

# Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings

## Part Two

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In this portion of the paper, we shall compare the ideas presented by the forerunners of postmodernism and their most important successors and the Bahá'í Writings in order to demonstrate that surface similarities notwithstanding, the foundational ideas of postmodernism and the Writings are incompatible.

### 11. The Counter-Enlightenment and the Bahá'í Writings

In regards to reason, the Writings adopt a position that is neither in agreement with the Enlightenment's unquestioning faith in reason nor with the scepticism and even rejection of reason by the Counter-Enlightenment and its post-modern protégés. To be precise, the Writings exemplify a position that may be described as "moderate rationalism", according to which reason can give us some but not all knowledge; there are kinds of knowledge - such as the knowledge available to the heart<sup>1</sup> - which are not obtainable by reason alone but are, so-to-speak, 'trans-rational.' (We say 'trans-rational' rather than 'irrational' because this knowledge is not opposed to reason per se but goes beyond it making use, for example, of revelation.) Therefore, we must remember that "the human spirit, *unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities.*"<sup>2</sup> In other words, there are truths which cannot be discovered by unassisted or natural reason and which must be attained by other means, i.e. revelation and the development of "spiritual susceptibilities."<sup>3</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

If he [man] attains rebirth while in the world of nature, he will become informed of the divine world. *He will observe that another and a higher world exists.*<sup>4</sup>

Reason expands or transcends its limits if those employing it become spiritualized. In a further note regarding the limits of reason and knowledge, 'Abdu'l-Bahá 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>5</sup>

Here 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that rational knowledge is limited to qualities and that essences must be known by way of qualities; they cannot be known by direct insight or intuition but must be known indirectly through the mediation of qualities or attributes. This statement guides, i.e. limits our use of reason and our inquiry by saying not only that whatever we know about things and their essences, must come by way of qualities but also that whatever we know is limited to what qualities can tell us. The essences of things may have many other aspects which are not observable by us in our current state of being, and, therefore, must remain 'mysterious.' This has enormous ontological consequences not the least of which is that it safeguards the ontological integrity of all created things and provides a rational foundation for a belief in 'mysteries.' (God, for example is a 'mystery' insofar as He is beyond the comprehension of human reason.<sup>6</sup>) . In short, reason can tell us a great deal but not everything we need to know and live well.

In addition to limitations of scope and applicability, reason has the limit of fallibility. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that "the circle of this [rational] knowledge is very limited because it depends upon effort and attainment."<sup>7</sup> Anything depending on human action is subject to errors of all kinds; thus, by itself, it has limited reliability and therefore, does not always lead us to the truth.<sup>8</sup> According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the conflicting opinions among the philosophers clearly demonstrate that "the method of reason is not perfect."<sup>9</sup>

However, unlike the Counter-Enlightenment and its postmodern successors, the Bahá'í Writings do not reject reason altogether, but, quite to the contrary, encourage us to use it while keeping its limitations in mind. The Writings not only inform us of the limitations of reason but also, at the same time, endorse reason and its role in our lives. Such an endorsement of reason is clear when 'Abdu'l-Bahá, says "in this age the peoples of the world need the arguments of reason."<sup>10</sup> and

[God] has bestowed upon [man] the power of intellect so that through the attribute of reason, when fortified by the Holy Spirit, he may penetrate and discover ideal realities and become informed of the mysteries of the world of significances. As this power to penetrate the ideal knowledge is superhuman, supernatural, man becomes the collective center of spiritual as well as material forces so that the divine spirit may manifest itself in his being ...<sup>11</sup>

Through reason “fortified by the Holy Spirit,” we may obtain knowledge of the “ideal realities” i.e. the supernatural or spiritual realities of creation insofar as such knowledge is compatible with our human nature. Hence this knowledge is “superhuman.” This assurance that reason is able to attain genuine knowledge is important because that is precisely something denied by the Counter-Enlightenment and its postmodern successors. Both reject the ‘privileged’ status that reason has over ‘other ways of knowing’ and in particular its ‘privileged’ connection to truth. The link between rationality and truth has been severed.

The enormous positive importance of reason in the Writings is also seen in that the essential feature that distinguishes humankind from animals, the *differentia*, is the “rational soul.”<sup>12</sup>

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. This spirit, which in the terminology of the philosophers is the rational soul, embraces all beings, and as far as human ability permits discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings. But the human spirit, unless assisted by the spirit of faith, does not become acquainted with the divine secrets and the heavenly realities.<sup>13</sup>

Here we observe not only identification of our essential identifying feature with the rational soul but also, again, emphasis on the rational soul’s ability to attain genuine knowledge in the world, and, with the assistance of the “spirit of faith” or “Holy Spirit”, knowledge of “heavenly realities.” Once more, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá draws our attention to the intimate connection between rationality and obtaining knowledge or discovering truth. Elsewhere ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says that the rational soul or “the human spirit consists of the rational, or logical,

reasoning faculty, which apprehends general ideas and things intelligible and perceptible.”<sup>14</sup> Through the power of reason we can discover the “realities of things.”<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, there is continuous emphasis in the Writings on the use of reason to reconcile science and religion and to ground faith: “if a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation.”<sup>16</sup>

For God has endowed us with faculties by which we may comprehend the realities of things, contemplate reality itself. If religion is opposed to reason and science, faith is impossible; and when faith and confidence in the divine religion are not manifest in the heart, there can be no spiritual attainment.<sup>17</sup>

There are two matters of interest in these quotes. First, is the assurance that through the use of reason and other faculties, we are capable of discovering truths about the “realities of things,” i.e. the way things really are. Second, it is clear that reason and “spiritual attainment” are intimately connected i.e. reason is necessary to genuine spiritual life and faith. In addition, we are told that “religion must be in conformity with science and reason, so that it may influence the hearts of men.”<sup>18</sup> Here, too, we observe that reason is not only necessary for genuine spirituality through its influence on the heart, and through it, faith.

Religion must be reasonable. If it does not square with reason, it is superstition and without foundation. It is like a mirage, which deceives man by leading him to think it is a body of water. God has endowed man with reason that he may perceive what is true. If we insist that such and such a subject is not to be reasoned out and tested according to the established logical modes of the intellect, what is the use of the reason which God has given man?<sup>19</sup>

In a similar vein, `Abdu'l-Bahá informs us that “true science is reason and reality, and religion is essentially reality and pure reason; therefore, the two must correspond.”<sup>20</sup> Yet again we observe that reason, religion, science and reality are all intimately, i.e. indissolubly connected and are not necessarily in conflict.

Finally, it should be noted that notwithstanding the possibility of error, reason can also provide us with knowledge of the truth, something that is denied by all postmodernists

from Nietzsche on; indeed, as we have seen, Nietzsche and his postmodern successors deny that there is such a thing as 'truth' to be found. Rather truth is something we make or construct. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

God has created man in order that he may *perceive the verity of existence and endowed him with mind or reason to discover truth*. Therefore, scientific knowledge and religious belief must be conformable to the analysis of this divine faculty in man.<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere he says, "God has created man and endowed him with the power of reason whereby he may arrive at valid conclusions."<sup>22</sup> In other words, in spite of the possibility of error, reason is one way of attaining truth.

From the foregoing discussion, we may conclude that unlike the Counter-Enlightenment, Nietzsche and his postmodern protégés for whom there are no truths but only interpretation,<sup>23</sup> the Writings maintain that reason does, indeed, provide us with genuine knowledge of the truth despite the fact that we may use it incorrectly. It must be used carefully, preferably under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we have seen in a number of previous quotations.<sup>24</sup> In other words, one of the conditions for ensuring that reason works correctly is divine assistance. Another such condition is given in the following quote:

Consequently, it has become evident that the four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions are faulty and inaccurate. All of them are liable to mistake and error in conclusions. But a statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete *When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake*. This is self-evident and manifest."<sup>25</sup>

When we view these quotations together, in addition to the warnings about the fallibility of human reason, we find it difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Writings exemplify not only 'moderate rationalism' but also a position known as "reliabilism." According to the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, reliabilism is "the position that "a belief can be

justified if formed as the result of a reliable process even if the believer is unaware of what makes it justified.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, reliabilism demands that belief be “the result of some reliable process of belief-formation.”<sup>27</sup> The Writings tells us that a “reliable process of belief formation” involves, ideally, the Holy Spirit, but at the very least, the congruence of several tests among which ‘Abdu'l-Bahá lists empirical sense knowledge, reason, tradition and the “promptings of the heart” which we interpret as the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Of course, the Writings do not go into all the technical details of reliabilism, but they do, quite clearly adumbrate this position which is for us to work out within the guidelines provided.

The inescapable conclusion to which we are led is that while the Writings do not accept the Enlightenment’s unquestioning trust in reason, neither do they accept the categorical rejection of reason exemplified by the Counter-Enlightenment and its postmodern successors. Indeed, in their emphasis on the importance of reason in science and religion, as well as in the identification of humankind’s essence as a “rational soul,” the Writings demonstrate strong leanings in favour of the Enlightenment. Philosophically, they may be seen as a continuation of the Enlightenment albeit it in an amended and corrected form.

## 12. The Bahá'í Writings and Kant

In regards to Kant, the Bahá'í Writings, cannot accept his rejection of metaphysics *tout court* since they do not accept the idea that under any and all circumstances, reason is necessarily confined to the phenomenal realm. According to Kant, we cannot correctly reason from the phenomenal to the noumenal or transcendent because the laws and conditions of reasoning do not apply to the noumenal world. These laws and conditions – for example time, space, causality, quantity, relation, quality and modality – are imposed by the human mind on the ‘raw’ data from the noumenal realm and, thereby, make thinking and reasoning possible.<sup>28</sup> However, the categories are not inherently part of the transcendent noumenal realm, from which it follows that reason does not apply to this realm of which we have no experience as it is in itself, i.e. unshaped by us. Because God is transcendent to the phenomenal realm, we cannot devise proofs of His existence by way of the phenomenal world.

As we shall see below, the Bahá'í Writings do not agree that the existence of God cannot be proven from the phenomenal

realm. This is made evident, for example, by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's proof of God as the First Cause.

Such process of causation goes on, 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. This Universal Reality cannot be sensed, it cannot be seen. It must be so of necessity, for it is All-Embracing, not circumscribed, and such attributes qualify the effect and not the cause.<sup>29</sup>

In 'Abdu'l-Bahá's view, a First Cause is necessary because no actually real chain of causation can go on infinitely. He does not say why, nor is it important for us at this point, to know why he reached this conclusion. What is germane to our discussion is that he clearly accepts the possibility of reasoning our way to an "Ultimate Cause" and "Universal Reality [that] cannot be sensed" i.e. is beyond the phenomenal realm. Moreover, he does so on the basis of causality, which he regards as a real feature of the universe and not merely an imposition by the human mind on raw noumenal data. Since causality is ontologically real, and infinite causal chains are "manifestly absurd," we must eventually find a First Cause to set the chain of causes into motion.

For the reasons given above, Kant would not accept as legitimate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "all beings and all existences are the centers from which the glory of God is reflected - that is to say, the signs of the Divinity of God are apparent in the realities of things and of creatures."<sup>30</sup> If this statement were accepted, then we would be able to use the signs of God to reason our way from the phenomenal to the noumenal and transcendent Source. Similarly, Kant is bound to reject the claim that "the smallest created thing proves that there is a creator. For instance, this piece of bread proves that it has a maker."<sup>31</sup> Here, in this compressed version of Intelligent Design, we observe reasoning from the created to the Creator which is precisely what Kant forbids.

It might be argued that the Writings could agree with Kant as far as the limits of natural reason, i.e. reason unassisted by the Holy Spirit are concerned. Without such assistance, individuals will not develop their "spiritual susceptibilities,"<sup>32</sup> and their thinking, therefore, remains confined to the phenomenal realm. However, the Writings do not take such a position. For example, the argument to the First Cause cited above needs

nothing other than natural reason to make its point; indeed, the same argument was already used by Aristotle and other philosophers. No divine inspiration is needed to see why an initial Cause is necessary. Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's other argument from the contingency and dependency of creation and humankind to the transcendent non-contingent Source is also available to natural reason without divine assistance, as is his argument from the imperfections of all created things to the existence of a perfect Being.<sup>33</sup> In light of these arguments it is more accurate to say that according to the Writings, natural reason is sufficient for some kinds and levels of knowledge but not for others which require the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Nor do the Writings endorse Kant's belief that the phenomenal world in which we live is entirely a human construction, i.e. the way the categories of the mind organise data from the noumenal realm according to time, space and causality for example. Nature - which is what we must interpret and work with - is made by God Who provides its various inherent qualities, essences, potentialities and laws. This nature pre-exists us and therefore does not depend on us for its existence and/or attributes. It is given to us, with all things having their natural attributes and behaving according to pre-existing natural laws decreed by God from which no being except man may deviate.<sup>34</sup> In other words, unlike the philosophy of Kant, the Bahá'í Writings do not teach that humankind has any part in the process of constituting natural reality, i.e. the phenomenal realm in which we live. One could argue that making such a claim is, in effect, setting oneself up as a kind of second god and co-creator, or 'partner'.

And now concerning thy reference to the existence of two Gods. *Beware, beware, lest thou be led to join partners with the Lord, thy God.* He is, and hath from everlasting been, one and alone, without peer or equal ... He hath assigned no associate unto Himself in His Kingdom, no counsellor to counsel Him ... To this every atom of the universe beareth witness, and beyond it the inmates of the realms on high ...<sup>35</sup>

These words suggest that humankind has no part in this process of constituting natural reality, i.e. no part in constituting the phenomenal realm in which we live. We may, of course, interpret the divinely constituted reality in various ways, and, of course, we may invent and construct all sorts of things - machines, laws, social codes, art and so on - using first nature, but these interpretations and constructions are not

prior to and should not be confused with the divinely created reality itself. In other words, reality as created and constituted by God, i.e. 'first nature,' should not be confused with what humankind makes from 'first nature' i.e. an artificial 'second nature', a society and civilization which we create and constitute according to our wills guided by revelation. To some extent, our wills can constitute the second nature but only to the limits allowed by the attributes inherent in the things that God has created. Fire is inherently hot<sup>36</sup> and will not serve as ice.

Thus, the Bahá'í Writings clearly recognise a distinction between first and second nature, something which is highly problematical with Kant. We might consider the noumenal to be the first nature and the phenomenal the second nature, but this is dubious at best since the phenomenal, for Kant, includes everything that is shaped by such categories as causality, quantity, existence and relation, i.e. the entire natural world. According to the Writings, however, this phenomenal realm is precisely the nature that is created by God and which humankind interprets and uses to build second nature, i.e. societies, laws, conventions, art and science within the limits defined by the divinely established first nature. The natural tendency of Kant's philosophy is to deny the distinction between the two natures and, thereby, set the stage for the postmodernist rejection of this distinction.

### 13. The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche

Although one may find individual ideas wherein Nietzsche and the Bahá'í Writings agree, a survey of his work makes it abundantly clear that the disagreements are fundamental and wide-spread. Let us begin with their sharply divergent assessments of Socrates and the use of reason in scientific discovery. The Writings praise Socrates as one of the philosophers who recognised the reality of the spiritual

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 ... 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*. This was the reason of the triumph and survival of their teachings and principles.<sup>37</sup>

Nietzsche, as we have already seen, disparaged Socrates as the “theoretical man”<sup>38</sup> and “mystagogue of science”<sup>39</sup> who foolishly believed that reason could explain and tell us the truth about reality.<sup>40</sup> Instead, Nietzsche wants to escape beyond “the eternal reason-spider and reason cobweb”<sup>41</sup> so that we may be free to live with our fullest passionate capacity of our will-to-power.

Unlike Nietzsche, the Writings hold that recognising the supernatural, the transcendent or divine is an important contribution to our existence. Furthermore, as we have seen in the previous section on the Enlightenment, the Writings also disagree with Nietzsche’s decisively negative assessment of reason. After all, of course, they identify humankind’s distinguishing characteristic, its *differentia*, as the “rational soul.”<sup>42</sup> They do not, of course, uncritically accept reason as the final authority on all issues, but, in their moderate rationalism and reliabilism they accept reason as a legitimate source of real knowledge. In other words, the Writings accept reason as a means of discovering truth about reality, and could not accept Nietzsche’s belief that “‘Truth’ is therefore not something there, that might be found or discovered – but something that must be created.”<sup>43</sup> Nor can they accept his sweeping statement that truth is no more than

[a] mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are.<sup>44</sup>

The Bahá'í Writings recognise that what Nietzsche describes may sometimes be the case – as in the gradual degeneration of religious teachings to the point when a new Manifestation is needed – but they do not hold that this is what truth-claims always and necessarily are. Some truth-claims such as ‘God exists’ are simply correct and others are plainly wrong: the earth is not a flat disk but a sphere. Distinguishing between real truth and man-made fictions is the very basis of progress i.e. addition and improvement of knowledge, both in the sciences and in progressive revelation. Both of these involve the overcoming of error and superstition which the Writings also recognise as real – but which are problematic for Nietzsche. If truth is invented fiction, then how can we tell a ‘true fiction’ from a ‘false one’? How can we ever progress from ‘false’ to ‘true’? Indeed, in a statement that exemplifies an extreme sceptical attitude

towards truth, Nietzsche writes, "Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species of life could not live. The value of life is ultimately decisive."<sup>45</sup> What is essential about truth is not that it is true but that it serves life or our life purposes: "[t]he criterion of truth resides in the enhancement of the feeling of power."<sup>46</sup> In other words, truth is not which is actually the case but that which meets our needs in the struggles of life – a view of truth that is highly subjective and which allows there to be as many truths as there are individuals with needs.

The Writings, for their part, maintain that truths are discovered, not invented and show no sign of accepting Nietzsche's extremely subjective characterization of truth.

God has created man in order that he may perceive the verity of existence and endowed him *with mind or reason to discover truth*. Therefore, scientific knowledge and religious belief must be conformable to the analysis of this divine faculty in man.<sup>47</sup>

Elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

Man is able to resist and to oppose Nature because he *discovers the constitution of things*, and through this he commands the forces of Nature; all the inventions he has made are due to his *discovery of the constitution of things*.<sup>48</sup>

He also states,

*The mind and the thought of man sometimes discover truths*, and from this thought and discovery signs and results are produced. This thought has a foundation. But many things come to the mind of man which are like the waves of the sea of imaginations; they have no fruit, and no result comes from them.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, we may conclude that although they the Writings recognise the inherent limitations of unaided reason, they do not share Nietzsche's extreme scepticism about discovering knowledge. Therefore, they place a high value on science as a means of discovering truth and not as a provider of comforting illusions<sup>50</sup> as does Nietzsche. Finally, there is no evidence that the Bahá'í Writings would accept Nietzsche's reduction of 'truth' to the will-to-power without any genuine epistemological content or truth value; "It [truth] is a word for the 'will-to-power.'"<sup>51</sup> This, and his claim that truth is created,

i.e. an aesthetic theory of truth, is incompatible with Bahá'í epistemology which holds to a correspondence theory of truth in which truth is discovered.<sup>52</sup> The correspondence theory of truth, i.e. the theory that we attain truth when our conceptions correspond with reality is illustrated in the following:

for the connection which exists between the reality of things, *whether they be spiritual or material*, requires that when the mirror is clear and faces the sun, the light of the sun must become apparent in it.<sup>53</sup>

“The mirror of the reality of man”<sup>54</sup> reflects realities “whether they be spiritual or material” and, through this process of reflection, learns about them and if its concepts adequately represent the various realities. If they do, then they correspond to one degree or another to reality; and if they do not, we shall (hopefully) discover we are in error. This theory is also an example of ‘representationalism’ insofar as our concepts represent reality in our minds. For Nietzsche (as for all postmodernist philosophers), this is problematical because this not only undermines the theory that truth is created or constructed but also implies that language is capable of putting us into touch with reality. This would limit human creativity and freedom in the construction of reality.

In regards to the “will-to-power”, it should also be noted that it should not be understood as simply the actualization of our inherent potentials. Even the most cursory survey of Nietzsche’s statements on the will-to-power make it clear that he thinks of it in terms of overcoming and dominating others, or being unrestrained by normal moral codes. That is why he mocks Christian and other religious moralities as “slave morality”<sup>55</sup> because they have given up this goal. is emphasized by his use of the word “Macht” instead of “Kraft” or energy for power. “Macht” in German implies domination, overcoming and power over others and we must never lose sight of the fact that Nietzsche wrote of a “Wille-zur-Macht” not a “Wille-zur-Kraft.” This is important because the term “will-to-power” is central in Nietzsche’s philosophy and sets a tone that is fundamentally out of harmony with the Writings which emphasize love.

Nietzsche’s doctrine of the “eternal return.”<sup>56</sup> is also profoundly out of harmony with the Writings for two main reasons. First, it denies the existence of a transcendent dimension to reality, pre-figuring thereby, postmodernism’s rejection of any form of transcendence whether it be an

ontological denial of realms beyond the material or an epistemological denial of a 'real' world that transcends or is external to our constructions. The Bahá'í teachings about the reality of an absolutely transcendent God, the immortality of the soul and its advance into "spiritual heavenly worlds,"<sup>57</sup> or the "spiritual worlds that can neither be expressed in words nor intimated by allusion,"<sup>58</sup> or the Concourse of High, demonstrate that any rejection of ontological transcendence is not compatible with the Writings. Furthermore, in his startling and flamboyant claim that "God is dead"<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche does not merely reject an outmoded vision of the Christian God, but also expresses his opposition to recognition of any transcendent being or realm of being because those would detract from valuing earth and life on earth.. Acceptance of the transcendent will make us 'naysayers" to the value of earthly, phenomenal, material life. The epistemological denial of a real world that transcends or is outside our constructions is also problematical. The correspondence theory of truth to which the Writings adhere requires there be a real world to which we can refer our constructions, and if need be correct them.

The second reason Nietzsche's "eternal return" clashes with the Writings is because this doctrine runs counter to nature. According to Nietzsche,

all things eternally return, and ourselves with them, and that we have already existed times without number, and all things with us ... But the plexus of causes returneth in which I am intertwined,--it will again create me! I myself pertain to the causes of the eternal return. I come again with this sun, with this earth, with this eagle, with this serpent--NOT to a new life, or a better life, or a similar life: *I come again eternally to this identical and selfsame life*, in its greatest and its smallest, to teach again the eternal return of all things<sup>60</sup>

Nietzsche sees the eternal return as a sign of hope and a call to live heroically, but the Writings clearly reject it for the same reasons they reject incarnation. First,

reincarnation, which is the repeated appearance of the same spirit with its former essence and condition in this same world of appearance, is impossible and unrealizable.<sup>61</sup>

The repetition in the eternal return and reincarnation is of the same kind, a return of the same soul to the same conditions

without end. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá this cannot take place because human existence is not confined to material creation:

The idea that existence is restricted to this perishable world, and the denial of the existence of divine worlds, originally proceeded from the imaginations of certain believers in reincarnation; but the divine worlds are infinite. If the divine worlds culminated in this material world, creation would be futile.<sup>62</sup>

Nietzsche's eternal return denies the transcendent, non-material, dimension of existence and requires that we live in only one world, the world of physical creation within which we shall be eternally re-cycled without undergoing any evolutionary process and progress in other realms. In this statement 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that without such transcendent realms, creation itself would have no purpose or meaning if it were limited to material existence. Furthermore, he challenges Nietzsche's idea that the eternal return is a glorious and inspiring vision by calling such a vision of life limited to the material plane "futile."

The eternal return is also contrary to nature, for, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

The point of the compass in describing a circle makes no retrograde motion, for this would be contrary to the natural movement and the divine order ... and a movement contrary to the system and law of nature is the cause of nonexistence. The return of the soul after death is *contrary to the natural movement, and opposed to the divine system.*<sup>63</sup>

These statements make it clear that Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return which is so central to his philosophy, is fundamentally incompatible with the Bahá'í Writings because such a return violates the naturally progressive essence of the soul. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that "with the human soul, there is no decline. Its only movement is towards perfection; growth and progress alone constitute the motion of the soul."<sup>64</sup> To return to this current material state is simply unnatural.

There are also serious difficulties in reconciling the Writings with Nietzsche's perspectivism. A superficial examination of the Writings might lead us to conclude that they support Nietzsche's perspectivism but this is a mirage. Nietzsche's perspectivism (and the perspectivism adopted by the postmodernists) does not recognise that there does in fact exist

a privileged point of view, an objective 'Archimedean point,' a transcendental vantage point from which to judge and evaluate our various individual perspectives and interpretations. This, of course, is the viewpoint of the Manifestation of God and His appointed interpreters. Whatever perspectives and interpretations we espouse must not reject or, at the very least, not contradict what the Manifestation teaches and what His specifically appointed successors decree. Nietzsche's philosophy, is incapable of recognizing the existence of such a Being, Whose "Book itself is the "Unerring Balance" established amongst men"<sup>65</sup> by which all other views and perspectives are to be judged. In reflecting on this we should not make the mistake of confusing Nietzsche's 'Super-man' or 'Ueber-mensch' with a Manifestation. The 'Super-man' is a thoroughly human entity whereas the Manifestation occupies a unique ontological position in which He has "the station of essential unity ... [and] the station of distinction"<sup>66</sup> which is limited to the created world. Moreover, the Manifestation in one station has an ontological position transcendent to the material world - something that Nietzsche's philosophy is bound to reject as an example of hostility to this life in this particular world. Nothing in Nietzsche's doctrine of the 'Super-man' provides him with any remotely similar ontological attributes.

#### 14. Commentary on the Bahá'í Writings and Heidegger

As we recall, Heidegger thought that metaphysics - "the philosophical investigation of the nature, constitution and structure of reality,"<sup>67</sup> - had gone astray, and lost the "question of Being,"<sup>68</sup> replacing it with concern for particular *beings*. In other words, metaphysics or, more precisely, western metaphysics, replaced a concern for Being with a concern for particular entities or instantiations of being. In his introduction to *Being and Time*, he says, " 'Being' cannot indeed be conceived as an entity ... nor can 'Being' be derived from higher concepts by definition, not can it be presented through lower ones."<sup>69</sup> It is also impossible to define Being in the manner of "traditional logic."<sup>70</sup> For Heidegger,

Metaphysics thinks about beings as beings. Wherever the question is asked what beings are, beings as such are in sight. Metaphysical representation owes this sight to the light of Being. The light itself, i.e., that which such thinking experiences as light, does not come within the range of metaphysical thinking; for- metaphysics always

represents beings only as beings.<sup>71</sup>

To continue Heidegger's metaphor, we may say that metaphysics no longer looks at the light (of Being) by which we see all things but only at what the light reveals and, therefore, comes to forget Being. "Metaphysics, insofar as it always represents only beings as beings, does not recall Being itself. Philosophy does not concentrate on its ground."<sup>72</sup> In other words, metaphysics concentrates on the surface phenomena and forgets that which makes the surface phenomena possible, the condition of their being-there [Da-sein].

In our view, the Writings do not agree with Heidegger that the concern for "beings as beings," i.e. for specific entities, necessarily leads to a forgetfulness of Being. It may do so, but such a result is not necessary. To understand how this can be so, we must come to grips with the fact that the Bahá'í Writings abound with metaphysical statements and analysis about the nature and structure of reality including that of all kinds of beings. The Writings make wide-spread and consistent use of the Aristotelian method, terminology and arguments in their analysis of reality. In the Aristotelian analysis of reality, there are substances<sup>73</sup> which have essential and non-essential attributes; there are essences with necessary and accidental attributes; there are potentials in each entity; things are contingent or necessary, there are four causes (material, final, formal and efficient) and all materially existing things are composites of matter and form, and subject to corruption. There is also a First Mover or God Who is "the object of desire"<sup>74</sup> for all things and towards Whom all things are attracted. All of these concepts are found and used in the Writings.<sup>75</sup> In addition, metaphysical arguments of various kinds - for immortality, against re-incarnation, against materialism, pantheism and the belief that the world is an illusion - are also employed.

This leads to an important question: given their wealth of metaphysical analysis, do the Bahá'í Writings 'forget' Being? Does Heidegger's statement that "It [metaphysics] refers to Being and means beings as beings"<sup>76</sup> also apply to the Writings? In our view, the answer is negative because the Bahá'í doctrine of the essential unknowability of God's Essence:

Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is, and hath ever been, veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and

will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men. "No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving."<sup>77</sup>

Precisely because God cannot be known in His Essence - a belief which is emphasized throughout the Bahá'í Writings - we cannot make God into another particular being subject to definitions and "traditional logic."<sup>78</sup> All the specific images of God as an entity are no more than products of our own individual and/or collective imaginations, or heuristic images provided by Manifestations for a particular time and place. These images are not real although they serve a heuristic purpose that both facilitates and limits our thoughts and feelings at the same time. If understood correctly, they draw attention to the utterly transcendent which does not exist as a being 'like any other' and prevent us from forgetting Being completely.

In other words, if we keep God's unknowability foremost in mind, we shall not mistake a being for Being. Since God's Essence is unknowable, we can only observe the "signs of God" (presence of God.) in all created things.<sup>79</sup> To use Heidegger's metaphor, since we cannot look at the sun, we can still become aware of the light and how that light is received by individual beings. Through reflective prayer guided by the Manifestation, we can still be aware of the light by which we see and its Source: "No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it."<sup>80</sup> It is precisely Bahá'u'lláh's revelation with its emphasis on the unknowability of God that ensures we do not forget That which is the very condition for our being and knowing.

Because the Bahá'í Writings avoid the metaphysical trap of mistaking Being for 'a being' and, forgetting Being, Bahá'ís can agree with Heidegger's analogy between Being and colour:

Color shines and wants only to shine. When we analyse it in rational terms by measuring its wavelengths, it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate into it. it causes every merely calculating importunity to turn to a destruction ... The earth appears only cleared and as itself when it is perceived and preserved as that which is by nature undisclosable ....<sup>81</sup>

Here we see the ineluctability of God or Being, the "generous,"<sup>82</sup> Who "wants only to shine" and on Whom all

beings depend for their existence. However, as with colour, the moment we begin analysis we lose the very thing we seek to analyse; propositional knowledge and calculative and technological reasoning is of no use in understanding Being. Indeed, the truest thing we can say about God or Being is that it is utterly transcendent and “undisclosable.”

Our conclusion is that on the fundamental issue, the Bahá'í Writings both agree and disagree. They agree with Heidegger insofar as Being or God is absolutely beyond human conception and that all our concepts are deficient in this regard. However, the Writings also show that the doctrine of the unknowability of God's Essence is the antidote needed to prevent metaphysics from diminishing God into a being ‘like the others.’ This disagreement is fundamental insofar as there is no way to bridge Heidegger's rejection of metaphysics and the Writings' use of them.

At this point an extremely thorny problem intrudes. Is there any correspondence between the Bahá'í concept of God and Heidegger's concept of Being? Heidegger's views varied over his career. In his first major work, *Being and Time*, we observe “little interest in the idea that being [Being] is the ground of beings.”<sup>83</sup> “Later, being [Being] is the ground of being ... ‘being offers us no ground and basis on which we build and in which we dwell - as do the beings to which we turn. Being is the nay-saying [Ab-sage] to the role of such grounding...’”<sup>84</sup> Not surprisingly, there has been considerable discussion of Heidegger's alleged atheism - but this has not hindered theistic views of his work from appearing in large numbers. We are in no position to engage in this highly complex debate here. However, we must not overlook the fact that Heidegger's lack of clarity on this issue contrasts sharply with the Writings which see the recognition of God has the first and most essential duty of humankind: “I bear witness O my God, that Thou has created me to know Thee and to worship Thee...” Any vacillation or lack of absolute clarity on this issue is in conflict with the Bahá'í Writings.

Another area of serious disagreement between Heidegger and the Writings is his unqualified rejection of the correspondence theory of truth: “truth has by no means the structure of an agreement between knowing and the object in the sense of a likening of one entity (the subject) to another (the Object).”<sup>85</sup> He also writes, “In what way is this relation [of correspondence] possible as a relation between *intellectus* [mind/intellect] and *res* [thing/object]?”<sup>86</sup> Heidegger has no

confidence in the mind's ability to form concepts that correspond to or are adequate to reality.

According to the Bahá'í Writings, the correspondence theory of truth is valid insofar as it can provide genuine and adequate knowledge in its appropriate sphere of action. It cannot, for example, apply to 'knowledge' of God Who is unknowable in his essence; not can it apply to the direct or immediate knowledge of the essence of things. The appropriate sphere of human knowledge is whatever can be known by the qualities or attributes of a thing.<sup>87</sup> Thus, the Writings disagree with Heidegger's complete rejection of the correspondence theory of truth. On this issue, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes,

Reflect that man's power of thought consists of two kinds. *One kind is true, when it agrees with a determined truth. Such conceptions find realization in the exterior world; such are accurate opinions, correct theories, scientific discoveries and inventions.*

The other kind of conceptions is made up of vain thoughts and *useless ideas which yield neither fruit nor result, and which have no reality.* No, they surge like the waves of the sea of imaginations, and they pass away like idle dreams.<sup>88</sup>

He says a thought or concept is true "when it agrees with a determined truth," and describes "conceptions [that] find their realization in the exterior world" as "*accurate opinions, correct theories, scientific discoveries and inventions.*" Clearly these are references to correspondence between our ideas and reality. On the other hand, "useless ideas" or concepts which "have no reality" and therefore produce no results obviously do not correspond to reality. Moreover, the action of overcoming and correcting mistakes and learning to which the Writings refer obviously require bringing our conceptions into correspondence with reality. Finally, the Writings clearly believe in scientific progress, and that, in turn, depends on ever-improving correspondence between our concepts and the things we study; our knowledge gains in accuracy, scope, explanatory and predictive power and opens hidden aspects of reality that allow us to make new discoveries and inventions. If our knowledge did not correspond to reality, this would not be possible. Conversely, the Writings assert the existence of error, ignorance and superstition. In other words, there are beliefs that do not correspond to reality, and these must be corrected.

Heidegger also doubts the ability of language, or

propositions to convey the whole truth about things: “the traditional assignment of truth exclusively to statements as the sole essential locus of truth falls away. Truth does not originally reside in the proposition.”<sup>89</sup> In other words, there are truths about things that cannot be adequately conveyed in language. Heidegger doubts that mere verbal propositions lacking proper grounding in a relationship to Being can ever satisfactorily correspond to real specific beings. The Bahá'í Writings agree with him on this point, albeit it with serious qualifications. We observe the boundaries of what words can say, for example when 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that the full meaning of first chapter of John in the *Bible* (“In the beginning ...”) is “beyond the power of books or words to contain and express.”<sup>90</sup> Obviously, there are limits to humankind's powers of comprehension and explanation. However, while language and propositions have their limitations, they are not as incapable of reflecting reality as Heidegger seems to think. There is no absolute disconnect between language and all aspects of reality. If there were, the Writings would not be able to endorse the concept of progress i.e. improvements in accuracy, scope, explanatory and predictive power, in scientific understanding or in many other human endeavours. For progress to occur, true propositions about reality must reflect reality with some degree of accuracy.

Nonetheless, the Writings agree with Heidegger insofar as a proper relationship to and understanding of Being is necessary to acquire a fully adequate knowledge of particular beings. Heidegger writes,

it becomes plain that to clarify the structure of a truth it is not enough simply to presuppose this relational totality [of complete correspondence between mind and object] but we must go back and *inquire into the context of Being which provides the support for this totality as such.*<sup>91</sup>

In terms of the Bahá'í Writings, this means that to have the fullest possible understanding of specific beings, we also need to take Being or God into consideration, since God provides the ground for the very possibility of specific beings even coming into existence. Being or God is the condition for the existence of all things. Without a proper relationship to Being, we might, for example, degrade things to merely material objects without seeing the “signs of God” in them and think that their existence is entirely for our use. Such understanding of things would be unsatisfactory and easily leads to error. This situation is precisely why science and its propositional knowledge and religion, and its relationship to Being, must work together to

attain appropriate knowledge of things.

For the Writings, the correspondence theory of truth is valid not just of material reality but also of spiritual realities, though to comprehend these higher realities requires assistance of the Holy Spirit to develop our “spiritual susceptibilities.”<sup>92</sup> When these are developed, we can correct our ignorance of “divine religion”<sup>93</sup> and think “beyond the range of the senses”<sup>94</sup> and attain the “conscious pathway to the Kingdom of God.”<sup>95</sup> ‘Abdu'l-Bahá tells us that a person who “possesses no spiritual susceptibilities [] is uninformed of the heavenly world”<sup>96</sup>; this is another statement which implicitly posits a correspondence between our thoughts and reality. That the correspondence theory also applies to spiritual realities is seen by the close association between wisdom and the heart:

Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of thy heart, and water them with the water of certitude, that the hyacinths of My knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green in the sacred city of thy heart.<sup>97</sup>

Not only does the heart attain knowledge of spiritual realities, but it is also capable of ‘thinking’ albeit it in its own way and attaining understanding: “Ponder this in thine heart, that thou mayest comprehend its meaning,”<sup>98</sup> Such exhortations to ponder things in our hearts are frequent throughout Bahá'u'lláh's Writings and indicate that the heart is capable of acquiring knowledge and understanding. However, this does not mean the knowledge attained by the heart is incompatible with the knowledge attained by reason and other ways:

If thou wishest the divine knowledge and recognition, purify thy heart from all beside God, be wholly attracted to the ideal, beloved One; search for and choose Him and apply thyself to rational and authoritative arguments. *For arguments are a guide to the path and by this the heart will be turned unto the Sun of Truth.* And when the heart is turned unto the Sun, then the eye will be opened and will recognize the Sun through the Sun itself. Then (man) will be in no need of arguments (or proofs), for the Sun is altogether independent, and absolute independence is in need of nothing, and proofs are one of the things (of which absolute independence has no need).<sup>99</sup>

In other words, arguments can clear the way for the heart's direct perception of the truth after which point, such arguments will no longer be needed. When the heart is turned to the sun,

we will understand, but we will understand in a way not mediated by propositions.

Heidegger agrees with the Writings on the issue of truth simply making itself known, through “disclosedness”<sup>100</sup> of Being and the Being of beings. Letting the Being of beings and Being itself or God unconceal itself is a higher, or more profound kind of knowledge than can be stated in propositions. This does not mean propositional knowledge is unimportant; as we see in ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s words above, propositional knowledge plays an essential part in the development of the heart - but it is not the ultimate knowledge we have. However, there are limits to this agreement between the Writings and Heidegger. The Writings cannot agree that the knowledge revealed by the assistance of the Holy Spirit not only reveals but also, in its inherent nature, conceals and, thereby, leads us into error. This knowledge is “infallible and indubitable ... and this is the condition in which certainty alone can be attained.”<sup>101</sup> In contrast, Heidegger says, “The disclosure of beings as such is simultaneously and intrinsically the concealing of being as a whole”<sup>102</sup> because “[i]n the simultaneity of disclosure and concealing errancy holds sway. Errancy and the concealing of what is concealed belong to the primordial essence of truth.”<sup>103</sup> The Bahá'í Writings nowhere suggest that error or “errancy” is an intrinsic part of truth itself. Our knowledge of the truth may be a mixture of truth and error but this fact does not extend to the truth in itself, i.e. “the primordial essence of truth.” Indeed, separating light “from darkness, , truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error”<sup>104</sup> is one of the reasons for the Manifestation’s appearance.

## 15. Lyotard and the Bahá'í Writings

The Bahá'í Writings and Lyotard’s postmodernism are in conflict on all fundamental points. It is impossible to embrace them both without losing logical consistency and thereby becoming hamstrung both in thought and action. One cannot both reject metanarratives and accept only small, local narratives [*petits récits*], and at the same time accept progressive revelation as the paradigm for humankind’s spiritual history and global unity as the goal of earthly evolution without completely undermining one’s own position intellectually and thereby making consistent thought and action impossible. As a metanarrative of humankind’s religious and even non-religious history, progressive revelation is integral to the identity of the Bahá'í Faith. It is the foundation on which belief in the essential

unity of all religions and of humankind is built. Any philosophy which rejects metanarratives is, for that reason alone, fundamentally at odds with the Bahá'í teachings. On the issue of metanarratives at least, the Bahá'í Writings are in the same company as Hegel, Marx, Toynbee and Sorokin to name only a few of the best-known examples of metanarratives of human history.

It is also clear that the Bahá'í Writings privilege the metanarrative revealed by the Manifestations over all other metanarratives. For our time, Bahá'u'lláh is described as the “true Physician”<sup>105</sup> Whose Book is the “infallible remedy”<sup>106</sup> that provides the vision for understanding our world as well as previous dispensations. Obviously, for the Writings, not all remedies - or metanarratives - are equally effective or true. Some are more true, or appropriate or effective than others and those presented by the Manifestations are supreme. From this it is also evident that the Bahá'í Writings reject the relativism inherent in Lyotard's thought. If all metanarratives are on par, and there is no external ‘Archimedean standpoint’ from which to judge among them, it becomes impossible to distinguish knowledge from superstition, scientific fact from fiction, divine revelation from imagination and, of course, good from evil. All differences are justified as differences of viewpoint. If no viewpoint, or, metanarrative is privileged over any other, then they are all equally valid, and this leaves us with an epistemological and moral relativism according to which we can make no objective or universal judgments about any statements.

This relativism inherent in Lyotard's philosophy is problematic for the Writings because they do not maintain that all moral positions are equal - they clearly privilege love and peace over hatred and war - nor do they assert that superstition is equal to true knowledge or that all putative physicians for mankind's ills are of equal skill. They also uphold objective and universal truths such as progressive revelation, the inability to know essences directly, the “rational soul” as humankind's distinguishing characteristic, and most importantly, the absolute existence of God. Nowhere do they suggest that contrary views on these and many other issues are equally valid as relativism is bound to maintain. The Writings are full of references to those who deny the teachings of the Manifestation as “ignorant”, in “error,” subject to “superstition,” “mistaken” and even “absurd.” By such means the Writings actively oppose the idea that all viewpoints are equally valid and that none is privileged

over any other. However, we hasten to add that the recognition that the Manifestation's teachings are privileged, does not justify a feeling or attitude of personal superiority to the other as a fellow human being. The other's view may be mistaken but s/he is still a creation of God and must be treated as such:

Necessarily there will be some who are defective amongst men, but it is our duty to enable them by kind methods of guidance and teaching to become perfected. Some will be found who are morally sick; they should be treated in order that they may be healed. Others are immature and like children; they must be trained and educated so that they may become wise and mature. Those who are asleep must be awakened; the indifferent must become mindful and attentive. But all this must be accomplished in the spirit of kindness and love and not by strife, antagonism nor in a spirit of hostility and hatred, for this is contrary to the good pleasure of God.<sup>107</sup>

Another serious conflict between Lyotard (and postmodernism in general) and the Writings is that the Writings accept various binary oppositions rejected by Lyotard as "terrorist,"<sup>108</sup> because they can be used to "eliminate[] or threaten[] to eliminate, a player [point of view, culture] from the language game [or metanarrative] one shares with them."<sup>109</sup> As we have already seen in previous sections, the Writings accept the binary opposition of 'rational' and 'irrational', and privilege the rational by stating that humankind is distinguished from animals by the "rational soul." Another such binary opposition is 'civilized' and 'uncivilized', with the former being clearly privileged as the desirable state for man. For example, in *Paris Talks*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that Mohammed raised the Arabs who were "a people as savage and uncivilized as the wild beasts"<sup>110</sup> to a higher, more civilized state. The Writings also make use of the oppositional binary 'knowledge' and 'superstition' and unhesitatingly privilege the former. 'Superstition' is always a term of opprobrium and condemnation as seen in the following statement: "It is, therefore, clear that in order to make any progress in the search after truth we must relinquish superstition."<sup>111</sup> This theme is constantly repeated in the numerous references to science and religion: "If religion does not agree with science, it is superstition and ignorance."<sup>112</sup> Quite patently, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is condemning superstition, and, in the second quote, privileging science. He wants us to overcome error, i.e. to leave behind and marginalise erroneous beliefs instead of succumbing to them.

This, of course, is not to say that the Writings accept any and all binary oppositions; oppositional binaries based on race, nationality and wealth for, example, are not acceptable and must be overcome.<sup>113</sup> We may reject and marginalise ideas but we must not marginalise individual human beings. However, the fact that the Writings accept oppositional binaries in any situation puts them in profound conflict with Lyotard's theories.

The Bahá'í Writings can only accept some aspects of Lyotard's language game theory. Language game theory, as we recall, is a development of his theory of metanarrative. Very briefly, a language game is a particular use of language, according to particular rules, and these rules vary from game to game. Science is a language game; so are religion, philosophy, literature. Every society is/has a language game. For the Writings, there is no difficulty with the idea that various cultures and subcultures have different language games and that a language game is necessary for the existence of society. However, the Writings cannot accept the claim that a universal metalanguage<sup>114</sup> cannot exist, since the revelation brought by the Manifestations may be seen as being exactly that, a universal language game or metanarrative applicable to all cultures and all human beings. The unification of humankind requires that we all agree to at least one, universal language game. This is possible because the Writings maintain that all human beings share the same human nature which is specifically characterized by the possession of a "rational soul."<sup>115</sup> The universal possession of a "rational soul" is the foundation of Bahá'í anthropology or theory of man as well as the foundation for all hopes for the unity of humankind; without a common, universal, essential human nature such unity would have nothing to build on.

According to Lyotard, language games are water-tight compartments that prohibit any critical inter-action since they use language according to different rules. There is really no possibility of sensible criticism and debate. How could the rules of tennis be used to critique the rules of soccer? Thus, unlike the Writings, Lyotard's theory, resurrected by Stephen J Gould's concept of "non-overlapping magisteria"<sup>116</sup> sees no possibility or even need for a dialogue, consensus and harmony between science and religion since they are playing different language games. From this point of view, science and religion are confined in "two solitudes"<sup>117</sup> and the goal of harmonizing them is a willow-the-wisp; they are not competitors and,

therefore, do not need harmonizing. Of course, such a view is philosophically untenable. Whether or not science and religion are two disparate language games, the fact is that at least some scientific discoveries have implications for religion and some religious teachings have implications for science. The “two solitudes” are not totally isolated and do, indeed, interact, and for that reason may be in conflict that requires harmonizing. This is further emphasised by the Bahá'í teaching that “truth is one, although its manifestations may be very different.”<sup>118</sup> Since that is the case, it follows logically that we should “earnestly endeavour to be the means of uniting religion and science.”<sup>119</sup>

‘Abdu'l-Bahá advocates more than “two solitudes” that do not conflict by virtue of not communicating with each other, rather, he wants that “Religion and science walk hand in hand.”<sup>120</sup>

Liotard rejects the possibility or need for critical interaction among language games and metanarratives because he is concerned about preserving heterogeneity or diversity. This cannot be achieved if one metanarrative or language game becomes dominant and arrogantly identifies their views with reality itself and, thereby, turns “terrorist”<sup>121</sup> by excluding or otherwise silencing conflicting views.

His ‘war on totality’ rejects totalizing theories which he describes as master narratives [metanarratives] that are somehow reductionistic, simplistic and even ‘terroristic’ by providing legitimations for totalitarian terror and suppressing differences in unifying schemes.<sup>122</sup>

Instead, Lyotard wants us to recognise “the heteromorphous nature of language games,”<sup>123</sup> in order to preserve the diversity of games and metanarratives. Even freely arrived at consensus is rejected<sup>124</sup> because that is simply another way for a majority to pressure and oppress a minority and requires the surrender of the very attributes that provide a unique identity and mode of existence. Instead Lyotard “champions dissensus over consensus, diversity and dissent over conformity and consensus and heterogeneity and the incommensurable over homogeneity and universality.”<sup>125</sup> This position, held in some form by all postmodernist philosophers, makes them suspicious of anything that seems likely to diminish heterogeneity by attempting to subsume differences – even if this is presented as a freely arrived at consensus – within a single, all-encompassing i.e. ‘totalizing’ metanarrative and language game. Because of this “irreducible pluralism”<sup>126</sup> there can be at best temporary local

arrangements (but no permanent institutions) “in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family and international domains”<sup>127</sup> that can be dissolved at any time at the behest of the ‘players.’ From this point of view, the Bahá’í teaching of “unity in diversity”<sup>128</sup> could very easily be seen as operating to suppress diversity for the sake of unity, and thereby become a recipe for “terrorism.” The concept of a ‘totalizing’ metareligion trying to unify all other religions into one by concentrating on the essential “oneness of religion”<sup>129</sup> is, from the postmodernist viewpoint, a threat to the independent existence of all other metanarratives and language games, as is the desire to establish world unity through some form of global commonwealth. Such a project inevitably requires the establishment of permanent global institutions and would thereby diminish heterogeneity in customs of governance. All would have to submit to and find their place in the metanarrative of the development of global unity. Furthermore, despite the fact that all Bahá’ís have the right and duty to investigate the truth for himself and to speak their minds freely, postmodernists like Lyotard see this principle as severely compromised and undermined by the enormous emphasis put on unity in Bahá’í community life and LSA decisions. At the personal level, the use of standardized prayer books as distinct from extemporaneous individual prayer, is a further example of control over the language game as is the existence of authorized and infallible interpreters of the Manifestation’s Word. Rather than embrace the unity provided by such limitations of the language game and metanarrative, Lyotard prefers to celebrate endless pluralities and heterogeneities for no other reason than their differences. According to him, most people have lost their interest in grand narratives.<sup>130</sup> Finally, with his emphasis on “dissensus” Lyotard is bound to be highly suspicious of the entire consultation process because it can be seen as a way to minimize diversity in the quest for consensus.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Lyotard and the Bahá’í Writings are in deep conflict. As noted at the outset of this paper, there may be some areas of minor or superficial agreement between them, but on the essential and foundational issues there is none.

## 16. The Bahá’í Writings and Derrida

As with Lyotard, the Bahá’í Writings have a considerable number of foundational differences with the philosophy of Jacques Derrida. These would preclude harmony on anything

but superficialities and incidentals. The first of these foundational differences concerns Derrida's rejection of 'privilege' in regards to knowers and knowledge.

Unlike Derrida, the Bahá'í Writings recognise the existence of privileged knowers, the Manifestations of God, Who possess "essential infallibility,"<sup>131</sup> or the "Most Great Infallibility"<sup>132</sup> which makes it impossible for them to err in Their teaching. They are "endowed with divine knowledge, not dependent upon learning acquired in schools"<sup>133</sup> and are distinguished above all others of mankind in every aspect and qualification in order that He may be able to train effectively the human body politic, eliminate the darkness enshrouding the human world, uplift humanity from a lower to a higher kingdom.<sup>134</sup>

The knowledge of these "infallible Physician[s]"<sup>135</sup> is not just another point of view or interpretation in an endless series of such, but rather, is the standard by which all other knowledge must be assessed: "Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men."<sup>136</sup> Obviously, this Book which can only be measured by its own standard<sup>137</sup> is privileged above all other human knowledge, and, in effect, is a transcendental or Archimedean standpoint from which all other viewpoints may be evaluated. Furthermore, in the Bahá'í Dispensation there are 'Abdu'l-Bahá, an infallible interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's Word, as well as the Guardian whose interpretations of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are also infallible.<sup>138</sup> In addition, the Bahá'í Faith also recognises that the Universal House of Justice is "under the unerring guidance of God"<sup>139</sup> in its appointed sphere of operations.

The existence of these privileged knowers and interpreters is fatal to the deconstructive project because they establish an outside, transcendental privileged Archimedean standpoint from which to judge human viewpoints and, thereby, impose limits on the endless "play," self-subversion and supplementation of texts that is crucial to deconstruction. They also place boundaries within which the Writings may be understood. The problem is that such parameters deprive the deconstructionist project of its very reason for being and its *modus operandi*. An instructive example of how the presence of privileged interpreters sets constraints on our understanding of the Writings is the issue of homosexuality. Bahá'u'lláh's statements about "boys"<sup>140</sup> has been interpreted by Shoghi Effendi to mean a prohibition of homosexual behavior and relationships.<sup>141</sup> For Bahá'ís, the Guardian's understanding ends

the “play” of words, of self-subversion and of complementarities and imposes a final and authoritative meaning on what Bahá'u'lláh means. To emphasise its denial of any privileged interpreters of texts, deconstructionism rejects even the notion that the author has any privileged insight into his own creation.

In regards to the rejection of privilege, it should be noted that in distinction to Derrida, the Writings privilege one member of certain oppositional binaries such as good and evil, rational and irrational, truth and untruth, God and creation and, as we shall see, signifier and signified. In ontology they also accept such binary oppositions as substance and attribute, essential and incidental (accidental), contingent and necessary all of which deconstructionism rejects. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes,

*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>142</sup>

Very obviously, substance is completely different from attribute and is superior to it insofar as the accident or attribute depends on the substance. In the case of the human soul, the substance does not need the accidental or contingent human body to exist. In this sense, the rational soul, as substance, is privileged over the accidental, or, to put it another way, the essence is privileged over the accident.

Without privileging the substance over the accident 'Abdu'l-Bahá would not be able to establish his proof of the immortality of the soul – a key Bahá'í doctrine. And what would be the point of having a Manifestation's guidance, if we were not willing to privilege good over evil, the rational over the irrational, truth over untruth? Who would we need any guidance at all? The Writings, however, clearly state that humankind needs this guidance for its material and spiritual evolution, and, therefore, privilege good over evil, love over hatred, knowledge over ignorance, truth over lies<sup>143</sup> and, as we shall see below, the rational over the irrational. There is no question for them of reversing this order by invoking Derrida's “aporias” i.e. by invoking explanations that lie outside the standard rules of reasoning and logic.<sup>144</sup> For the Writings, there is simply no need to puzzle ourselves over the superiority of truth over ignorance and superstition and the need to overcome the latter. The same

case holds for religion. If we are not willing to privilege God over creation, by recognising God's ontological independence and primacy, then there is no possibility of having religion at all since religion requires the recognition of some original or foundational Source however it be envisioned.

Although we have already done so in our discussion of the Bahá'í Writings and the Counter-enlightenment, it is necessary to draw attention again to the privileging of reason precisely because this is so contradictory to Derrida's deconstructionism, its rejection of binary oppositions and its "aporias." It may, of course, be argued that these "aporias" represent moments of higher insight beyond the merely rational and for that reason find some resonance in the Writing's concepts of trans-rational, intuitive, 'mystical' insight gained with the aid of the Holy Spirit. The Bahá'í Faith certainly recognises these, but the situation with Derrida's "aporias" is different. Derrida's "aporias" overturn various binary oppositions in order to destabilise and un-privilege them whereas the moments of inspiration and transcendental insight confirm the Manifestation's teachings and the binary oppositions He establishes, such as, for example, the precedence of knowledge over ignorance, and love over hatred and God over creation. That said, let us turn our attention to the privileging of reason by the Bahá'í Writings.

The Bahá'í Writings, of course, do not regard human reason as infallible but they clearly privilege reason and the rational even in religion. Reason is necessary for humankind's spiritual evolution but it is not, by itself, sufficient for our spiritual development. It must be guided by the Manifestations and "fortified by the Holy Spirit"<sup>145</sup> in order to become informed of the mysteries of the world of significances"<sup>146</sup> that constitute the world of creation. Reason is privileged in Bahá'í anthropology or theory of humankind. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "[t]he 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>147</sup> The fact that reason is the essential, and universal feature distinguishing man from animal is significant because this means that all human beings share this capacity and have a common, inherent nature or essence regardless of historical period, place or culture. Reason already unifies humankind in essence and can, therefore, be the foundational capacity for manifesting the unity of humankind in the phenomenal world. It can also be the basis of recognizing the essential oneness of all religions and

progressive revelation.

Reason is also necessary to faith and spiritual development, for as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation"<sup>148</sup> and "If religion is opposed to reason and science, faith is impossible; and when faith and confidence in the divine religion are not manifest in the heart, there can be no spiritual attainment."<sup>149</sup> This is an example of where the Manifestation and His appointed interpreter have dissolved a binary opposition – faith and reason – but this should not be interpreted as a blanket rejection of all such oppositions.

Privileging reason or the rational soul obviously limits our ability to fully engage in deconstructive "play" with relevant passages because we now have a privileged viewpoint or perspective from which to judge and possibly deny the validity of other ideas. We can now at least begin the process of distinguishing knowledge from superstition, rationality from irrationality, truth from error or deceptions. Once again we observe how the position adopted by the Writings undermines and effectively negates the entire deconstructive project.

The Bahá'í Writings also privilege through the agency of humankind insofar as man, whose unique identifying feature is "the rational soul" is "the highest creature of the phenomenal world."<sup>150</sup> Creation itself would have no purpose without man: "This world is also in the condition of a fruit tree, and man is like the fruit; without fruit the tree would be useless."<sup>151</sup> Thus we can see that reason is also privileged ontologically in regards to the make-up or nature of reality by characterizing it as the distinguishing feature of God's highest creation.

Deconstruction programmatically rejects all privileging because it limits the "play" of words, subversions and complementarities. We might say that deconstructionism rejects these binaries for 'political' reasons, insofar as privileging one term arbitrarily imposes it on the other, it imposes an order of value and importance, thereby marginalising one of them. To use Lyotard's term, privileging is "terroristic" since this imposed, authoritarian order, limits our freedom to follow the "play" of concepts. The rejection of privilege accords with deconstruction's refusal to subsume things under universal concepts such as 'human,' 'human nature' or 'species,' i.e. the refusal to recognise essences. Such universal concepts<sup>152</sup> are a form of violence and totalitarianism against the heterogeneity

of the individual. Deconstruction is supposed to free us from such conceptual oppression.

There are still other problems between Derrida and the Bahá'í Writings. To understand one of the most important, it is worth while recalling Jonathan Culler's remark that "[t]o deconstruct a discourse [text] is to show how it *undermines the philosophy it asserts*, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies..."<sup>153</sup> Given the infinite play of traces and infinite supplementarity, we can never know what a text of any kind really means. There can be no authoritative, final self-sufficient interpretation of a text because the concept of infinite supplementation means that "meaning is always deferred."<sup>154</sup> Meaning is something that simultaneously is and is not, something that never is and is always to be. It cannot be definitively established for two reasons. First, any interpretation of a text is itself subject to the "play" of traces, supplements and substitutions and thus at least as ambiguous as the original text itself. Second, the self-sufficient, essential and privileged meaning cannot be established by logical or rational means because reason depends on the principle of identity and non-contradiction: "A = A" and "A thing cannot be A and not-A in the same respect at the same time." The "play" of supplements prevents precisely that simple identification of "A" with itself; it is always "A and not-quite-A" because of the traces and supplements originating in links to the whole linguistic system. Christopher Norris' comment about literary critics is apropos to anyone reading a text by Derrida's deconstructionist method:

if interpretation is always caught up in a chain of proliferating sense which it can neither halt nor fully comprehend, then the critic [or any reader] is effectively absolved of all responsibility for limiting the play of his own imagination.<sup>155</sup>

Indeed, if the traces and supplements can ultimately extend through the entire linguistic system there is no reason to arbitrarily call a halt to interpretation. Derrida's position leads to the unavoidable conclusion no one can ever really know what a text is about since both the text and all its interpretations are constantly undermining themselves. In more general terms, there can be no knowledge at all because all knowledge is embodied in texts written or spoken and is, therefore, subject to the "play" of traces and supplements.

Derrida's position is extremely problematical for all religious texts. Why would any religious revelation endorse an

undertaking which is guaranteed to create additional and needless ambiguity to texts meant to provide guidance for human thought and action? Why would a Manifestation speak in such a way as to undermine or subvert His own meaning? Doing so would sow needless confusion and contention among people and thereby defeat the very purpose of religion which is “to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife.”<sup>156</sup> The prevention of such confusion and contention is the very reason for appointing ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi as infallible interpreters. Indeed, if we take the deconstructionist project to its logical conclusion, we could never know, not even in principle, what any particular text (revealed or not) actually says since an infinite number of supplementations could lead to an infinite number of interpretations at least some of which would be in direct conflict. This may sound fine in theory but in practice it is unworkable for a religion trying to unify humankind, to explicate its teachings clearly and to engage in meaningful inter-faith dialogue.

It is difficult if not impossible to avoid concluding that Derrida’s position leads to a profound and corrosive scepticism about humankind’s ability to obtain and articulate knowledge. In fact, the whole concept of knowledge distinguishable from fiction, lies, pretence, error and mythology is thrown into question. Problems begin with Derrida’s refusal to recognise the signifier/signified distinction. If at least some propositions and statements, i.e. signifiers do not refer to some entity or state of affairs external or transcendental to the signifier but only to the play of differences in a language system, then how can these propositions provide knowledge of the world? Derrida’s theory leads to a profound disconnect between human discourse and reality, a disconnect so fundamental that it effectively denies our ability to get knowledge and communicate about the world. This position is known as scepticism. All we have, in the last analysis, are different stories, interpretations, perspectives or texts, each as valid as the next in its own way (see Lyotard’s position on the validity of each language game), with none privileged over any other. Furthermore, there is no possible way to choose between accounts or texts, since there is no way for humans to attain a transcendental viewpoint, i.e. a viewpoint outside of all texts from which to make a judgment. Not only does this conflict with the Writings’ acceptance of privileged knowers, but also throws into question the whole concept of progress i.e. overcoming error in favour of more accurate views in science or any other area of study. psychology or history.

Progress in science and knowledge of reality in general is an integral part of progressive revelation. Such deep scepticism also conflicts with the Writings because it undermines the concept of reason as a means of achieving progress: reason itself becomes just another perspective or method of acquiring 'knowledge' without having any privileged status. In addition, Derrida's view undermines ethics insofar as we can no longer distinguish the liar from the truthful person: if there is no independent, i.e. transcendental truth about any situation, all we have left is confused and conflicting welter of perspectives, interpretations, claims and counter-claims all of equal validity.

The Writings do not accept Derrida's view that words do not refer to a "transcendental" of some kind, i.e. to an object, person, situation, process or phenomenon that is external to a particular language. Words, according to Derrida, refer only to other words in a language and not to something else; to put it another way, there is no external, transcendental signified beyond the signifier. In the Bahá'í view, this is untenable. What would become of the word "God"? If it did not refer to an 'other' outside of language, the whole purpose of religion would be negated, as would the concept of a Manifestation of God, not to mention God's Will, or the Names of God. Religion would literally be reduced to a 'word-game' in which each word simply refers to another in an endless web of cross-references. Prayer, especially petitionary prayer would lose their rationale and purpose, as, for example, the Noonday prayer with its daily rededication of ourselves to "know [God] and to worship [Him]."<sup>157</sup> What be the point of testifying to "[our] powerless and Thy might"<sup>158</sup> if there was nothing external and transcendental to us Whose power we are recognising? The same would be true of the Writings' ontological statements such as the following: "The essence of a thing is known through its qualities; otherwise, it is unknown and hidden."<sup>159</sup> What could this mean if the word 'essence' were not a reference to something outside of language and did not direct us to something in the object we are studying?

Derrida's belief that the signifiers do not refer to an external, transcendental signified undermines all concepts of knowledge since our statements do not ultimately refer to the world (of "transcendental" others) but to the linguistic system we inhabit. Inevitably, this concept undermines the concept of progress in scientific knowledge.<sup>160</sup> How could we measure progress if all propositions are only about the language system? How could we know what is or is not true if there is a fundamental disconnect

between our statements and reality? The Bahá'í Writings, of course cannot accept the existence of such a disconnect, as made clear by the transcendental references in the frequent allusions to the discovery of truths or realities in the world around us. If language cannot tell us anything about reality, i.e. reflect reality with some degree of accuracy, why would we bother with Bahá'u'lláh's and `Abdu'l-Bahá 's statements about the current condition of the world, about the necessary remedies, about the nature of the soul, the structure of creation and so on? If these statements do not refer to reality but only to other words, they are pointless.

Because Derrida posits a disconnect between the signifier and the signified, between words and what they refer to, i.e. he rejects the belief that "properties, kinds, relations, propositions, sets and states of affairs are taken to be primitive [fundamental and real] and irreducible."<sup>161</sup> In other words, Derrida is a nominalist, holding that humans construct the concepts referring to "properties, kinds, relations, propositions, sets and states of affairs" and that these constructions do not necessarily reflect reality. Our ideas represented by words do not exist outside our minds. General terms, or universals, such as 'chair' or 'red' refer to nothing that the objects of reference actually possess in common but are, rather, an arbitrary selection that ignores or marginalises some attributes by privileging others. Only individuals in their full heterogeneity are real. Hence, "[d]econstruction is opposed to anything that claims to gather up, to unite, to bring together as one,"<sup>162</sup> i.e. any concept that 'violates' individuality by lumping many individuals under a single category or thought - or organization. There is, for example, no human nature or essence - something which, as we have seen, the Bahá'í Writings flatly assert just as they assert the existence of a plant and animal nature or essence.<sup>163</sup> It is precisely because essences are real that `Abdu'l-Bahá can tell us that we cannot know them directly but only by means of their qualities. In other words, the Writings do not think there is necessarily a disconnect between our statements and reality, though, of course, there might be in some specific instances of error.

Accepting that the signifier refers to an exterior, transcendental signified, means that in Derrida's view, the Bahá'í Writings exemplify a metaphysics of presence. Such a metaphysics holds not only that our truth-claims are supported and guaranteed by an external, transcendental (or in Kantian terms, noumenal) object, situation, relationship or process but

also that language can make such truth present to us. The desire to have language make the truth present to us he calls “logocentrism” which requires that language be an unsullied or neutral way of reflecting reality and truth. In Derrida’s view, no such language exists or can exist. On the basis of various discussions in different sections of the second part of this paper, it is virtually self-evident that the Bahá’í Writings exemplify a metaphysics of presence and logocentrism. Here is an example of the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism at work:

Above all, we expressed our conviction that the time has come when religious leadership must face honestly and without further evasion the implications of the truth that God is one and that, beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one.<sup>164</sup>

Implicit in this statement is the idea that there is one external transcendental religion – which we can know through the words of Bahá’u’lláh – ‘behind’ the enormous “diversity of cultural expressions” that characterise world religion. To know more about this one religion, we must rely on words, the Writings’ to report accurately about this aspect of human affairs.

As shown above, there is no indication that the Bahá’í Writings accept Derrida’s arguments that metaphysics of any kind and logocentrism are forms of violence because they recognise that human beings, in addition to being unique individuals, also share a common essence, i.e. a “rational soul.” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá recognises that we are all members of a species,<sup>165</sup> i.e. share certain heritable characteristics that distinguish us from other kinds of beings, i.e. an essence. The concept of an ‘species,’ ‘kind’ or “degree of existence” is also at work in the following statement by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá:

As the degrees of existence are different and various, some beings are higher in the scale than others ... some creatures are chosen for the highest degree, as man, and some others are placed in the middle degree, as the vegetable, and some are left in the lowest degree, like the mineral.”<sup>166</sup>

No doubt, deconstructionists would see such a hierarchy as an example of privileging and seek to apply their methods to destabilize and subvert an allegedly oppressive ontology. From a Bahá’í perspective, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s statement simply recognises the way God has created the phenomenal world which has been

given to us and must be accepted as such. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of the Writings, Derrida's doctrine about the supposedly oppressive nature of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence goes too far in privileging difference, heterogeneity and the individual i.e. is excessively 'antinomian', i.e. too willing to allow each thing to be *sui generis*, a kind and law unto itself. This is not to say that the Writings downplay heterogeneity and difference:

As the proof of uniqueness exists in all things, and the Oneness and Unity of God is apparent in the reality of all things, the repetition of the same appearance is absolutely impossible.<sup>167</sup>

Differences are real, but so are commonalities or essences: our goal is not to privilege one or the other but to apply them appropriately and in a balanced manner. In social/political terms we must maintain a middle course between a potentially anarchic antinomianism and an oppressive totalitarianism that fails to recognise individual difference.

## 17. Foucault and the Bahá'í Writings

Foucault's rejection of "grand narratives" i.e. "the theme and possibility of a total history"<sup>168</sup> puts him seriously at odds with the Bahá'í Writings in which the concept of progressive revelation is foundational. We have dealt with this before and need not discuss it again in detail. Let it suffice to point out that because revelation is progressive from one dispensation to the next, there is also some continuity between dispensations, or, to use Foucault's term, between 'epistemes.' This is clear in Shoghi Effendi's statement that in each new dispensation, the Manifestation "restates the eternal verities they [the preceding dispensations] enshrine,"<sup>169</sup> i.e. "restates their fundamentals"<sup>170</sup> in order to ensure continuity of between different dispensations. Elsewhere he says, the different dispensations are "identical in their aims ...[and] continuous in their purpose,"<sup>171</sup> thereby re-emphasising the theme of continuity between dispensations of epistemes. Such emphasis is wholly in conflict with Foucault's "caesuralism," his focus on "discontinuity,"<sup>172</sup> between historical epistemes, on the "divisions, limits, differences of level, shifts"<sup>173</sup> from one to the other. In Foucault's view, we must "renounce all those themes whose function is to ensure infinite continuity of discourse."<sup>174</sup>

The Bahá'í Writings recognition of historical continuities between dispensations of epistemes undermines Foucault's

project of emphasising the 'caesuras' or breaks in order to ensure that each is treated as a completely unique and heterogeneous. Like Lyotard and Derrida, he sees grand universal themes and continuities (or grand all encompassing universal concepts) as threats to individuality and diversity.

The Bahá'í Writings reject this unbalanced, one-sided view of history and accept the presence of both continuities and discontinuities as humankind evolves. Re-iterating the fundamentals ensures continuity and the emphasis on progress ensures change, discontinuity and new developments. As Shoghi Effendi says,

in accordance with the principle of progressive revelation every Manifestation of God must needs vouchsafe to the peoples of His day *a measure of divine guidance ampler than any which a preceding and less receptive age could have received or appreciated.*<sup>175</sup>

Thus, we have a gradual building process or progress as we evolve through various conditions and various dispensations or epistemes. Our progress and knowledge is accumulative across differing epistemes thereby improving our understanding of ourselves and the world. Foucault, of course, sees no progress from one episteme to another, but only succession. His one-sided view of history, his rejection of continuity and progress brings him into conflict with the Bahá'í belief that human history shows and erratic but persistent evolution towards the unification of humankind into a global commonwealth as seen in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk about unity in the "political realm ... unity of thought in world undertakings ... unity in freedom ...unity in religion ... unity of nations ...unity of races ...[and] unity of language."<sup>176</sup> This means that the Bahá'í Writings see history as teleological or goal-oriented, shaped by a final cause, whereas Foucault, by virtue of his emphasis on discontinuity and his denial of progress does not.

The Bahá'í Writings have other difficulties with Foucault's views on history. First, it bears pointing out specifically that the progressive nature of science through various epistemes is regarded as highly problematical for Foucault's theory.<sup>177</sup> Second, while the Writings do not deny that chance and human failings play a role in history - which is what Foucault wants to stress - these factors are not able to derail material and spiritual progress that marks human evolution. Third, the Bahá'í Writings can agree that historical knowledge is perspectival, but must do so with serious qualifications. Most obvious is the fact

that the perspective of the Manifestation, His appointed successors and interpreters and the Universal House of Justice have a privileged perspective on history and this provides us with an Archimedean point from which to evaluate and judge other perspectives by their degree of harmony with Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Thus, many viewpoints are possible but whatever one we choose, must harmonize with or at least not conflict with what the Writings state. Finally, the Writings disagree with Foucault's tendency to explain cultural and historical events exclusively in terms of the lowest common denominator, i.e. in terms of what the Writings call man's "animal nature."<sup>178</sup> Recognising the importance of our animal propensities, as well as the importance of seemingly insignificant events is not, in itself at odds with the Bahá'í Writings. Indeed, the Báb's prayer that "All are His servants and all abide by His Bidding"<sup>179</sup> can be understood in this context to mean that insignificant, shameful or even hostile acts will ultimately work for the goal of history, the eventual unification of humankind. However, such explanations too easily become reductionistic insofar as they ignore or denigrate humankind's higher motives and "spiritual susceptibilities"<sup>180</sup> which also have their role in the unfolding of history. In other words, whereas the Writings do not deny that people sometimes act on the basis of their "animal nature," they disagree that human beings can be accurately presented solely in that light.

This last issue is important because it sheds light on a significant difference between the philosophical anthropology or theory of man found in the Bahá'í Writings and in Foucault. In the Bahá'í view, humankind has a dual nature, being both animal and spiritual: "man is dual in aspect: as an animal he is subject to nature, but in his spiritual or conscious being he transcends the world of material existence."<sup>181</sup> Through this spiritual nature we are able to recognise the existence of transcendental realities like God and the soul and orient our lives towards them while our animal nature remains imprisoned in the material world. Furthermore, man's true vocation, his destiny is to transcend the physical world, to seek more than material knowledge<sup>182</sup> and pursue his evolution in the spiritual plane after his material demise. However, Foucault shows no awareness of man's spiritual aspect; it plays no role in his archaeological and genealogical analyses and explanations of history or human nature other than as a man-made construct in a particular episteme. The reason for this is programmatic unwillingness to probe 'beneath' the images generated by our epistemes in order to identify their transcendental objects.

He writes, "We shall not return to the state anterior to discourse,"<sup>183</sup> meaning that he will not look beyond the discourse of signifiers generated by an episteme to some external or transcendental signified.

By refusing to return to "state anterior to discourse," i.e. to an external, transcendental object, Foucault, like Derrida, conflates epistemology and ontology; he refuses to recognize a transcendental signifier beyond the signifier. Things ontologically are as we know them, no more and no less; what we 'see' is what there is, and nothing more. The Writings, of course, disagree:

There was a time when they [the realities of things] 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.<sup>184</sup>

Admitting that things have "hidden secrets" and unknown natures means that the signified is not identical to the signifier, that what a thing is - its ontology - is not limited to what we know about it - our epistemology. In other words, there is an external, transcendental signified separate from the discourse we use about things. This also implies that the subjective knower is distinct from what is known, i.e. the object of knowledge and, thereby, reinforces the subject-object distinction. In addition, the object is not dependent on the subjective knower. For Foucault this is problematic. As James Williams says, "Foucault is critical of this ambiguous transcendence of subject and the system, where the subject is both outside the causality and totality of the system, yet capable of acting within it."<sup>185</sup> Given this transcendence, the knower is able to evaluate his or her own knowledge in regards to accuracy and adequacy to the object and refine and modify her ideas or even overthrow them completely. That is how progress occurs. For Foucault, however, this is not possible since the knower constitutes the object and, therefore, has nothing - no anterior nature or essence - to compare it against.

For the Bahá'í Writings, Foucault's position is especially unacceptable that God, the "Self-Subsistent" is in any whatsoever dependent on human perception and construction. Certainly, people and societies form images of God in their own minds, but these do not constitute God Himself or God's Essence in any way. These images or idols have absolutely no affect on God's ontological nature. In contrast, Foucault's

position involves a strange reversal: if God's nature is constituted by man, then, because of the conflation between epistemology and ontology, we could say that, in effect, man is the creator of God. This, of course, would reverse the relationship between the dependent and the independent, between the contingent and the necessary, between the immanent (us) and the transcendent (God) and the time-bound and the timeless. Finally, we note that the rejection of transcendence in all its forms, leads to a 'one-dimensional' world picture, a 'flatland' in which only the immanent is real. This is unacceptable to the Writings because man's essence is his spiritual not his immanent material nature.

It is self-evident that Foucault's position on epistemes leads to relativism. Each episteme is completely independent of all others, and, whatever beliefs and values it has, cannot be judged by others. However, as we have already seen in previous discussions, the belief in the discovery of truth, in progressive accumulation and improvement of knowledge as well as belief in a universal human nature make such relativism unacceptable to the Writings. It might, of course, be argued that the Bahá'í Writings themselves adopt an epistemological relativism, as Shoghi Effendi seems to do when he says that "religious truth is not absolute but relative."<sup>186</sup> However, to understand what Shoghi Effendi means we must look at the entire context of this quote, namely the subject of progressive revelation in which the essential "eternal verities"<sup>187</sup> remain while the man-made doctrines and errors are removed and/or changed.

He [Bahá'u'lláh] insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, restates the *eternal verities* they enshrine, coordinates their functions, distinguishes the *essential and the authentic from the nonessential and spurious* in their teachings, separates the God-given *truths from the priest-prompted superstitions*.<sup>188</sup>

It is the man-made additions and doctrines that are relative and change not the "eternal verities" which are continuous through successive dispensations and universally valid for all human beings. Moreover, we must not forget that according to the Writings, the Manifestation and His authorized interpreters provide the absolute standard, the Archimedeian standpoint from which all other views may be evaluated and judged. Perspectives are to be judged by their degree of harmonization with what the Manifestation reveals. As we have seen before, the Manifestation provides us with the means to distinguish truth from error, science from superstition, moral from

immoral and fact from fiction. From this it becomes clear that Foucault's relativism is incompatible with the Bahá'í Writings on the issue of relativism.

The Bahá'í Writings contradict Foucault's view of reason insofar as they believe that reason can actually provide objectively and universally true knowledge. Foucault, of course, does not trust reason to deliver true knowledge. According to Best and Kellner, "His concept of 'power/knowledge' is symptomatic of the postmodern suspicion of reason and the emancipatory schemes advanced in its name."<sup>189</sup> The following quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear the great difference between Foucault's views and the Writings': "God has created man in order that he may perceive the verity of existence and endowed him with mind or reason to discover truth."<sup>190</sup> This does, not, of course, mean that in the Bahá'í view reason as a perfect and flawless instrument for, as we have seen, it is not; however, it is good enough to be made a criterion for evaluating both religion and science as evident in the following quotation:

true science is reason and reality, and religion is essentially reality and pure reason; therefore, the two must correspond. Religious teaching which is at variance with science and reason is human invention and imagination unworthy of acceptance.<sup>191</sup>

At the very least, reason can bring us closer to the truth of things and, since truth is one,<sup>192</sup> this truth is, at least potentially, universal, i.e. valid across all epistemes. For Foucault the idea of universal truths is untenable because each episteme has its own rules about reason and truth and, therefore, judgments across differing epistemes are not allowable.

In regards to the subject of truth and power, the difference between Foucault and the Writings is that Writings do not agree that any and all truth claims are necessarily expressions of the will-to-power and part of a "regime[] of power"<sup>193</sup> seeking to dominate its rivals merely for the sake of power. As Foucault says, knowledge "creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence."<sup>194</sup> Like Derrida, Foucault thinks that knowledge is innately violent because it subordinates individual heterogeneity to generalizations and universal concepts, and because each truth-claim is actually a power-claim advanced against all other truth/power claims. This free-for-all struggle for domination among truth-claims is inevitable because there is no standard by which to evaluate and judge them. This inability

to distinguish true from false or partially true is, of course, an unavoidable consequence of relativism which lacks a transcendental Archimedean standpoint from which to judge competing truth-claims. Truth-claims thus become mere assertions of preference and/or will. In short, epistemology is reduced to power-politics. However, the Bahá'í Writings do not envisage such a reduction because the quest for truth and knowledge is not seen as being inherently political in nature but rather as quest to know and to understand God's creation. This attitude is made clear by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight ... In fact, science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development ... Therefore, seek with diligent endeavor the knowledge and attainment of all that lies within the power of this wonderful bestowal.<sup>195</sup>

It bears a passing note that this passage contains 'Abdu'l-Bahá's picture of science as a mirror, reflecting the world, which is to say, that knowledge is not or at least not entirely a man-made construction with no reference to anything beyond the language system. Knowledge, in the Bahá'í view is not simply immanent to the episteme; it has transcendental references, just as a mirror refers beyond itself. More immediate to our purpose is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's portrayal of knowledge as fulfilling humankind's "divine purpose" in our "individual and national development." In other words, knowledge and truth are not centered on the acquisition and/or maintenance of power but instead are centered on fulfilling our divinely mandated destiny, on personal and/or collective self-actualization. The Writings do not deny that knowledge is very useful, or that it can be mis-used for political/power purposes; however, they do not accept Foucault's contention that the quest for power is an inevitable and inherent part of seeking and conveying knowledge.

Another obvious difficulty with Foucault's philosophy is that it leaves the self, the human subject, more or less passive, a helpless object of action the various "truth games" and discourses that constitute any given episteme. What room can there be for free action or ethical behavior under such circumstances? As Danaher, Schirato and Webb point out, Foucault himself became more sensitive to this problem towards

the end of his career and tried to argue that the subject can, in fact, shape itself like a work of art or a novel.<sup>196</sup> However, this change does not seem to be consistent with the philosophy he outlined in the majority of his important works in which he successfully undercut the whole notion of the self or subject as an agent in its own life.

The Bahá'í Writings, of course, do not agree that the self, or subject, or soul is not a substance as Foucault claims. 'Abdu'l-Bahá' says quite pointedly on this issue,

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>197</sup>

Here we have the clearest possible indication that according to the Writings, the self or subject or soul is a substance that persists through its accidental changes and is precisely the kind of single, unitary, independent and consistent entity posited by Descartes and Kant. Indeed, the soul is not only a substance, but it also possesses inherent personality from the outset, and, therefore is not simply a construction based on an episteme.

The personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body, but the state and the personality of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world; it will make progress and will attain to the degrees of perfection, or it will remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance, veiled and deprived from beholding the signs of God.<sup>198</sup>

The personality is essentially transcendent to the episteme, although the episteme can influence its future development, strengthening some features, weakening others. Nevertheless, we must always bear in mind that despite these changes, the soul's essential, universal attributes remain the same: it is, as we have already seen, rational, it has "spiritual susceptibilities," it is immortal, it has free will in matters of morality, it is not bound by time and space, it has powers of infinite growth, it can discover the 'realities' of things, and it has powers that make it superior to phenomenal nature. Thus, the Bahá'í Writings do not deny that the self is influenced by its socio-historical surroundings, but they preserve the free agency of the self by drawing attention to its power to choose the better way.

Nor do they deny that the self can relate to itself in different ways while performing different actions, but the essential nature of the self underneath these changes remains constant. Such constancy is incompatible with Foucault's concept of the self.

## 18. Richard Rorty and the Bahá'í Writings

When we examine Rorty's postmodernism, we find that it has virtually nothing in common with the Bahá'í Writings on any major issues. In the first place, the Writings clearly accept representationalism whereas Rorty rejects it.<sup>199</sup> Representationalism, as we recall, is the belief that language does not just refer to itself but also makes verifiable statements about an external reality. In other words, language involves a signifier referring to an external signified, or, is like a mirror reflecting a transcendental signified beyond itself. Adherence to representationalism is clearly evident in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements that "Science may be likened to a mirror wherein the images of the mysteries of outer phenomena are reflected,"<sup>200</sup> and that "science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected."<sup>201</sup>

If language did not allow us to reflect reality adequately, we could not form theories or scientific propositions that inform us about reality with some degree of accuracy and, therefore, could not speak of the "progress science and knowledge have made."<sup>202</sup> We could not speak of such "progress" because our theories and/or propositions would not tell us anything about reality, and therefore, we could not know if we had made any progress by improving theories, i.e. making theories more accurate reflections of reality. We could not even discard false theories, because knowing that a theory is false implies that we already have a better way of understanding reality. In addition, if we reject representationalism we also find ourselves perpetually trapped in a prison of language and linguistic constructs that makes reality - if it even exists - inaccessible. Just as in Kant's philosophy, we are permanently enclosed in the phenomenal realm, so in Rorty's rejection of representationalism, we are perpetually confined within conversations that refer to nothing other than themselves: sentences, he says, are only "connected with other sentences rather than with the world."<sup>203</sup> He is satisfied with this situation.

An idea closely associated with representationalism is that, that reason can provide us genuine knowledge about reality. By means of reason we can develop theories and propositions that are capable of discovering truths, i.e. reflecting reality: "He [God] has endowed him [man] 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>204</sup> The very purpose of reason is the discovery of truth: "God has created man in order that he may *perceive the verity of existence* and endowed him with *mind or reason to discover truth*."<sup>205</sup> Reason, if properly applied, can reflect the truth about reality, or put otherwise, can correspond to reality. For his part, Rorty thinks that reason is a faculty that "can now be dispensed with - and should be dispensed with"<sup>206</sup> because it cannot tell us anything about the real world since sentences are only connected to other sentences. This is not something to which the Writings can agree. Nor can they agree to Rorty's proposal that instead of pursuing knowledge, "we just might be *saying something*"<sup>207</sup> simply in order to "keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth."<sup>208</sup> This, for Rorty is "a sufficient aim of philosophy."<sup>209</sup> In effect, for Rorty, philosophy and science are no longer interested in attaining truth.<sup>210</sup> This is completely incompatible with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "It is, therefore, clear that in order to make any progress in the search after truth we must relinquish superstition."<sup>211</sup> From Rorty's viewpoint, we might want to cling to the superstition simply because it keeps the conversation alive.

One additional consequence of representationalism is that the Writings, unlike Rorty, accept realism, the belief that reality is what it is independent of human observation. At this point a clarification is in order: the Writings espouse realism in regards to original or 'first nature', the universe as created by God, the universe which depends for its inherent essence and attributes on God, not humankind. Of course, the Writings recognise that human creations like societies, laws and customs traditionally known as 'second nature,' depend on us, at least to a certain extent. However, the arguments surrounding philosophical 'realism' are focussed on the issue of whether or not original nature depends on us in any way, as for example Kant says it does. The Bahá'í Writings clearly do not accept the Kantian notion - or postmodern variations of it - that humankind constitutes original nature and its laws. These natural laws are discovered and not constituted by us.<sup>212</sup>

Since, for Rorty, sentences can only refer to other sentences and not to reality, it follows that he is incapable of recognising the existence of essences. On his premises, how could we possibly know about them since our sentences or propositions cannot mirror reality? Therefore, they must be linguistic constructs of some kind, products of conversation. The Writings, of course, assert the reality of essences of things, and even of God<sup>213</sup> and even provide guidance in we can and cannot come to know essences:

*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>214</sup>

Just as Rorty denies the existence of essences, Rorty emphatically rejects the notion of a “core self,”<sup>215</sup> an essential self, a ‘true’ self that somehow endures which remains what it is independent of changes in one’s beliefs and desires.<sup>216</sup> This so-called ‘self’ is a fiction created by language.<sup>217</sup> He tells us that ““there is no self distinct from this self-reweaving web”<sup>218</sup> of muscles, movements, beliefs and states of mind, i.e. no core substantial independently existing entity. Rorty adds that we should “avoid the self-deception of thinking that we possess a deep, hidden, metaphysically significant nature which makes us ‘irreducibly’ different from inkwells or atoms,”<sup>219</sup> meaning that the self is a natural product like anything else. The Writings, of course reject this view and assert that the “rational soul is the substance and the body depends on it”<sup>220</sup> and, unlike all other things, can exist independently of the body after death. This idea of the soul’s existence as an independently existing substance is re-enforced when ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says that “the personality of the rational soul is from its beginning; it is not due to the instrumentality of the body.”<sup>221</sup> If the personality is “from its beginning”, it is obviously not dependent on our physical self-construction or ‘reweaving’ to use Rorty’s term, and, therefore, exists as a real entity.

In contradiction to Rorty and the postmodernists, the Bahá’í Writings advocate foundationalism, i.e. the belief that there are certain propositions, principles and/or knowledge and truths which are non-inferential i.e. not dependent on other justifications and are self-evident, i.e. cannot be denied without falling into self-contradiction or into denying self-evident empirical experience. For example, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá recognises that God is “the self-evident Reality”<sup>222</sup> and expresses shock that educated academics cannot see this. Moreover, “[i]t is a self-

evident truth that all humanity is the creation of God. All are His servants and under His protection. All are recipients of His bestowals,<sup>223</sup> and “[I]t is a self-evident fact that phenomenal existence can never grasp nor comprehend the ancient and essential Reality.”<sup>224</sup> A final example of truths that are foundational in the Writings:

*It is self-evident that the human spirit is simple, single and not composed in order that it may come to immortality, and it is a philosophical axiom that the individual or indivisible atom is indestructible.*<sup>225</sup>

The Writings probably accept foundationalism because all thinking – including anti-foundationalism – requires certain premises, assumptions and axioms to work. The notion that anyone’s thinking let alone a philosophical position can be genuinely anti-foundational is a self-contradictory willow-the-wisp. At the very least it would require the assumption that there exist foundational arguments since if no such arguments existed, anti-foundationalism would lose its reason for being. In addition to being foundational, the Writings also endorse metaphysics, i.e. “the investigation of the nature, constitution, and structure of reality”<sup>226</sup> and are replete with examples of metaphysical analysis:

Nature is that condition, that reality, which in appearance consists in life and death, or, in other words, in the composition and decomposition of all things.

This Nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design from which it will never depart ... But when you look at Nature itself, you see that it has no intelligence, no will.<sup>227</sup>

These are patently assertions about how nature actually is, its mode of existing and its limitations i.e. they deal with the nature and structure of reality. In Rorty’s view, such statements are impossible and, therefore, patent nonsense.

Another significant difference between Rorty and the Bahá'í Writings is Rorty’s adherence to relativism, as illustrated by his remark that ironists like himself “do not hope to have their doubts about their final vocabularies settled by something larger than themselves.”<sup>228</sup> In other words, he does not look to a God – or a transcendental, Archimedean standpoint to resolve his philosophical issues and conflicts. Rejecting one or both of these makes Rorty – his strenuous denials notwithstanding – a relativist since that leaves no way of adjudicating among

conflicting viewpoints. To prove that he does not think all views are equally good, he asserts that a pragmatist like himself “thinks his views are better than the ‘realists,’ but he does not think his views correspond to the nature of things.”<sup>229</sup> Basically, he thinks his views are better because he is a “liberal” and, therefore, “more afraid of being cruel than anything else.”<sup>230</sup> It is difficult to take his claim that he is not a relativist at face value. Given his belief that statements cannot correspond to reality (and, therefore cannot be tested by reality), that rationality is simply a local cultural bias without general validity and that truth itself is a chimera, on what ground other than sheer dogmatic assertion can he claim that his philosophy is better? (Unless of course he relies on revelation which he does not.) If language games are incommensurable, if there is no rational or empirical way of ‘proving’ one view or another, then the alleged superiority of one view comes down to a dogmatic assertion of preference, i.e. of Nietzsche’s will-to-power. In the last analysis Rorty’s liberalism has nothing more than his preference to recommend it. Ironically, it is precisely such dogmatic assertion that his much recommended edifying conversation is supposed to replace. Judged by his own standards, Rorty’s views exemplify a thorough-going, i.e. radical relativism both in epistemology and ethics. The Bahá’í Writings, will certainly agree about the value of avoiding cruelty, but they cannot agree that the desire to avoid cruelty is based on nothing more than personal whim and preference; instead, they see such a desire grounded in our common human nature and the essential one-ness of humankind and the commandments of God.

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that on virtually all substantive and fundamental issues, the Bahá’í Writings and Rorty’s philosophy differ. Even Rorty’s advocacy of “solidarity” and “edifying conversation” do not really bridge the gap between the two because the Bahá’í Dispensation wants to achieve solidarity through the recognition of certain foundational truths such as the existence of God or the essential one-ness of humankind. It does not think solidarity can be built on mere ‘political considerations’ in the politics of knowledge or by temporarily edifying conversations. Rorty’s goals cannot be relied upon to be the foundation for a social order because they are merely ‘political’ and not spiritual in nature and according to the Writings such unity does not last.<sup>231</sup> Thus, here too, as with other postmodern philosophers, we are forced to conclude that despite superficial or accidental similarities, the differences between Rorty and the Bahá’í Writings are essential

and substantial.

## 19. Baudrillard and the Bahá'í Writings

For the most part, the Bahá'í Writings have the same kind of difficulties with Baudrillard as they have with the other postmodernists. There may well be agreement on individual points, but the Writings cannot accept the fundamental ontological and epistemological premises of Baudrillard's work. Given such foundational disagreement, we can only conclude that whatever specific concurrences we may discover are accidental and, therefore, superficial, and not essential.

Even if we choose to read Baudrillard as a sociologist describing postmodern social phenomena and not, like the other postmodernists we have examined, as a philosopher promoting a certain philosophic programme we shall still have difficulty with his analysis from a Bahá'í perspective.

The difficulties between Baudrillard and the Bahá'í Writings begin with the conclusions he draws from the Borges short-story, "On Exactitude in Science." According to Baudrillard, this story shows the implosion of intellectual categories so that the usually accepted and clearly defined terms of our thought cease to be distinct and meld into one another. (This is not unlike Derrida's subversion in which a term - such as *pharmakon* or medicine - may turn into its opposite, poison.) If the map in the story is really as large as the territory, what does the map represent? The represented and that which represents have become one. What is the distinction between the signified and the signifier, between "a referential being or a substance"?<sup>232</sup> Other threatened binaries are cause and effect, active and passive, subject and object and ends and means,<sup>233</sup> as well as true and false, real and imaginary.<sup>234</sup> Other untenable distinctions include real and ideal, original and copy, appearance and reality, and essential and nonessential.

The Bahá'í Writings do not agree that these terms are meaningless and/or outmoded in our analysis of reality and the human situation. Because we have touched on this subject before, only a brief review of some of the evidence will be necessary. They clearly distinguish between true and false as when Bahá'u'lláh says that "the divine Purpose hath decreed that the true should be known from the false, and the sun from the shadow."<sup>235</sup> Indeed, without these distinctions, there would no basis for an ethical teachings. As we have seen previously, the Writings clearly accept the distinction between cause and

effect,<sup>236</sup> real and imaginary,<sup>237</sup> essential and accidental (nonessential),<sup>238</sup> signified and signifier as in the word 'God' and the actual God, substance and accident,<sup>239</sup> and subject and object as in the perceiver and what is perceived.<sup>240</sup> In other words, the Writings accept as useful analytical tools precisely those binary concepts that Baudrillard no longer finds serviceable in his analysis of reality and postmodern society. Quite obviously, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá find these concepts applicable and build on them a significant portions of their analysis of reality, the general condition of humankind and the condition of the contemporary world.

Furthermore, if all these essential differences simply meld, it is impossible to be rational since rationality depends on clear and distinct categories of thought that allow us to attain clear and decisive answers. According to Baudrillard, "All the referentials intermingle their discourses in a circular Moebian compulsion,<sup>241</sup> i.e. go around endlessly from one opposite to another, and, thereby prevent reason from functioning. In other words, the efficacy of reason as a way of understanding reality is short-circuited, leaving us no further ahead than we were without it. The Bahá'í Writings, as we have seen, do not share this pessimistic view of the ability of reason to discover truth about reality. According to Baudrillard, however, "truth, reference and objective causes have ceased to exist."<sup>242</sup>

Since "truth, reference and objective causes have ceased to exist," it is clear that metaphysics (which he satirizes as "pataphysics"<sup>243</sup>) is impossible. After all, metaphysics untenable since metaphysics requires clearly identified causal relationships in its study of the structure and nature of reality. Furthermore, if our propositions are no longer referential and do not refer to reality, we cannot discuss reality at all let alone decide which propositions are true. This, too, makes metaphysics impossible as does the view that we can no longer distinguish real from unreal, or appearance from reality; with this situation "goes all of metaphysics. No more mirror of being and appearance, of the real and its concept ..." <sup>244</sup> However, the Writings do not accept this view, as is quite evident from the numerous passages of metaphysics in the Bahá'í Writings. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá obviously think that metaphysics is not only possible but also, that some metaphysical understanding is necessary for our well-being and spiritual evolution. Without some understanding of metaphysics, how can we understand and appreciate our spiritual nature in this world and our super-natural destiny in the next?

Let us examine another example. The Writings do not agree with Baudrillard's claim that in the postmodern world "there is no real,"<sup>245</sup> that we live in a hyperreal world in which the simulation constitutes reality. This is why, in his view, *Disneyland is America*. While the Bahá'í Writings may accept that for some this might be true insofar as it describes a rather unfortunate state of mind, it is certainly not an accurate description of how things actually are. In other words, they question the melding of reality and simulation into a hyperreality, and the denial of any difference between them is simply inadequate metaphysical analysis of reality. The materially and spiritually poor are not simulations experiencing simulated poverty and hunger, for example, their deprivations are very real and cannot be cured with a simulated sandwich. The distinction between reality and the difference between it and "vain imaginings"<sup>246</sup> is as operative in the postmodern world as much as it is at any other time in human history.

## 20. Conclusion

As we have already noted, it is difficult to escape the general conclusion that as far as the major exponents of post modernism are concerned, i.e. Nietzsche, Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Rorty and Baudrillard, the disagreements with the Bahá'í Writings are foundational. There are, of course, individual similarities and agreements, but in light of the foundational differences we have observed in epistemology, ontology, ethics, philosophical anthropology (theory of man) and cultural studies, such concurrences cannot reasonably be regarded as more than accidental and fortuitous. In our view, this means that we cannot adhere to both the postmodern philosophy articulated by these thinkers and to the philosophical positions explicitly and implicitly held by the Bahá'í Writings without losing consistency and coherence of view-point, and without falling into difficult logical contradictions.

Given this situation, can Bahá'í scholars make use of postmodern techniques and views in studying or creatively interpreting the Writings? In our view, the answer is generally negative because the foundational differences are too great to be bridged. How, for example, can we overcome the diametrically opposed positions on grand narratives, privileged authors, interpreters and viewpoints, or external, transcendental objects of signification and knowledge? The postmodern insistence on immanence, its 'immanentism' (inherited from Nietzsche) is also at odds with the Bahá'í insistence on

transcendentalism, on the reality of God, the soul and the supernatural.<sup>247</sup> These positions are logically reconcilable. How could a Bahá'í scholar use Derrida in a study of the Writings when, according to Derrida, any reading of any text can be endlessly shown to subvert its own meaning and thereby forestall any final reading or interpretation. Insofar as there is no authoritative or final reading, all readings become equal. How far can deconstruction, subversion and destabilizing texts go? Can it go so far as to show that, Bahá'u'lláh's statement, "Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self"<sup>248</sup> also means its opposite, 'Let your vision become narrow and focussed on your own country and your own self'? Can we apply such endless subversion to the messages from the Universal House of Justice? Little reflection is required to see what insurmountable difficulties this would raise for teaching the Bahá'í Faith, explicating its teachings and principles, defending it against critics and engaging in meaningful inter-faith dialogue. Who, if we applied such methods, would or could really know what the Bahá'í Faith stood for? Consequently, this paper suggests that Bahá'í scholars make very cautious use even of the accidental similarities with postmodernism and ensure they do not entangle themselves in philosophical positions that create difficulties with the Writings.

There are two possible partial exceptions to this, Heidegger and Baudrillard. Heidegger's philosophy of Being has been given theological interpretations<sup>249</sup> that in many respects are in harmony with the Writings. There is certainly no problem in regards to Heidegger's refusal to confuse Being with beings, or, in Bahá'í terms, God with creations, either natural or our own man-made idols. Nor is there any inherent difficulty or insurmountable difficulty with Heidegger's theory of truth as *aletheia*, the disclosure of the Being of individual beings, or the task of art and especially poetry as the disclosure of the Being of beings.<sup>250</sup>

If we read Baudrillard's work as a sociological diagnosis of the corrupt condition of society and culture, i.e. as a sociological description of a world in which entire societies have been "deluded by a mere phantom which the vain imaginations of its peoples have conceived,"<sup>251</sup> then one might be favourably inclined towards his analyses of the postmodern condition. His assertion that boundaries have blurred between the real and artificial or imaginary, true and false, cause and effect, subject and object is not inherently opposed to the

Bahá'í Writings *if* we read it as an analysis of individual and social pathology. However, if we read Baudrillard's work as we read Lyotard's, Derrida's, Foucault's or Rorty's i.e. as a program that is being suggested for the analysis and exploration of the postmodern world, then we have the same problems we have with these other philosophers: the Bahá'í Writings accept and make use of the numerous metaphysical categories that Baudrillard rejects outright. In our view, the latter reading is more justified than the former because Baudrillard nowhere gives any sign of recognising that the postmodern view of reality he describes is a distortion and misrepresentation of reality as it really is, i.e. reality as described by the Bahá'í Writings. That is why he is included in this study.

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<sup>1</sup> "Ponder this in thine heart, that the sweet gales of divine knowledge, blowing from the meads of mercy, may waft upon thee." Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 149. References to this 'heart-knowable' abound in the Writings.

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- <sup>2</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* p.208; emphasis added.
- <sup>3</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.288.
- <sup>4</sup> PUP 304; emphasis added.
- <sup>5</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- <sup>6</sup> See for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 146 - 147
- <sup>7</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 157.
- <sup>8</sup> 'SAQ 297; PUP 20 - 22.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 298.
- <sup>10</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.7.
- <sup>11</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* , p.303
- <sup>12</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.208.
- <sup>13</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>14</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá* v1, p. 115.
- <sup>15</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.208.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 181.
- <sup>17</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.298 - 299.
- <sup>18</sup> *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 299.
- <sup>19</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 63.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 107.
- <sup>21</sup> PUP 287; emphasis added.
- <sup>22</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.312 -313
- <sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Book III, Section 12.
- <sup>24</sup> See footnotes 286 and 288. See also *Some Answered Questions*, p. 299.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá , *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* p.255; emphasis added.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich, p.759.
- <sup>27</sup> Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, p.327.
- <sup>28</sup> Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, SS6, Section III.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18; emphasis added.
- <sup>30</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 195.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 6.
- <sup>32</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.179.
- <sup>33</sup> SAQ 5. Ch. 2: "Proofs and Evidences of the Existence of God"
- <sup>34</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 17.
- <sup>35</sup> GWB XCIV, p. 192; emphasis added.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 93.
- <sup>37</sup> PUP p. 327; emphasis added.
- <sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Section 18.
- <sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Section 15.

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- <sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Section 17.
- <sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "Before Sunrise."
- <sup>42</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.208.
- <sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, # 552.
- <sup>44</sup> Nietzsche, *Of Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense*.
- <sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #493.
- <sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #534.
- <sup>47</sup> PUP 287; emphasis added.
- <sup>48</sup> *Some Answered Questions*, p. 3-4.
- <sup>49</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 253; emphasis added.
- <sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Section 15.
- <sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, # 552.
- <sup>52</sup> Ian Kluge, "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings" in *Lights of Irfan*, Book 4, 2003.
- <sup>53</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.42; emphasis added.
- <sup>54</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 9.
- <sup>55</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*. First Essay, Section 6; see also *Beyond Good and Evil*.
- <sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part III, "The Convalescent", p.215.
- <sup>57</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 223.
- <sup>58</sup> *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 61.
- <sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part II, "The Pitiful", p. 87.
- <sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part III, "The Convalescent", p. 207; emphasis added.
- <sup>61</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 283.
- <sup>62</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 287.
- <sup>63</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 286; emphasis added.
- <sup>64</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 89.
- <sup>65</sup> *The Kita-i-Aqdas* 13.
- <sup>66</sup> *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 176.
- <sup>67</sup> Robert Audi, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 563.
- <sup>68</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.21.; in other works, Heidegger spells it 'being' without the capital.
- <sup>69</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.23.
- <sup>70</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.23.
- <sup>71</sup> Heidegger, "Existence and Being"
- <sup>72</sup> Heidegger, "Existence and Being."
- <sup>73</sup> An Aristotelian 'substance' is not necessarily a material substance as Descartes, Hume and Locke mistakenly thought. A substance is anything that is not an attribute of something else. For example, 'strength' is not a substance because it can only exist as an attribute of a substance.

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- <sup>74</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XII, 7, 1072a.
- <sup>75</sup> Ian Kluge, *The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings*," *Lights of Irfan IV*, 2003.
- <sup>76</sup> Heidegger, "Existence and Being."
- <sup>77</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIX, p. 46 - 47.
- <sup>78</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.23.
- <sup>79</sup> *Some Answered Questions*, p. 113.
- <sup>80</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 178.
- <sup>81</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 47.
- <sup>82</sup> *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 23.
- <sup>83</sup> Micahel Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, p. 84.
- <sup>84</sup> Micahel Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, p. 84
- <sup>85</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 261.
- <sup>86</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.259.
- <sup>87</sup> *Some Answered Questions*, p. 220.
- <sup>88</sup> *Some Answered Questions*, p. 251; emphasis added.
- <sup>89</sup> Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth."
- <sup>90</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 154.
- <sup>91</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.259; italics added.
- <sup>92</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 69.
- <sup>93</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 69.
- <sup>94</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 69.
- <sup>95</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 69.
- <sup>96</sup> *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 237.
- <sup>97</sup> *Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words (Persian) # 33*.
- <sup>98</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XVII, p. 46.
- <sup>99</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá v1*, p. 168; emphasis added.
- <sup>100</sup> Heidegger, "Existence and Being."
- <sup>101</sup> *Some Answered Questions*, p.299.
- <sup>102</sup> Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth."
- <sup>103</sup> Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth."
- <sup>104</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 8.
- <sup>105</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XVI, p. 40
- <sup>106</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCII, p. 183.
- <sup>107</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 397.
- <sup>108</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.63.
- <sup>109</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.63.
- <sup>110</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 47.
- <sup>111</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 136.

- <sup>112</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.128.
- <sup>113</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 246.
- <sup>114</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.36.
- <sup>115</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.208.
- <sup>116</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, "Non-Overlapping Magesteria," [www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould\\_noma.html](http://www.stephenjaygould.org/library/gould_noma.html)
- <sup>117</sup> Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, Letter 7.
- <sup>118</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 128.
- <sup>119</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 131.
- <sup>120</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 131.
- <sup>121</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.63.
- <sup>122</sup> Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, p. 171.
- <sup>123</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.66.
- <sup>124</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.66.
- <sup>125</sup> Best and Kellner, "The Postmodern Turn in Philosophy: Theoretical Provocations and Normative Devices."
- <sup>126</sup> Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction*, p.60.
- <sup>127</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.66.
- <sup>128</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.42.
- <sup>129</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.175.
- <sup>130</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.41.
- <sup>131</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.171;
- <sup>132</sup> *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* p.105.
- <sup>133</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 467.
- <sup>134</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 467.
- <sup>135</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVI, p. 213.
- <sup>136</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p.56.
- <sup>137</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p.56.
- <sup>138</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, 33-34.
- <sup>139</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 172.
- <sup>140</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 58
- <sup>141</sup> *Lights of Guidance*, p. 365; *Lights of Guidance*, # 725; p. 273.
- <sup>142</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.
- <sup>143</sup> Furthermore, if truth is not distinguished from and privileged over untruth on what grounds can Derrida even presume to critique logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence since one would be as good as the other? Clearly, he is undermining his own philosophical project.
- <sup>144</sup> Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary*, p.1; this is Derrida's meaning of *aporia*; the term also means a philosophical puzzle or state of puzzlement.
- <sup>145</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 303.

- <sup>146</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 303.
- <sup>147</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.208.
- <sup>148</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 181.
- <sup>149</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 299.
- <sup>150</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.89.
- <sup>151</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.201.
- <sup>152</sup> Jacques Derrida, “*Violence and Metaphysics*” in *Writing and Difference*, p.79.
- <sup>153</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p.86; italics added.
- <sup>154</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, p.32.
- <sup>155</sup> Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, p. 96.
- <sup>156</sup> *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.129.
- <sup>157</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 100.
- <sup>158</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 100.
- <sup>159</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.220.
- <sup>160</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.271; emphasis added.
- <sup>161</sup> *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 634.
- <sup>162</sup> Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary*, p. 78.
- <sup>163</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- <sup>164</sup> *One Common Faith*. reference.bahai.org/en/t/bic/OCF/
- <sup>165</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.184.
- <sup>166</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.130.
- <sup>167</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.283.
- <sup>168</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.10.
- <sup>169</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*,” p. 108.
- <sup>170</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 58;
- <sup>171</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 58.
- <sup>172</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.23.
- <sup>173</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.11.
- <sup>174</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.28.
- <sup>175</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 102; emphasis added.
- <sup>176</sup> *Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, p.32.
- <sup>177</sup> J.G. Merquior, *Foucault*, p. 60-61.
- <sup>178</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.41.
- <sup>179</sup> “Is there any remover of difficulties save God?“, *Compilations, Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 27
- <sup>180</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.106.
- <sup>181</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.81.
- <sup>182</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.82.

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- <sup>183</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.53.
- <sup>184</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.217-218; emphasis added.
- <sup>185</sup> James Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism*, p.151.
- <sup>186</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.58.
- <sup>187</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p.108.
- <sup>188</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p.108; emphasis added.
- <sup>189</sup> Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, p. 50.
- <sup>190</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.287.
- <sup>191</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.107.
- <sup>192</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.62.
- <sup>193</sup> Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, p. 50.
- <sup>194</sup> Michel Foucault, "Homage to Jean Hippolyte" in Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, p.120.
- <sup>195</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.50.
- <sup>196</sup> Danaher, Schirato, Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, p.150.
- <sup>197</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.239.
- <sup>198</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.239.
- <sup>199</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.
- <sup>200</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 29.
- <sup>201</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 50.
- <sup>202</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.64.
- <sup>203</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p.372.
- <sup>204</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.291; emphasis added.
- <sup>205</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.287; emphasis added.
- <sup>206</sup> Richard Rorty, "Solidarity" in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.194.
- <sup>207</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p.371.
- <sup>208</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p.377.
- <sup>209</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p.378.
- <sup>210</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p.370.
- <sup>211</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p.136.
- <sup>212</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.258.
- <sup>213</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIX, p. 46.
- <sup>214</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p.220.
- <sup>215</sup> Richard Rorty, "Solidarity" in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.189.
- <sup>216</sup> Richard Rorty, "Non-reductive Physicalism" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, p.123.
- <sup>217</sup> Richard Rorty, "Non-reductive Physicalism" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, p.123.

- <sup>218</sup> Richard Rorty, "Inquiry as Recontextualization" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, p.93
- <sup>219</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p.373.
- <sup>220</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.
- <sup>221</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 240.
- <sup>222</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.17.
- <sup>223</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.40.
- <sup>224</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.113.
- <sup>225</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.306.
- <sup>226</sup> Robert Audi, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p.563.
- <sup>227</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 3.
- <sup>228</sup> Richard Rorty, "Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger," in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.97.
- <sup>229</sup> Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity:" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, p.23.
- <sup>230</sup> Richard Rorty, "Solidarity" in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p.192.
- <sup>231</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p.191, 320.
- <sup>232</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulations*, p.2.
- <sup>233</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulations*, p.55.
- <sup>234</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulations*, p.5.
- <sup>235</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 53.
- <sup>236</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 307.
- <sup>237</sup> PUP 191; *Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá*, v2, p. 327.
- <sup>238</sup> TAB v3, p.562; *Tablet to August Forel*, p. 23.
- <sup>239</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 239.
- <sup>240</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 143.
- <sup>241</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulations*, p.35.
- <sup>242</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulations*, p.6.
- <sup>243</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "Pataphysics," trans. by Drew Burk. [www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=569](http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=569)
- <sup>244</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulations*, p.3.
- <sup>245</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "Holograms," trans. by Sheila Glaser. [www.egs.edu/faculty/ baudrillard/ baudrillard-simulacra-and-simulation-11-holograms.html](http://www.egs.edu/faculty/ baudrillard/ baudrillard-simulacra-and-simulation-11-holograms.html)
- <sup>246</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 80.
- <sup>247</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 11.
- <sup>248</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* XLIII, p. 94.
- <sup>249</sup> For example, the work of Paul Tillich or John MacQuarrie's *An Existentialist Theology*.
- <sup>250</sup> Some of these overlaps are explored in "The Call into Being: Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism," in *Lights of Irfan* IV, 2003.

<sup>251</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, III, p. 6.