sup> The Bahá'í Faith and its principles are based on a belief in God. It is interesting to note, however, that in the texts of Bahá'u'lláh, we see some pragmatic approaches to religion, which actually serve as a contrast to Confucian ideas:

It is not necessary to undertake special journeys to visit the resting-places of the dead.<sup>28</sup>

In *Analects* 1.9, however, a disciple of Confucius, states:

Be circumspect in funerary services and continue sacrifices to the distant ancestors, and the virtue of the common people will thrive.<sup>29</sup>

But these are small differences. Given the vast separation in time between the Confucian *Analects* and the rise of the Bahá'í Faith, and their quite different cultural contexts, it is actually remarkable how similar their principles are.

### Points of Convergence

Even a quick reading of the *Analects* with certain Bahá'í texts also at hand shows some rather clear points of convergence. But this is not surprising in that these two systems – like many other such systems – are broad attempts to wrestle with human behavior in an attempt to create a better world. Yet even when we look more closely here, we still see this convergence, and on a rather detailed level.

A fruitful place to look, in fact, is in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. We begin with the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, a collection of writings comprising selected tablets that cover such subjects as teachings and laws, personal character, knowledge of God, and the development of mankind.<sup>30</sup>

27. See the discussion in Yong Huang, "Confucian Theology: Three Models," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 4 (July 2007): 455-78.

28. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh: A Compilation*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998), p. 212.

29. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 73.

30. The full title of this work is *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice . . .*, trans. Habib Taherzadeh (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994).



In Bahá'u'lláh's *Bishárát* ("Glad Tidings"), for example, we find a number of analogues to passages in the *Analects*. In the "fifth Glad-Tidings," we read:

In every country where any of this people reside, they must behave towards the government of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness.<sup>31</sup>

This passage reflects the idea that individual followers of the Bahá'í Faith are to keep the faith separate from political matters and questions. A follower of this faith, wherever they might reside, should obey a government, as long as that government is duly constituted. Recall that one of the underlying principles of both Confucian thought and the Bahá'í Faith is for human beings to live in a society characterized by *harmony*, and one aspect of achieving such a goal is abiding the law. In *Analects* 1.2, we read the words of one of the Confucian disciples, Master You:

It is a rare thing for someone who has a sense of filial and fraternal responsibility to have a taste for defying authority. And it is unheard of for those who have no taste for defying authority to be keen on rebellion. Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way [道 *dào*] will grow therefrom. As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct.<sup>32</sup>

The key part here is the first line – "It is a rare thing for someone who has a sense of filial and fraternal responsibility to have a taste for defying authority" – and the third line: "Exemplary persons concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way [道 *dào*] will grow therefrom." What Confucius is saying here is not to "obey authority," but rather to concentrate on the matter at hand – as in the Bahá'í Faith, this means one's own direct moral and social responsibilities.

There are several implications in the *Analects* passage. The first is that it is wise to avoid getting involved in outright rebellion. Second implication is that good governance at a larger scale will follow *naturally* from individuals concentrating on their own "filial and fraternal responsibility," i.e., at a smaller, local scale. Finally, individuals engaging in these responsibilities will create a model for others to follow, and thus bring about change "organically" rather than through confrontation and revolt.

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31. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 209.

32. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 71.

One can certainly read the *Bishárát* passage above in the same way. Indeed, in a letter written by Shoghi Effendi (1897 - 1957), who was the head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 until 1957, we find a comment that explicates this passage from the *Bishárát*:

The cardinal principle which we must follow... is obedience to the Government prevailing in any land in which we reside. . . . We see, therefore, that we must do two things – shun politics like the plague, and be obedient to the Government in power in the place where we reside... [T]he Bahá'ís must turn all their forces into the channel of building up the Bahá'í Cause and its Administration. They can neither change nor help the world in any other way at present. If they become involved in the issues the Government's of the world are struggling over, they will be lost. But if they build up the Bahá'í pattern they can offer it as a remedy when all else has failed.<sup>33</sup>

Note here the idea of disengagement from broad-scale politics, as in the *Analects*. Note, too, the idea that one could become “lost” in the sense of one’s moral compass if involved in political issues. Most important, however, is the last line. In the *Analects*, “filial and fraternal responsibility” can be the “root” of a world that runs with proper “conduct,” and here in Shoghi Effendi’s commentary we see the very similar idea that the “Bahá'í pattern” can be a “remedy” to a world that is “struggling.” This is also the fundamental idea introduced at the beginning of this paper: the *unity* of a shared ethical practice can serve as the road to a society characterized by *harmony*, or a remedy for a society that suffers from disharmony.

Confucius, of course, was greatly concerned with governance and its relation to achieving a better society. In *Analects* 2.1, we read:

Governing with excellence can be compared to being the North Star: the North Star dwells in its place, and the multitude of stars pay tribute.<sup>34</sup>

This passage can be read, too, as resonant with Bahá'í thought. As a metaphor for leadership, the North Star is carefully chosen by Confucius – and not just because of its use in navigation. Perhaps drawing from a typically contrarian Daoist perspective, Confucius has chosen a *passive*

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33. See Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, comp. Gertrude Garrida (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), pp. 56-57.

34. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 76.

object as an exemplar of leadership. The North Star does not *try* to be a leader; it governs by simply being what it is: a fixed star in the heavens.

Even as fine a detail as the role of clothing is found both in the Confucian *Analects* and Bahá'u'lláh's *Bishárát*. In *Analects* 10.6, we read:

Persons of nobility do not use reddish black or dark brown for the embroidered borders of their robes, nor do they use red or purple in casual clothing. In the heat of summer, they would wear an unlined garment made of fine or coarse hemp, but would invariably wear it over an undergarment to set it off. With black upper garments they wear lambskin; with undyed silk upper garments, fawn fur; with yellow-brown upper garments, fox fur. Casual fur robes were long overall, but the right sleeve was somewhat short. They are certain to have a nightcoat half his body in length. They use the thick fur of the fox and badger for sitting rugs. Outside of the mourning period, they wear whatever girdle ornaments they please. Apart from pleated ceremonial skirts, they would invariably have their skirts tailored. A lambskin coat and a black cap could not be worn on funeral occasions. On New Year's Day, they would invariably go to court in full court attire.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, in *Analects* 10.7, we read that, "In periods of purification, Confucius would invariably wear a spirit coat made of plain cloth."<sup>36</sup> To the modern reader, the description in the passage above seems obsessive, if not outright absurd. But in the Confucian system, how one dresses is part of adherence to ritual – and that is, in turn, part of propriety (禮 *li*). Propriety is an idea, interestingly, which appears rarely in Western philosophical systems. In its most literal sense, it is the "performance of a ritual action."<sup>37</sup> But by extension, then, it is the way an individual should behave so that society – which, to Confucius is the sum of careful, reflective individuals behaving with propriety can function.

While the *Bishárát* does not include such a prescriptive passage concerning clothing, we do indeed read the following:

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35. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

37. For an extended definition, see Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 34.

The choice of clothing and the cut of the beard and its dressing are left to the discretion of men. But beware, O people, lest ye make yourselves the playthings of the ignorant.<sup>38</sup>

Here, we see an obvious reference to clothing as regulated by religious edicts. But note the message here: On the one hand, there is the idea of a breaking away from particular strictures. But on the other hand, there is also an admonition. The subtext here may be the same, then, as in the passage from the *Analects*: however one dresses, and even given freedom of choice, *observe propriety*.

Connected with the idea outlined above is the sense that when a person dresses and goes out, they are on display – and must be self-aware so as to not “lose face” (丟臉 *diū liǎn*). This concept of “face” and the culture of shame often are considered uniquely Chinese, but actually can be found in other cultures as well.<sup>39</sup> As pertains to Bahá'í thought, the “first leaf” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* (“Words of Paradise”) states that there existeth in man a faculty which deterreth him from, and guardeth him against, whatever is unworthy and unseemly, and which is known as his sense of shame. This, however, is confined to but a few; all have not possessed and do not possess it.<sup>40</sup>

Confucius ties together, too, the idea of shame and the concept of good governance in *Analects* 2.4:

Lead the people with administrative injunctions and put them in their place with penal law, and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves.<sup>41</sup>

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38. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 209.

39. For a discussion of the role of shame in Chinese culture, see pp. 181 et ff. of Heidi Fung, “Affect and Early Moral Socialization: Some Insights and Contributions from Indigenous Psychological Studies in Taiwan,” in Uichol Kim, Kuo-Shu Yang, and Kwang-Kuo Hwang, eds., *Indigenous and Cultural Psychology: Understanding People in Context* (New York: Springer, 2006), pp. 175-96. For an example in another culture, see Kofi Agyekum, “The Sociocultural Concept of Face in Akan Communication,” *Journal of Pragmatics and Cognition* 12, no. 1 (2004): 71-92.

40. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 232.

41. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 76.

Shame, in this view, is another structure to help guide individuals in their ethical development. Such individuals can then “order themselves” – a term that once more suggests the larger goal of creating a better society.

In contrast to this communal model, another early school of Chinese thought, Daoism – especially as articulated in the *Zhuangzi* (莊子 *Zhuāngzǐ*) – seems to advocate at least a certain degree of seclusion and withdrawal from society. In Western philosophy, we find a similar strain, though with some caveats. Epicurus “advocated withdrawal” from mercantile and political affairs.<sup>42</sup> However, he also “stressed engagement with neighbors,” and “intended to aid humanity as a whole through his philosophy.”<sup>43</sup> Confucius seems to be more of the Epicurean strain, and here again we will see a connection to an idea in Bahá'í thought. *Analects* 18.6 addresses the issue directly:

Old Marsh and Boldly Sunk were out in harness ploughing the field. Confucius, passing their way, sent Zilu to ask them where to ford.

Old Marsh asked him, “Who is that man holding the reins of your carriage?”

“He is Confucius,” replied Zilu.

“The Confucius of Lu?”

“Indeed.”

“Then he already knows where the ford is.”

Zilu turned and asked Boldly Sunk where to ford.

“Who are you?” asked Boldly Sunk.

“I am Zilu.”

“You are that follower of Confucius of Lu?”

“The very one.”

He then said, “We are inundated like floodwaters. And the whole world is the same. Who then is going to change it into a new world? You follow after a teacher who avoids people selectively. Wouldn't you be better off following a teacher who avoids the world altogether?” As he spoke he continued to turn the earth over the seeds.

Zilu left to inform Confucius. Confucius, with some frustration, replied, “We cannot run with the birds and beasts. Am I not

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42. See Yonder M. Gillihan, *Civic Ideology, Organization, and Law in the Rule Scrolls: A Comparative Study of the Covenanters' Sect and Contemporary Voluntary Associations in Political Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), p. 98.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89; also see Jeffrey Fish and Kirk R. Sanders, eds., *Epicurus and the Epicurean Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), p. 76.

one among the people of this world? If not them, with whom should I associate? If the way [道 *dào*] prevailed in the world, I wouldn't need to change it.”<sup>44</sup>

A closely related idea is found in the subsequent passage, *Analects* 18.7, where Zilu, a disciple of Confucius, speaks:

To refuse office is to fail to do what is important and appropriate. If the differentiation between young and old cannot be abandoned, how could one think of abandoning what is appropriate between ruler and subject? This is to throw the most important relationships into turmoil in one's efforts to remain personally untarnished. The opportunity of the exemplary person to serve in office is the occasion to effect what is judged to be important and appropriate.<sup>45</sup>

The careful handling of the issue of seclusion appears also in the *Bishárát*:

The pious deeds of the monks and priests among the followers of the Spirit . . . are remembered in His presence. In this Day, however, let them give up the life of seclusion and direct their steps towards the open world and busy themselves with that which will profit themselves and others.<sup>46</sup>

Again, in both sources, we see the idea of engagement with the world, rather than withdrawal. Another text by Bahá'u'lláh, the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* (“Words of Paradise”) reiterates this concept. In the “tenth leaf” we read:

O people of the earth! Living in seclusion or practising asceticism is not acceptable in the presence of God. It behoveth them that are endued with insight and understanding to observe that which will cause joy and radiance. . . . In former times and more recently some people have been taking up their abodes in the caves of the mountains while others have repaired to graveyards at night. . . . Abandon the things current amongst you and adopt

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44. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 214.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

46. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 210.

that which the faithful Counsellor biddeth you. Deprive not yourselves of the bounties which have been created for your sake.<sup>47</sup>

We clearly see the idea here that those who possess what Bahá'u'lláh calls “insight and understanding” should – as the Confucian disciple Zilu puts it – “serve... to effect what is judged to be important and appropriate.”

While engagement is emphasized in both the Confucian system and Bahá'í thought, there are also admonitions against distractions from worldly goods. Near the beginning of the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*, we read:

Man's distinction lieth not in ornaments or wealth, but rather in virtuous behaviour and true understanding. Most of the people in Persia are steeped in deception and idle fancy. How great the difference between the condition of these people and the station of such valiant souls as have passed beyond the sea of names and pitched their tents upon the shores of the ocean of detachment.<sup>48</sup>

Note the use of the term “detachment”; so, while engagement in the world is a key part of these systems, there still must be a separation, one brought about through adherence to virtue and the seeking of understanding. Confucius, not surprisingly, also speaks of kind of detachment from the material:

To eat coarse food, drink plain water, and pillow oneself on a bent arm – there is pleasure to be found in these things. But wealth and position gained through in appropriate means – these are to me like floating clouds.<sup>49</sup>

In the same passage of the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*” cited above, we also read:

People for the most part delight in superstitions. They regard a single drop of the sea of delusion as preferable to an ocean of certitude. By holding fast unto names they deprive themselves of the inner reality and by clinging to vain imaginings they are kept back from the Dayspring of heavenly signs. God grant you may be graciously aided under all conditions to shatter the idols of

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47. *Ibid.*, pp. 236-37.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

49. *Analects* 7.16, in Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 114.

superstition and to tear away the veils of the imaginations of men.<sup>50</sup>

So, not only may “ornaments or wealth” distract mankind, but also spurious beliefs. We find a very tersely expressed but quite similar idea in *Analects*. 7.21:

The Master had nothing to say about strange happenings, the use of force, disorder, or the spirits.<sup>51</sup>

The emphasis here is on engagement, even though not explicitly stated. Confucius's mind was on cultivation of the virtuous individual and engaging the world through sound relationships, not a false harmony achieved through the appeasement of some ephemeral realm.

Connected with the concept of engagement in the word is the shared idea in both Bahá'u'lláh's writing and the *Analects* that idleness is pernicious and loathsome. The “twelfth Glad-Tidings” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Bishárát* states:

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means. When anyone occupieth himself in a craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded in the estimation of God as an act of worship; and this is naught but a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty.

The *Analects* (9.23) is more succinct in its admonition, and does not frame the issue of work in such a directly theological context:

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50. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 228.

51. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 115; see the brief comments concerning Confucius and superstition in Karl Ludvig Reichelt, *Meditation and Piety in the Far East* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2004), pp. 127-28.



The young should be held in high esteem. After all, how do we know that those yet to come will not surpass our contemporaries? It is only when one reaches forty or fifty years of age and yet has done nothing of note that we should withhold our esteem.<sup>52</sup>

That such a philosophy exists in both sources is not that surprising, but what is interesting here is the implication. It is not so much the Puritanical idea that “idle hands are the Devil’s playground” recounted here, but rather something more subtle. Work and “engagement in such work,” as Bahá’u’lláh puts it, are necessary for both living in accordance with God and for the kind of cohesive, universal society that the Bahá’í Faith envisages.

Both Confucianism and the Bahá’í Faith are concerned with character, and in some sense for the same reason: good character means sound relationships, and sound relationships mean a cohesive society. This is a “bottom to top” model of building a society, where the fundamental units in their active process of cohesion yield a solid “whole.” If each person engages in virtuous conduct, then there is unity in practice. If there is unity in practice, then sound relationships can form; and if there are sound relationships, a harmonious society will arise.

But both Confucian *Analects* and the writings of Bahá’u’lláh also present an overall framework, and in a way address the issue of governance directly, “top to bottom.” In the Confucian system – and, one could argue, in much of Chinese thought there is a clear model of a heavenly or cosmic *order*. This is expressed with the term 天 (*tiān*), often translated as “heaven” or “heavens,” but really having little to do with the Western connotations that that word bears.<sup>53</sup> Rather, the term signifies the “cosmic order,” or even more precisely as “the order [of the world] itself, and what orders it.”<sup>54</sup>

More particularly, there is the concept of 天命 (*tiān mìng*), usually rendered as the “mandate of heaven,” but again meaning more specifically the “order” or even “propensities”<sup>55</sup> (命 *mìng*) of the “cosmos” (天 *tiān*). What is key, then, is the concept that any ruler of the state must be aligned with this “mandate of heaven.” A ruler who does not follow this

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52. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 131.

53. See pp. 46-48 of Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius* for a complete analysis of how this term, 天 (*tian*), should be understood.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

55. As in *Analects* 16.8, discussed below.

“cosmic order” or defies it (違命 *wéi mìng*, to “defy the mandate of heaven”) is no longer legitimate, and can have no authority over the people.

In *Analects* 16.8, Confucius lays it out clearly:

Exemplary persons hold three things in awe: the propensities of *tian* [天命 (*tiān mìng*)], persons in high station, and the worlds of the sages. Petty persons, knowing nothing of the propensities of *tian*, do not hold it in awe; they are unduly familiar with persons in high station, and ridicule the words of the sages.<sup>56</sup>

Understanding the “propensities of *tian*” is no easy task, of course, and in a famous passage (*Analects* 2.4), we find the following:

From fifteen, my heart-and-mind was set upon learning; from thirty I took my stance; from forty I was no longer doubtful; from fifty I realized the propensities of *tian*; from sixty, my ear was attuned; from seventy I could give my heard-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries.<sup>57</sup>

For the individual, then, it takes some time to become aware of – and then aligned to – the “propensities of *tian*” or the “mandate of heaven.” For a ruler, the process is even more fundamentally important: as an individual, the ruler must be aligned to the “propensities of *tian*” and incorporate such propensities into their every act of governance.

How this finds an analogue in Bahá'í thought is not immediately obvious. But implications certainly appear in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. In the “fifteenth Glad-Tidings” of the *Bishárát*, one finds what is to the modern reader a rather curious passage:

Although a republican form of government profiteth all the peoples of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should remain deprived thereof.<sup>58</sup>

How does this connect with the Confucian expression of 天命 (*tiān mìng*), the “mandate of heaven”? Note the emphasis on kingship: the idea here is that an *individual's* majesty is most reflective of God, and the im-

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56. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 198.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

58. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 212.

plication is that an individual ruler is best suited to be like God in terms of fairness and ethical rule. At the end of the “fifteenth Glad-Tidings,” we see a reinforcement of this reading:

We earnestly beseech God – exalted be His glory – to aid the rulers and sovereigns, who are the exponents of power and the daysprings of glory, to enforce His laws and ordinances.<sup>59</sup>

Just as in the Confucian model, the ruler’s role is to “channel” the “laws and ordinances” from above – from 天 (*tiān*) or from God. This structure and the patterning of the earthly realm on the heavenly realm is clearly articulated in the “sixth leaf” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*:

Verily I say, whatever is sent down from the heaven of the Will of God is the means for the establishment of order in the world and the instrument for promoting unity and fellowship among its peoples.<sup>60</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's writings emphasize this point in other places, as well. In the “first Ishráq” of the *Ishráqát* (“Splendors”), we have the following:

They that are . . . invested with authority and power must show the profoundest regard for religion. In truth, religion is a radiant light and impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world. . . .<sup>61</sup>

Here, the suggestion is both that human authority must be based on divine principles and that people can be protected from the vagaries of secular rule by the power of religious – i.e., divine – principles.

The “second Ishráq” explicitly states that the “sovereigns of the world” are the manifestations of the power of God and the daysprings of his authority. We beseech the Almighty that he may graciously assist them in that which is conducive to the well-being of their subjects.<sup>62</sup>

Very much as in the *Analects*, we have here rulers as transmitters of the divine or cosmic order.

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59. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

60. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 234.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

62. *Ibid.*

In addition to this linear model of governance, there is also the suggestion of the use of merit, and other ways of creating social order, in both Confucianism and the Bahá'í thought. *Analects* 2.19 has the following:

Duke Ai of Lu inquired of Confucius, asking: “What does one do to gain the allegiance (fu) of the people?” Confucius replied: “Raise up the true and place them over the crooked, and the allegiance of the people will be yours; raise up the crooked and place them over the true, and the people will not be yours.”<sup>63</sup>

In a close parallel, the “fifth *Ishtárq*” states:

Governments should fully acquaint themselves with the conditions of those they govern, and confer upon them positions according to desert and merit.<sup>64</sup>

A second way of bringing about harmony is by addressing the very question of what is being governed. Is it a collection of individuals? Sovereign states? The “sixth *Ishtárq*” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Ishtárqát* includes a very interesting passage on this topic. It looks to a time in the future when the earth will be regarded as one country and one home. . . . Let not man glory that he loveth his country, let him rather glory in this that he loveth his kind.<sup>65</sup>

The key term here is “one country and one home.” In a very similar manner, Confucius saw the larger political entity of the state as no more than a collection of households, and thus itself a household or home. As one commentator notes:

In the writings of Chinese intellectuals and officials, the word *jia* (family or home) is regularly featured as a metaphor for the nation. . . . This is not surprising, since the state (*guo*) is explicitly figured as family in the modern Chinese term for nation or country (*guojia*).<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, still today the term 國家 (*guó jiā*, literally “state + home”) is used to refer one's country. For Confucius, the family or household mod-

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63. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 80.

64. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 271.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

66. Gloria Davies, *Worrying about China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007), p. 58.

el of society can be realized when the ruler acts in a parental role – not through strictures, however, but through exemplary behavior. In *Analects* 2.20, there is the following:

Ji Kangzi asked: “How do you get the people to be respectful, to do their utmost for you, and to be eager?” The Master replied: “Oversee them with dignity and the people will be respectful; be filial to your elders and kind to your juniors, and the people will do their utmost for you; raise up those who are adept and instruct those who are not and the people will be eager.”<sup>67</sup>

Again, we have a linear structure, where the person in authority rules, but does so as a father who models behavior for his child. Moreover, recall the idea in the “sixth *Ishrâq*” that man should “loveth his kind”; this is not a simple injunction, but rather a way of creating a unified society without use of coercion from above. Similarly, *Analects* 13.6 states:

If people are proper in personal conduct, others will follow suit without need of command. But if they are not proper, even they command, others will not obey.<sup>68</sup>

Exemplary behavior by a ruler leads to effortless rule, and exemplary behavior by other individuals will lead to their fellows doing the same.

Earlier, we noted that both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith are concerned with an individual's good character. People of good character make a good society. But what particulars concerning character development do the Confucian system and the Bahá'í Faith prescribe? Again, we can find similar concepts in the *Analects* and the words of Bahá'u'lláh. In Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*, the “first *Taráz*” has the following:

[M]an should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfilment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth though crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom.<sup>69</sup>

At first glance, this seems a rather simplistic philosophy, but the underlying themes here are the very important ones of responsibility, stabil-

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67. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 80.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

69. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215.

ity, and self-knowledge – part of the over-arching theme of building a harmonious and unified society.

For Confucius, the same holds true, although he approaches the matter in a slightly different way. At the root, there is an emphasis of paying attention to one's role or one's "craft"; in *Analects* 19.7, we have:

The various craftsmen stay in their shops so that they may master their trades; exemplary persons study so that they might promote their way.<sup>70</sup>

The "sixth Taráz" of Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*" adds:

Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it. Such arts and material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of His knowledge and wisdom which have been revealed in Epistles and Tablets through His Most Exalted Pen – a Pen out of whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts of the world are brought to light.<sup>71</sup>

The *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*" adds a definition:

By the wise it is meant those whose knowledge is not confined to mere words and whose lives have been fruitful and have produced enduring results.<sup>72</sup>

Note the meaning here: knowledge must include the pragmatic, and it must engage the world, a theme examined earlier.

But where does one gain the knowledge to know one's role? Returning to the "first Taráz" in Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*," we read that "men of wisdom" are, in truth, cup-bearers of the life-giving water of knowledge and guides unto the ideal way. They direct the peoples of the world to the straight path and acquaint them with that which is conducive to human upliftment and exaltation. The straight path is the one which guideth man to the dayspring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding and leadeth him to that which will redound to glory, honour and greatness.<sup>73</sup>

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70. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, pp. 219-20.

71. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 218.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 231.

73. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215.

Note two subtle points here: first of all, those who have wisdom and knowledge are called “cup-bearers.” What they know is not something that they invented themselves; rather these wise figures are preservers and transmitters. The emphasis is not on innovation. Second, we note the idea of the “straight path.” This is not exactly like the “path” (道 *dào*) that we find in Confucius, but in some manner the idea is the same: our journey through life is defined by how well we fulfill our role, and if we each succeed in that, we are on our way to “human upliftment and exaltation.”

These two points are also found in Confucius; in *Analects* 7.28, Confucius states:

There are probably those who can initiate new paths while not understanding them, but I am not one of them. I learn much, select out of it what works well, and then follow it. I observe much, and remember it.<sup>74</sup>

The emphasis again is on learning and preserving, not innovation. In *Analects* 7.20, Confucius again talks about knowledge in terms of the past: “. . . loving antiquity, I am earnest in seeking it out.” Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the “straight path” as “the one which guideth man to the day-spring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding . . . .” *Analects* 1.14 presents a similar idea, in its frequent use of the term *dao* (道 *dào*), noted above:

In eating, exemplary persons do not look for a full stomach, nor in their lodgings for comfort and contentment. They are persons of action yet is cautious in what they say. They repair to those who know the way [道 *dào*], and find improvement in their company. Such persons can indeed be said to have a love of learning.<sup>75</sup>

In another passage, Confucius says, “Set your sights on the way know the way [道 *dào*]. . . .”<sup>76</sup> and later, “People who have chosen different ways [道 *dào*] cannot make plans together.”<sup>77</sup>

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74. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 117

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

76. *Analects* 7.6, *ibid.*, p. 112.

77. *Analects* 15.40, *ibid.*, p. 192.

Moreover, both in the writings of Confucius and Bahá'u'lláh, the capacity to follow or forge the right path or way comes from self-knowledge. Note, of course, that in the case of Bahá'í Faith, this self-knowledge has a strong theistic foundation: self-knowledge comes from fully recognizing the Manifestation of God, and obeisance to what He has ordained.

Returning to the “first Taráz” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*, we read that through the “loving-kindness of the All-Wise, the All-knowing,” “people may discover the purpose for which they have been called into being.”<sup>78</sup> As the Bahá'í Faith has a well-articulated concept of God, naturally self-knowledge would come from there. In Confucius, the concept of a deity is not expressed in this way; nonetheless, self-knowledge is paramount. In the famous passage in *Analects* 2.15, we read:

Learning without due reflection leads to perplexity; reflection without learning leads to perilous circumstances.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, in *Analects* 1.4, we read the words of Confucius' disciple, Master Zeng:

Daily I examine my person on three counts. In my undertakings on behalf of other people, have I failed to do my utmost? In my interactions with colleagues and friends, have I failed to make good on my word? In what has been passed on to me, have I failed to carry it into practice?

These three questions embody the Confucian process of gaining self-knowledge. That self-knowledge leads to the practice of becoming a person of integrity who can engage in sound relationships.

The “third Taráz” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát* reinforces the connection between God, a person's character, and the path of proper conduct:

A good character is, verily, the best mantle for men from God. With it He adorneth the temples of His loved ones. By My life! The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men. The glory and the upliftment of the world must needs depend upon it. A goodly character is a means whereby men are guided to the Straight Path. . . .<sup>80</sup>

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78. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 215.

79. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 79.

80. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 216.



Again, in both the Confucian system and the Bahá'í Faith, self-reflection leads to self-knowledge, and an easing of one's way onto the path. Individuals with sound self-knowledge are sharing a unity of practice. Moreover, they naturally will be drawn to one another, leading to harmonious relationships – something clearly emphasized in the passage above. In Confucianism, it is clear that self-reflection, in turn, ultimately will lead to a harmonious society. The Bahá'í Faith also employs self-reflection, but in terms of building a society characterized by harmony, recognition of God's Manifestation takes a primary role.

### **Conclusions: Future Directions in Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith**

Both Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith deal directly with the role of the individual in society, and the future of these systems lies in this core of their philosophical approaches. Without taking a particularly cynical stance, one could argue that we live in an increasingly narcissistic age, and in a society that has for some time now become increasingly “atomized” due to the sparsity of meaningful social interactions. In such an environment, systems such as Confucianism and the Bahá'í Faith at the same time may find both greater challenges in promoting their philosophies and a greater need for those same philosophies.

Confucianism is not global in view, but the *Analects* reveal a system that has such an expansive potential. Individuals of good character, Confucius notes, should associate with each other, and from a modern perspective there is no reason that this cannot mean across the globe. Indeed, one might have to journey far to find a Confucian associate, as we see in *Analects* 7.26:

The Master said, “I will never get to meet a sage – I would be content to meet an exemplary person.”

The Master said, “I will never get to meet a truly efficacious person – I would be content to meet someone who is constant. It is difficult indeed for persons to be constant in a world where nothing is taken to be something, emptiness is taken to be fullness, and poverty is taken to be comfort.”<sup>81</sup>

Despite such challenges, Confucius was aware that like minds would benefit from finding each other:

In taking up one's residence, it is the presence of authoritative persons that is the greatest attraction. How can anyone be called

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81. Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, pp. 116-17.

wise who, in having the choice, does not seek to dwell among authoritative people?<sup>82</sup>

In the “second Taráz” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Tarázát*, a similar idea can be found, although in more poetic language:

They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with the peoples and kindreds of the earth with and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world. . . .<sup>83</sup>

And what of harmony and unity? At the beginning of this piece, we pointed out that both the Confucian system and the Bahá'í Faith seek a future where human beings live in a society characterized by *harmony*, achieved by the *unity* of a common ethical practice. As noted earlier, Confucius looks to the past in seeking a better state for the future:

Achieving harmony is the most valuable function of observing ritual propriety [禮 *li*]. In the ways of the Former Kings, this achievement of harmony made them elegant, and was a guiding standard in all things large and small. But when things are not going well, to realize harmony just for its own sake without regulating the situation through observing ritual propriety will not work.<sup>84</sup>

So, harmony may be achieved through propriety (禮 *li*) – in this case, a term very particularly defined as understanding one's role. Such understanding and engaging in one's role properly by all individuals is the unity of practice noted above. In *Analects* 16.1, Confucius is engaged in a conversation about a potential attack by clan against a vassal state. But Confucius turns the conversation to the issue of avoiding conflict, and a potential ideal situation for society:

For if the wealth is equitably distributed, there is no poverty; if the people are harmonious, they are not few in number; if the people are secure, they are not unstable. Under these circumstances, if distant populations are still not won over, they per-

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82 *Analects* 4.1, *ibid.*, p. 89.

83. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 216.

84. *Analects* 1.12, in Ames and Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius*, p. 74.

suaude them to join them through the cultivation of their refinement and excellence, and once they have joined them, they make them feel secure.<sup>85</sup>

This connection between harmony and unity is also nicely summed up in the “seventh leaf” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*:

O ye men of wisdom among nations! Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity. Cleave tenaciously unto that which will lead to the well-being and tranquillity of all mankind. This span of earth is but one homeland and one habitation. It behoveth you to abandon vainglory which causeth alienation and to set your hearts on whatever will ensure harmony. In the estimation of the people of Bahá man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, his wisdom, and not in his nationality or rank.<sup>86</sup>

The message of the Bahá'í Faith echoes that in the Confucian *Analects*, despite the marked difference in style and tone. First, the *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* has, as in Confucius, the injunction to cling that which “will lead to the well-being and tranquillity of all mankind.” In other words, harmony is the goal, and all pursuits should be those that lead to that end. Further, there is the Chinese idea of the “one homeland and one habitation” – the country as a collection of households but also a *single* household, i.e., 國家 (*guójiā*). Then there is the direct statement to avoid “vain-glory,” and, again, pursue actions that will “ensure harmony.” Finally, the last line mirrors Confucian thought very closely indeed:

In the estimation of the people of Bahá man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, [and] his wisdom.<sup>87</sup>

All of these values – knowledge, good conduct, and solid character – are ones that Confucius would say precisely comprise the mature individual.

Confucius perceived a world in distress, riven with violence, and run by leaders out of touch with both the “heavenly mandate” above and their subjects below. The Bahá'í Faith arose in a nineteenth-century culture

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85. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

86. Bahá'u'lláh, *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 234-35.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

trapped between archaic tradition and encroaching modernity, one that had set the stage for – but was also not quite ready for – new principles, especially the principle of the oneness or unity of mankind. Both the Confucian system and Bahá'í thought urge individuals to transcend existing circumstances, and develop beyond human frailties and ignorance. While the Confucian system works primarily on the ethical development of the individual in terms of interpersonal relationships and the Bahá'í Faith looks for broader change based on religious precepts, the goals are the same: a more just and cooperative world.

What is this “broader change” sought by the Bahá'í Faith? Certainly, it is change towards a society structured according to the principles of harmony and unity. But note that in the Bahá'í faith the relation between harmony and unity is shaped by a particular factor – namely, the Bahá'í belief that harmony that is imposed without a clear expression of the need for justice and equity would not lead to genuine unity in society. While Confucius does not always argue about justice in the way it is understood in a contemporary perspective, the Bahá'í teachings do: justice serves as a key component for the dream of unity. As one commentator has noted about justice, “Time and again Bahá'u'lláh addresses this theme.”<sup>88</sup> In the “sixth leaf” of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*, for example, Bahá'u'lláh states:

The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.<sup>89</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh also puts it in this way:

No radiance can compare with that of justice. The organization of the world and the tranquility of mankind depend upon it.<sup>90</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh here makes an explicit connection between the concept of justice and the idea of “organization” – that is, the pragmatic building of a new society.

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88. Bowers, *God Speaks Again*, p. 118.

89. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 67, as quoted *ibid.*

90. *Ibid.*