

# The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings

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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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>*

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."<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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"<sup>5</sup> as residing as independent substances in a separate realm called "the Kingdom of Names"<sup>6</sup> which is itself identified with the First Mind.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>10</sup>

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"<sup>11</sup>, 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"<sup>12</sup> 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”<sup>13</sup> 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,”<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Nor can matter form itself according to Aristotle since it is a fundamental principle of his system that actuality precedes potentiality,<sup>16</sup> 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”<sup>17</sup> and the “first creation”<sup>18</sup> 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.”<sup>19</sup> 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*.<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup> 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 . . .*<sup>22</sup>

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.<sup>23</sup> Next, we see that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explicitly adopted Aristotle's definition of change as the motion from potentiality to actuality,<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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"<sup>26</sup> 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"<sup>27</sup> or "transit . . . from place to place."<sup>28</sup> 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 existence<sup>29</sup> 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"<sup>30</sup> in order to distinguish them from "coming to be and passing away"<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> In other words there are degrees of existence just as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says there are "degrees of motion."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> and "therefore, nonexistence is only relative and absolute nonexistence inconceivable."<sup>35</sup> 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)<sup>36</sup> before they stepped "into the court of objectivity."<sup>37</sup> 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?"<sup>38</sup>*

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,"<sup>39</sup> 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 into existence as a *degree* of change, even though Aristotle thought of specifically differentiated *types* of change: for Bahá'ís, "generation,"<sup>40</sup> 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"<sup>41</sup> 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 . . .*<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, Aristotle tells us that motion is an inextricable aspect of nature: “Nature has been defined as a ‘principle of motion and change.’”<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup> 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 motion<sup>45</sup>; (b) this prime mover must be unmoved<sup>46</sup>; (c) it must be apart from nature<sup>47</sup>; (d) it must be one and eternal.<sup>48</sup> Every Bahá’í will recognize these characteristics as some of the descriptors applied to God in the Writings: “the One, the Single”<sup>49</sup> the “Prime Mover,”<sup>50</sup> the “Self-Subsisting.”<sup>51</sup> 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.”<sup>52</sup> 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."<sup>53</sup> 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 exist 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."<sup>54</sup>*

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."<sup>55</sup>*

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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?”<sup>56</sup> 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”<sup>57</sup> but they also regard God as utterly self-sufficient, meaning, philosophically speaking, as not preceded by a cause<sup>58</sup> or, as the Bahá’í Writings say, “Self-Subsisting”<sup>59</sup> and, therefore, independent of all other existing things. According to Aristotle, God is also the First Mover Who is Himself unmoved or unchanged.<sup>60</sup> This is because the Unmoved Mover is pure actuality<sup>61</sup>, that is, has no potentials, and is, therefore, beyond all change<sup>62</sup> 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 eternal<sup>63</sup> 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.<sup>64</sup> God is also alive<sup>65</sup> 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 entity<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup>*

By the “Reality of Divinity”<sup>68</sup> ‘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.<sup>69</sup> As pure form thinking Itself,<sup>70</sup> 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 causes<sup>71</sup> 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."<sup>72</sup> 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."<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> Difference in this capacity create essential distinctions among creatures, a fact most readily seen in humankind's exalted position.<sup>75</sup>

### 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."<sup>76</sup>*

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement simply elaborates Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "All that is created, however, is preceded by a cause."<sup>77</sup> The views promulgated here, and most specifically 'Abdu'l-Bahá's, are exactly those first propounded in Aristotle in his *Physics*<sup>78</sup> and the *Metaphysics*.<sup>79</sup> 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."<sup>80</sup> 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"<sup>81</sup> and His reference to God as "the King of the entire creation and its Prime Mover."<sup>82</sup> The description of God as the "Prime Mover"<sup>83</sup> 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 entities<sup>84</sup> 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,"<sup>85</sup> and still elsewhere that "Nature never makes anything without a purpose and never leaves out what is necessary."<sup>86</sup> 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"<sup>87</sup>, 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"<sup>88</sup> between natural and craft production is seen in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to the universe as a "Great Workshop"<sup>89</sup> and as "one laboratory of might under one natural system"<sup>90</sup> which, without humankind" would lack its "consummation"<sup>91</sup> and has no purpose, "no result, no fruit."<sup>92</sup> 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"<sup>93</sup> operates pervasively throughout the Bahá'í Writings.

This fact is of enormous importance in our understanding of science and religion because the "craft analogy"<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup>*

### 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.”<sup>96</sup> 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”<sup>97</sup>; 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.*<sup>98</sup>

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.<sup>99</sup>*

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.’<sup>100</sup> 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 induction<sup>101</sup> 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,<sup>102</sup> the last being confined to humankind.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, Aristotle is even willing to countenance the idea of “immediate intuition”<sup>104</sup> 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.*<sup>105</sup>

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.<sup>106</sup> 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 inadequate<sup>107</sup> 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.<sup>108</sup> 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.*<sup>109</sup>

In effect, both Aristotle and the Bahá'í Writings promulgate the doctrine known as “the great chain of being”<sup>110</sup> 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 universe<sup>111</sup> 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.”<sup>112</sup> 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”<sup>113</sup> and that “all beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees.”<sup>114</sup> 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.”<sup>115</sup>

### 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 human<sup>116</sup> 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.<sup>117</sup> 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."<sup>118</sup> 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."<sup>119</sup> 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."<sup>120</sup> 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."<sup>121</sup> 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,<sup>122</sup> nutrition and reproduction<sup>123</sup> and possesses the powers of sight,<sup>124</sup> touch,<sup>125</sup> sensation and, most significantly in light of Bahá'u'lláh's statement, thinking.<sup>126</sup> 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."<sup>127</sup> Moreover, in complete agreement with the Bahá'í Writings,<sup>128</sup> he makes it clear that sickness, old age and death are not a diminishing of the soul itself but rather of its bodily "vehicle."<sup>128</sup>

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.<sup>129</sup> Soul is the essence or form which "corresponds to the definitive formula of a thing's essence."<sup>130</sup> Soul, in other words, is the "essential 'whatness of a body.'"<sup>131</sup> This, in turn, makes soul the "substance"<sup>132</sup> as well as the "actuality"<sup>133</sup> 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"<sup>134</sup> with the "human spirit"<sup>135</sup> and describes the "station of the rational soul"<sup>136</sup> as "the human

reality.”<sup>137</sup> 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.”<sup>138</sup> For his part Aristotle shows his agreement with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by saying that “Without reason man is a brute.”<sup>139</sup> He also asserts that “happiness is activity in accordance with virtue”<sup>140</sup> and that the highest virtue—both in the sense of the highest good and the highest power in humankind—is contemplation.<sup>141</sup> He writes, “Happiness, therefore, must be some form of contemplation”<sup>142</sup> and adds that since “reason is divine,”<sup>143</sup> “he who exercises his reason and cultivates it seems to be both in the best state of mind and most dear to the gods.”<sup>144</sup> Although Aristotle himself never uses the scholastic term “rational soul,” clearly in his view, reason distinguishes humankind distinct from the rest of nature<sup>145</sup> 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.”<sup>146</sup>

### 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 afterwards<sup>147</sup> 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.<sup>148</sup> 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.”<sup>149</sup> Not being “the formula of a thing's essence”<sup>150</sup> 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.”<sup>151</sup> 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.”<sup>152</sup> 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 reason<sup>153</sup> 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,<sup>154</sup> 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.”<sup>155</sup> 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.”<sup>156</sup> 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.*<sup>157</sup>

These statements could almost be a paraphrase of Aristotle's claim that "the soul is the primary substance and the body is the matter"<sup>158</sup> which is the philosophical gist of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá says. Using Aristotelian language—"substance [that] exists by itself"<sup>159</sup> and "accident"<sup>160</sup>—He clearly rejects the reduction of the soul to an "accident"<sup>160</sup> or epiphenomenon resulting from physiological processes. By asserting that the "rational soul is the substance,"<sup>161</sup> 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,<sup>162</sup> the body's final cause<sup>163</sup> as well as the origin or cause of the living body.<sup>164</sup> 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 . . ." <sup>165</sup>

#### 3.4) Mind / matter- Mind / body Dualism

The concept that the "spirit or human soul"<sup>166</sup> can exist separately from the body inescapably commits Aristotle<sup>168</sup> 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"<sup>169</sup> 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 . . .*<sup>170</sup>

Elsewhere He tells us "the reality of man is clad in the outer garment of the animal."<sup>171</sup> 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.<sup>172</sup> 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.*<sup>173</sup>

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"<sup>174</sup> 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.<sup>175</sup> 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 bounties<sup>176</sup> and those differences of degree are real, essential and permanent.<sup>177</sup> 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."<sup>178</sup> These inequalities and differences are real because they are divinely ordained as part of God's system. Nor can they be crossed.<sup>179</sup> 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,"<sup>180</sup> the single divine *system*<sup>181</sup> 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."<sup>182</sup> 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"<sup>183</sup> 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.<sup>184</sup> 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."<sup>185</sup> Aristotle holds a similar view, criticizing as "absurdity"<sup>186</sup> those theories that would "join the soul to a body, or place it in a body."<sup>187</sup> 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."<sup>188</sup>

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 analogy<sup>189</sup>—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"<sup>190</sup> 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"<sup>191</sup> and even "the form of forms"<sup>192</sup> which is "capable of receiving the forms of an object."<sup>193</sup> 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."<sup>194</sup> Because it is itself not sensible<sup>195</sup>, the mind does not work with sensible realities, that is, actual substances, but rather with forms, or what 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls "symbols"<sup>196</sup> of outward things. Instead, the mind perceives forms, picturing to itself as forms various perceptions and intellectual realities<sup>197</sup> 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."<sup>198</sup> 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.*<sup>199</sup>

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*."<sup>200</sup> Elsewhere He writes that the divine "gift of understanding"<sup>201</sup> "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."<sup>202</sup> 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*"<sup>203</sup> of "idle fancies and vain imaginings."<sup>204</sup> 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."<sup>205</sup> 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"<sup>206</sup> 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,"<sup>207</sup> 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."<sup>208</sup>

*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.*<sup>209</sup>

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*."<sup>210</sup> 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.<sup>211</sup> 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"<sup>212</sup> 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"<sup>213</sup> 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."<sup>214</sup> Indeed, he is an "extreme realist allowing for no modification, still less construction of the object by the mind."<sup>215</sup> 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."<sup>216</sup> 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*.<sup>217</sup>

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."<sup>218</sup> These physicians are ignorant precisely because they have constructed reality to fit their "personal desires"<sup>219</sup> and thus "erred grievously."<sup>220</sup> '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.”<sup>221</sup> nor that the soul’s journey is necessary in order to acquire divine knowledge<sup>222</sup> to overcome our “lower nature, which is ignorant and defective.”<sup>223</sup> Manifestations could not provide humankind with the “science of reality.”<sup>224</sup> Without the existence of objective truth about reality, we could not be transformed from “the ignorant of mankind into the knowing”<sup>225</sup>; it would make no sense for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to say that “the ignorant must be educated.”<sup>226</sup> 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 Writing’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.”<sup>227</sup> How we interpret those “realities”<sup>228</sup> 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,”<sup>229</sup> 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.”<sup>230</sup> The fact is that the mirror can be cleansed.<sup>231</sup> 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.”<sup>232</sup>

### 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?”<sup>233</sup> 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?”<sup>234</sup> What could

the phrase “His attributes”<sup>235</sup> 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.”<sup>236</sup> 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.*<sup>237</sup>

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.”<sup>238</sup> 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”?<sup>239</sup> 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.*<sup>240</sup>

If God had no real attributes how could they be made “resplendent in the mirror of the reality of man”?<sup>241</sup> 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.”<sup>242</sup>

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,”<sup>243</sup> 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.”<sup>244</sup> 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.”<sup>245</sup> ‘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.”<sup>246</sup> Elsewhere He says, “Man is able to resist and to oppose Nature because he discovers the constitution of things”<sup>247</sup> 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 potentials<sup>248</sup>; 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.’<sup>249</sup> 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.”<sup>250</sup> 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.<sup>251</sup> Your raincoat is a substance and so is this essay. Substance, however, does not only mean ‘matter’ or what Aristotle called “sensible substances.”<sup>252</sup> When it does, such matter forms the “substratum”<sup>253</sup> 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.<sup>254</sup> 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.<sup>255</sup> 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.<sup>256</sup>

### 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 substances<sup>257</sup> 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.*<sup>258</sup>

In this passage we first notice that, as with Aristotle, the "physical"<sup>259</sup> is clearly distinguished from the "substance,"<sup>260</sup> 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 change<sup>261</sup> 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.'<sup>262</sup> The Manifestation has formal identity with God—"I am He"<sup>263</sup>—but not substantial identity with God because He is "born of the substance of God"<sup>264</sup> and "He is that He is."<sup>265</sup> 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.*<sup>266</sup>

The first thing to notice is how the Master defines substance in proper Aristotelian fashion as something that “exists by itself”<sup>267</sup> 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.”<sup>268</sup> 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.”<sup>269</sup> 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.*<sup>270</sup>

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?*<sup>271</sup>

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,”<sup>272</sup> of truly “utter abasement”<sup>273</sup> 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.”<sup>274</sup> With the Aristotelian reading of 'substance,' we see new aspects of Husayn's martyrdom. The phrase “will continue to offer up”<sup>275</sup> 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,<sup>276</sup> 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.”<sup>277</sup> The phrase “composite substance of matter”<sup>278</sup> makes no sense until we recall that for Aristotle, all physical things were composites of matter which received form<sup>279</sup> which together make them a substance or unity.<sup>280</sup> 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.*<sup>281</sup>

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.*<sup>282</sup>

‘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”<sup>283</sup> 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 Aristotle<sup>284</sup> 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”<sup>285</sup> 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.*<sup>286</sup>

Two comments are in order. First, the statement that these two are the “same”<sup>287</sup> 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”<sup>288</sup> 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,<sup>289</sup> 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.<sup>290</sup> 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.”<sup>291</sup> 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.”<sup>292</sup> In this quotation, the essence or “inmost reality”<sup>293</sup> of a thing is defined by its capacity or potentiality to “testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God.”<sup>294</sup> 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: God<sup>295</sup>; the human soul<sup>296</sup>; humankind<sup>297</sup>; belief in Divine Unity<sup>298</sup>; justice<sup>299</sup>; “all created things”<sup>300</sup> beauty<sup>301</sup>; species of living things<sup>302</sup>; truth<sup>303</sup>; religion<sup>304</sup>; “this new age”<sup>305</sup>; and the spirit.<sup>306</sup> 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”<sup>307</sup>; “the realities of”<sup>308</sup>; “reality of”<sup>309</sup>; “inner reality,”<sup>310</sup> and “inner realities”<sup>311</sup> also refer to the essence of things. This connection is further emphasized by the parallel usage seen in the references to the “inmost essence”<sup>312</sup> 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.*<sup>313</sup>

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”<sup>314</sup>—portrayed as potentials or potencies “latent”<sup>315</sup> in us and are waiting to be moved from “from potentiality into actuality.”<sup>316</sup> 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”<sup>317</sup> where we especially notice the attention drawn to “inmost reality”<sup>318</sup> as “capacity”<sup>319</sup> or potential (which is another key Aristotelian term) as well as to how the phrase “[e]ach according to its capacity”<sup>320</sup> 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 Aristotle<sup>321</sup> what we know of a thing is its universal form, its universal essence or "formula"<sup>322</sup> 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."<sup>323</sup> As he writes, "It is not possible to define any thing, for definition is of the universal and of the form."<sup>324</sup> 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."<sup>325</sup> 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.*<sup>326</sup>

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."<sup>327</sup> Aristotle relegates the knowledge of particulars to "opinion"<sup>328</sup> 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,<sup>329</sup> 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 another<sup>330</sup> or (b) the ability to change into or be changed into something else or be acted upon.<sup>331</sup> 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.”<sup>332</sup> All created things suffer or exhibit absolute “privation” vis-à-vis God, and for this reason may be properly described as “utter nothingness.”<sup>333</sup> This understanding allows a logical resolution to the apparent contradiction between Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that we come from “utter nothingness”<sup>334</sup> and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s claim that nothing can come from absolute nothingness.<sup>335</sup> 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.<sup>336</sup> The language of this passage, for example, “lieth hidden,”<sup>337</sup> “possible”<sup>338</sup> and “can be turned,”<sup>339</sup> 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.”<sup>340</sup> 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.<sup>341</sup> 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.*<sup>342</sup>

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"<sup>343</sup> 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.<sup>344</sup> 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.<sup>345</sup> 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.<sup>346</sup>

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 reinterpret 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?*”<sup>347</sup> The word “created”<sup>348</sup> 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.*<sup>349</sup>

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."<sup>350</sup> 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?*<sup>351</sup>

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"<sup>352</sup> 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."<sup>353</sup> In other words, the mind perceives or reflects these attributes directly and immediately just as a mirror directly and immediately reflects whatever it faces.<sup>354</sup> Just as humankind reflects the divine perfections,<sup>355</sup> 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*,"<sup>356</sup> 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."<sup>357</sup> 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,"<sup>358</sup> 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"<sup>359</sup>:

*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.*<sup>360</sup>

It is important to notice that 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not abandon the laws of logic simply because He is providing a "spiritual proof."<sup>361</sup> 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.<sup>362</sup> 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 Concurrence.*<sup>363</sup>

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.*<sup>364</sup>

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 exists<sup>365</sup> and recognizes that intuition represents a real though problematical avenue to knowledge.<sup>366</sup> However, the existence of intuition and "intuitive reason"<sup>367</sup> 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"<sup>368</sup> which he explicitly identifies with "god."<sup>369</sup> He then goes on to explain that a few, "called fortunate"<sup>370</sup> have "inspiration"<sup>371</sup> and have no need for "deliberation."<sup>372</sup> Finally, there are also "the dreamers of what is true"<sup>373</sup> who are more susceptible to the influence of God, "the moving principle"<sup>374</sup> "when the reasoning power is relaxed."<sup>375</sup>

Readers will, of course, recognize that Aristotle's belief in knowledge from the inspired "fortunate"<sup>376</sup> and "dreamers of what is true"<sup>377</sup> 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 *Nichomachean 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."<sup>378</sup> This is because it is what "we choose always for itself, and never for the sake of something else"<sup>379</sup> 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”<sup>380</sup> 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.”<sup>381</sup> ‘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.”<sup>382</sup> 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.”<sup>383</sup> These beliefs are succinctly encapsulated in the assertion that “Bahá’u’lláh has brought you divine happiness.”<sup>384</sup>

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.”<sup>379</sup> 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.<sup>385</sup> 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,”<sup>386</sup> nor even activity in accordance with virtue<sup>387</sup> but rather activity “in accordance with the highest virtue.”<sup>388</sup> 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”<sup>389</sup> or nature, and connects actualization with happiness in his claim that “philosophic wisdom”<sup>390</sup> 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.”<sup>391</sup> 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.”<sup>392</sup> 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”<sup>393</sup> 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.”<sup>394</sup> However, even in the less spiritual *Nichomachean Ethics*, he notes that the highest activities “take thought of things noble and divine”<sup>395</sup> and remarks that contemplation is superior to action because contemplation can be carried out more continuously.<sup>396</sup> Ultimately, he awards contemplation the laurel as the highest virtue and the source of “perfect happiness.”<sup>397</sup> 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.”<sup>398</sup> 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.*<sup>399</sup>

‘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”<sup>400</sup> 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.”<sup>401</sup> 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.”<sup>402</sup> 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,”<sup>403</sup> that is, those who live more according to their lower animal selves than their specifically human selves which is at least partially “divine.”<sup>404</sup>

This belief in the “acquisition of the supreme virtues”<sup>405</sup> 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”<sup>406</sup> Bahá'u'lláh tells us, and Aristotle, of course, is well known for his doctrine of virtue as the golden mean between extremes.<sup>407</sup> Another aspect of moderation is balance which is lauded by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.<sup>408</sup> 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.”<sup>409</sup> ‘Abdu'l-Bahá exhorts us to “train their children with life and heart and teach them in the school of virtue and perfection.”<sup>410</sup>

### 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.<sup>411</sup> 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”<sup>412</sup> 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”<sup>413</sup> 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.”<sup>414</sup> 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”<sup>415</sup> 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).*<sup>416</sup>

In short, the Divine does not create an imperfect product. Moreover, when Aristotle says that “the bad is in its nature posterior to potency,”<sup>417</sup> 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,”<sup>418</sup> 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”<sup>419</sup> 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.”<sup>420</sup> “In creation there is no evil; all is good”<sup>421</sup> 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.*"<sup>422</sup>

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"<sup>423</sup> 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"<sup>424</sup> 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."<sup>425</sup> Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically writes about "industrial justice"<sup>426</sup> emphasized by Aristotle as 'distributive justice'<sup>427</sup> 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."<sup>428</sup> 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.<sup>429</sup>

Aristotle also believes that “rectificatory”<sup>430</sup> justice “restores equality”<sup>431</sup> which reflects the close association in the Bahá’í Writings between justice and equality.<sup>432</sup> Both also agree on the importance of temperance and moderation<sup>433</sup>; liberality or generosity<sup>434</sup>; honor and nobility<sup>435</sup> and proper leisure, that is, leisure appropriate to our specifically human nature.<sup>436</sup> The range of specific agreements between the two is enormously wide as shown by the following samples: the importance of music in character education<sup>437</sup>; the importance of suppressing swearing and foul language<sup>438</sup>; rational liberty<sup>439</sup> or “true liberty”<sup>440</sup>; majority rule limited by considerations of fairness<sup>441</sup>; equality of all citizens<sup>442</sup> and the primacy of good character.<sup>443</sup> As Aristotle says, “a good man may make the best even of poverty and disease and the other ills of life.”<sup>444</sup> 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.*<sup>445</sup>

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.<sup>446</sup> Indeed, in language reminiscent of Baha’u’llah,<sup>447</sup> Aristotle asserts that friends should ideally be “a single soul”<sup>448</sup> 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.”<sup>449</sup> 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”<sup>450</sup> 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 themselves<sup>451</sup> 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,”<sup>452</sup> 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”<sup>453</sup> which requires “external goods enough for the performance of good actions.”<sup>454</sup> 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,”<sup>455</sup> 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,”<sup>456</sup> 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.”<sup>457</sup> 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.*<sup>458</sup>

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,”<sup>459</sup> a fact that flatly denies Keven Brown's claim that Aristotle saw the universe as “self-ordering.”<sup>460</sup> 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.”<sup>461</sup> 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.*<sup>462</sup>

### 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 consultation<sup>463</sup> 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.”<sup>464</sup> Bahá’u’lláh reminds us that we must seek “true liberty”<sup>465</sup> which must not be confused with the seditious liberty of animals.<sup>466</sup> 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”<sup>467</sup> 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 justifiable<sup>468</sup> 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 courage<sup>469</sup> 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-sacrifice<sup>470</sup> 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.<sup>471</sup> 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 ourselves<sup>472</sup> 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.<sup>473</sup> 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"<sup>474</sup> 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."<sup>475</sup>

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.<sup>476</sup> 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."<sup>477</sup> (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"<sup>478</sup> 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"<sup>479</sup> insofar as it has its own qualities or attributes that distinguish it chemically from a gasoline or electrical fire. It has "self-existence"<sup>480</sup> 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,"<sup>481</sup> 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.<sup>482</sup>

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"<sup>483</sup> 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 unflinching 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*

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- 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.

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- 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.

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- 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.



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- 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.

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- 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 Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVI, 63. See also *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 39.

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- 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*, LXXIX; *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/](http://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.*

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- 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.

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- 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.