

Grand Narratives and the Bahá'í Writings Part 1

Ian Kluge

Introduction

This paper takes its cue from Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, who calls on Bahá'ís “to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science.”[1] He reinforces this point by saying,

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people . . . who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world. [2]

He adds, furthermore, that

If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems . . . who [are] capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society. [3]

It is worth noting that the Guardian associates “really effective” teaching with the ability to “correlate” the Bahá'í teachings with current issues and debates in society. Such correlations can be “really effective” because they help make the Writings part of public discourse about contemporary topics and, thereby, draw awareness to the Writings themselves by showing their relevance to modern issues. In addition, they can show that the Bahá'í Writings have uniquely new ideas and perspectives to share with the world.

The concept of grand narratives has been and is still under continued and strenuous attack in our time, being blamed, among other things, for being totalitarian and setting the stage for totalitarian regimes;[4] for engaging in intellectual “terrorism”[5] by ‘marginalizing the ‘others’

who are different; and for Western triumphalism and its concomitant colonialism. Precisely because these are serious accusations which include the Bahá'í grand narrative, it is important to understand why these charges are highly problematic vis-à-vis Spengler, Toynbee and Sorokin, and completely untenable in regards to the Bahá'í grand narrative. Therefore, in the first part of this paper we examine the nature of grand narratives, appraise some of the major attacks on them and present our understanding of the Bahá'í grand narrative. In the second part of this paper we correlate the Bahá'í grand narrative with the three most influential non-communist grand narratives of the twentieth century: Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee and Pitirim Sorokin and point out the unique features of the Bahá'í grand narrative that compensate for the short-comings of other theories.

We draw three major conclusions from our study. First, the arguments against grand narratives are logically unconvincing and paradoxically self-refuting. Second, there are numerous and far-reaching correlations between the Bahá'í Writings and the work of Spengler, Toynbee and Sorokin. Third, alone among these grand narratives, the Bahá'í Writings go beyond diagnosis of human history and its patterns but complete the diagnosis with a prescription and the establishment of a healing institution, i.e. the Universal House of Justice. This completeness – diagnosis, prescription and healing institution –

PART A: Grand Narratives

Background, Controversies and an Overview of the Bahá'í Grand Narrative

1: Introduction

Grand narratives or metanarratives are stories or narratives by means of which we interpret and understand history. A narrative may be defined as a series of coherently presented real or imagined events explicitly or implicitly embedding an interpretation of the events. In the field of history, such events and their interpretations may cover local, national, international and even cosmic history.[6] Their prime task is reveal certain patterns, trends, laws or themes guiding, informing, shaping the historical processes in societies, nations or even the world as a whole.[7] In other words, metanarratives purport to demonstrate that history has implicit or explicit order, coherence and meaning despite superficial appearances of disorder, randomness even anarchy. Consequently, for grand narratives the unfolding of history is not just a series of random, accidental events without any overall order, tendency or direction. Instead, history has patterns and to that extent is rational and can be understood rationally. Moreover, these patterns, themes or principles help us establish (1) values; (2) criteria for objectively evaluating historical facts as well standards for identifying goodness, truth, legitimacy; (3) consequences and/or logical inferences from the grand narrative and (4) criteria for making predictions about the course of history.

For grand narratives the unfolding of history is not just a series of random, accidental events

without any overall order, tendency or direction. Instead, history has patterns and to that extent is rational and can be understood rationally. The existence of order, coherence and meaning in history makes some degree of predictability possible. Consequently, these patterns, themes and laws make some degree of historical predictability possible. The kind of predictions are usually statistical in nature; like actuarial tables in the life insurance industry, the patterns of events allow us to calculate general trends – or the probability of death among certain groups of people – without being able to predict an individual death. The immense profitability of the life insurance industry demonstrates the effectiveness of such predictions.

Moreover, these patterns, themes or principles help us establish (1) values; (2) criteria for objectively evaluating historical facts as well standards for identifying goodness, truth, legitimacy; (3) consequences and/or logical inferences from the grand narrative and (4) criteria for making predictions about the course of history. In embryonic or fully developed form, grand narratives embody a world-view by which both individuals and societies consciously or unconsciously orient their lives in regards to fundamental values such as meaning and purpose, ‘the good,’ justice and ‘evil.’ One obvious example is how the Christian grand narrative has shaped the history of Western individuals and societies. Another, more recent example is the Communist grand narrative based on dialectical materialism in metaphysics and historical materialism in economics and politics. It teaches that history is a struggle between classes that will inevitably end with the end of class war and the “withering away of the state.”[8] A moment’s reflection shows how any metanarrative affects virtually all aspects of a person’s life such as political choices, social attitudes, ethics, and even beliefs about the nature of the universe.

The Bahá’í Writings explicitly embody a grand narrative of the history of humankind as well as a vision for its future culmination in a unified global commonwealth. Without this grand narrative, much of the *raison d'être* of the Bahá’í Faith would vanish since it is Bahá'u'lláh's specific mission as a Manifestation of God to guide human history to its culmination in world unity.[9] In the words of Shoghi Effendi,

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving.[10]

This study of grand or meta narratives and the Bahá’í Writings aims to accomplish three main goals:

To show how the Bahá’í Writings explicitly embody a grand narrative of the history of humankind;

To show how the Bahá’í grand narrative has important similarities to three influential metanarratives by Oswald Spengler, Arnold J Toynbee and Pitirim Sorokin;

To demonstrate the untenability of various criticisms of the concept of grand narratives.

These three goals are intertwined insofar as they are necessary to provide more than a skeletal presentation of the subject and to be useful in explicating the Bahá'í Writings, in apologetics and engaging in dialogue with other religions or schools of thought.

2: Grand Narratives: The Historical Background

It is important to realize that grand narratives are not a modern invention. Religions embed metanarratives either in developed or in embryonic form.[11] One of the earliest is the Zoroastrian doctrine that existence is a universal and cosmic struggle between truth and order on one side and lie and chaos on the other; our duty is to support the truth and order. This view gives cosmic significance to all individual and social actions, e.g. personal business dealings or exchanges with neighbors as well as political events at the local, national and even transnational levels. In short, history is a struggle for the victory of the good. The Jewish grand narrative concerns the story of the Jewish people (and by extension, humanity as a whole) overcoming their exile from Paradise and finding their way home to the Promised Land. During the wanderings, a pattern emerges of falling away from God, suffering the consequences and eventually triumphing. Here, too, victory, i.e. attainment of the Promised Land, is identified with the good. The Christian grand narrative includes the struggle or good against evil, but has a personal salvational emphasis focussed on the redemption for original sin bought for us by the crucifixion. The ultimate providential aim is for individuals to save their souls and to work for the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth. The Muslim metanarrative takes up this theme of a providential kingdom on earth which is set forth in greater detail than in Christianity and proclaims the end of historical revelation with Mohammed. The Muslim revelation essentially marks the end of history as a process to a greater goal.

Numerous philosophers have written enormously influential grand narratives about particular societies and about universal history. Saint Augustine's City of God – clearly influenced by Zoroastrian dualism – portrays the history of humankind as a struggle between God and the Devil, and our need to choose between the City of Man or the City of God. This clearly fits into the Christian tradition. The 12th century CE theologian Joachim of Fiore included the concept of progress in his three-fold division of history: the Age of the Father with its Old Testament emphasis on law and obedience; the Age of the Son which included law but emphasized mercy; and the Age of the [Holy] Spirit in which a "universal Christian society"[12] would emerge. Ibn Khaldun, a 14th CE Arab Muslim writer also saw a cyclic pattern of increasing immorality and corruption when successors took over from the founding generations of great dynasties. The cyclical nature of this seemingly inevitable process allows a measure of predictability in the historical process if not in specific events then in the nature and sequence of events. Giambattista Vico's The New Science (1725 CE) shows history as a progressing and expanding spiral. The cycles represent the three stages of development: the age of the gods in which humans are ruled by supernatural beings or God; the age of heroes in which humans are ruled by aristocratic classes; the age of equality in which all people viewed themselves as equal at least insofar as they shared a common humanity. The first led to theocratic government or rule

by priests; the second to aristocratic government or monarchies; the third led to republican or democratic government. According to Vico “the nature of peoples is first crude, then severe, then benign the delicate and finally dissolute.”[13] After this, the cycle begins again though always “recurring on a higher plane.”[14] Thus Vico combined the ideas of progress and cyclical patterns to show history as predictable at least the kind of developments we can expect.

The 18th Century CE of the European Enlightenment – so vehemently excoriated by the postmodernists – marks the beginning of an unusually productive period in the efforts to understand history. What almost all of them have in common is belief in the progress of humankind not only in scientific knowledge but also in the growth of rationality, freedom and social and cultural tolerance. Moreover, a theme hitherto implicit in earlier grand narratives came to the fore at this time: the perfectibility of man, society and the world. Kant’s “Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View” is a good example.[15] According to Kant, the purpose of history is the extension of individual freedom in an ordered national and international society. Viewing history as a whole, he states,

history, which is concerned with narrating these appearances, permits us to hope that if we attend to the play of freedom of the human will in the large, we may be able to discern a regular movement in it, and that what seems complex and chaotic in the single individual may be seen from the standpoint of the human race as a whole to be a steady and progressive though slow evolution of its original endowment.[16]

According to Kant,

The history of mankind can be seen, in the large, as the realization of Nature’s secret plan to bring forth a perfectly constituted state as the only condition in which the capacities of mankind can be fully developed, and also bring forth that external relation among states which is perfectly adequate to this end.[17]

The mechanism by which humanity will actualize its “original endowment” is that our lower animal nature drives us to overcome ourselves – because we can’t stand ourselves’ as mere animals – and to develop our higher natures. From a Bahá’í perspective this is an inadequate motivation for progress because it sidesteps the need for Manifestation.

Hegel’s Philosophy of History saw history as the conscious self-actualization of the Spirit in humankind and through human history and the growth of freedom. In the end, all humans will recognize themselves as free and as one with the Spirit. As Hegel’s erstwhile student, Marx, also promulgated a metanarrative as noted above. Some modern feminist metanarratives center on the claim that patriarchy, i.e. a male-dominated society has a specifically anti-female agenda which has dominated history so far.

The Bahá’í Writings emphasize a “world-embracing”[18] vision because there is no other adequate way of understanding the human nature and history in the contemporary world. Less expansive views do not allow us to see the global development of humankind and where it is going. We may see the course of a river from a high mountain but not from a deep valley. Moreover, as a religion committed to the unification of humankind in a global federal commonwealth united by “one common faith”[19] the Bahá’í Writings logically require a global

vision of human development to support its claims.

Furthermore, the Writings are not alone in recognizing that a “world-embracing” vision is necessary for a deeper understanding of human history. There are several new developments in the pursuit of global historical studies. We observe, for example, the establishment of the World History Association which studies history from “a trans-national, trans-regional, and trans-cultural perspective”[20] has been growing and developing since 1980. An examination of the WHA’s specialities shows that the WHA is doing the same kind of studies as Spengler, Toynbee and Sorokin.[21] We also note the rising interest in ‘Big History,’[22] which starts history with the Big Bang and reveals various patterns repeating themselves throughout cosmic and human history.[23] Juan Jose Gomez-Ibarra’s A Scientific Model of History: Where is the Future Leading us[24] (2003) shows the scientific laws – such as Malthus and Toynbee’s ‘challenge and response – underlying historical processes. Ross E. Dunn and Laura J. Mitchell’s Panorama: A World History is yet another example of historians working from a global perspective. In addition, there is Immanuel Wallerstein’s “world systems theory.”[25] Sebastian Conrad calls these expanded visions of history the “all-in version of global history”[26] or “planetary comprehensiveness.”[27] Finally, we refer readers to R. MacNeil and W.H. MacNeil, The Human Web: A Bird’s-Eye View of World History[28] which demonstrates how communications are unifying the world. Finally, we should take note of the rise of Civilizational Science, an interdisciplinary field which uses a scientific approach (e.g. the Annales School) to pursue macrohistorical studies (e.g., Toynbee) to “address some of the most important problems of globalizing society in the 21 century and beyond.”[29]

3: Why Grand Narratives? Four Reasons

At this point we may ask ‘Why are humans so fascinated with grand narratives? Why do these ‘stories’ keep reappearing – as, for example, in the recent ascent of Big History, Global History and scientific history. ‘What characteristics seem to make them indispensable?’ Why, for example, are the works of Spengler, Toynbee, Sorokin and Marx still read even though most professional historians ignore them or dismiss them as misleading? Why do established academic historians like the MacNeil’s still try to demonstrate the existence of a pattern uniting global history?

In our view, there are at least four reasons why grand narratives survive and will continue to survive.

First, every religion is a grand narrative – at least in outline or embryo form – that shapes our understanding of the reality, truth, goodness and morality, justice, human nature, and values. Religious stories provide a way of understanding individual and group behavior in the present and the past. For a pre-literate culture to say ‘We do things this way because our ancestors did’ is, in effect, an embryonic grand narrative about the past, present and future.¹ In short, as long as religions exist, grand narratives will continue. The fact that anthropologists have never encountered a group of humans without religion indicates how indispensable religion and its implicit and explicit grand narratives are to human survival and well-being. Religions, of course,

are more than metanarratives; they are, for the most part, revelations from God[30] to advance our spiritual development. However, when we accept a Manifestation and His spiritual teachings, we also implicitly accept a grand narrative. Consequently, it seems self-evident that believing we can live without a grand narratives of one kind or another violates our empirical anthropological knowledge of human nature.

'Abdu'l-Bahá presents a second reason why metanarratives are necessary. According to him "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." [31] Because humans have a "rational soul," we naturally want things to 'make sense,' i.e. to be understandable, intelligible, justifiable, self-consistent and practicable. Even Pieter Geyl, one of most relentless critics of metanarratives, admits that it is "an ingrained habit of human nature . . . to try to construct a vision of history in which chaos, or apparent chaos, is restored to order." [32] (Unfortunately, he does not ask why this habit is so deeply ingrained.) Without order, there is no understanding, and without understanding life becomes catastrophic: we lack a clear sense of identity or make sense of ourselves or what values we do or do not stand for or what our goals are; consequently it is virtually impossible to act coherently and maintain social relationships. How could a society made up of such individuals function? If we cannot act with a certain consistency or coherence, we shall often undermine our own efforts and confuse ourselves and others. In effect, we fail to actualize ourselves as "rational souls" – our essential attribute[33] – at the personal and societal level, and, therefore, cannot function optimally. For example, if we fail to recognize, as the Bahá'í Writings tell us, that all human beings have both a spiritual and a physical nature[34] and that the spiritual function must rule, then we are not actualizing our essence as "rational souls." In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "If the physical or natural disposition in him should overcome the heavenly and merciful, he is, then, the most degraded of animal beings" [35] We are incomplete beings whose "spiritual susceptibilities" [36] have yet to be actualized. Since animals do not have "rational souls" then obviously rule by our physical nature is irrational for humans.

Helping us gain such self-understanding is one of the benefits conferred by the Manifestations Who, for example, teach us about our spiritual and animal natures and the long-term benefits of having our spiritual nature in control. In addition, the Manifestations provide a 'map' or a guidebook to reality, its nature, its purpose and its goal or final cause. As humankind progresses, the accidental or culture-bound attributes of former metanarratives are abandoned and a new Manifestation arrives to establish a new grand narrative commensurate with the intellectual, social, material and spiritual development of the time. In other words, the continual presence of Manifestations means that there never has been a time when grand narratives of one kind or another have not guided human thought, feeling and action. In short, metanarratives are so important to human development that God sends Manifestations to establish them.

The third major function of grand narratives is epistemological, i.e. to bring order to our knowledge and thinking. Bringing order to any kind of knowledge and thought requires us to prioritize or privilege (a) some facts over others vis-à-vis truth, relevance and importance and (b) some sources of knowledge and knowledge-claims over others. In practical terms, we must choose if we are going to take surgical advice from a surgeon or an astrologer. We must be able to recognize and distinguish between the essential and non-essential aspects of information and

discard what is less important and unreliable sources. In religion, it is the Manifestation Who “distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the nonessential and spurious in their teachings.”[37] Such distinctions are necessary because no one can accept all knowledge sources and knowledge as equally valid or important because that makes it impossible to take action, i.e. to select one option or fact over another. Furthermore, such distinctions are also necessary because humans are fallible and not all knowledge claims are equally valid. This inevitably sets up a hierarchy of knowledge. The Writings obviously privilege Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi as infallible knowledge vis-à-vis the teachings of the Faith. Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh, God's Manifestation for this age, clearly rejects some sources of knowledge as invalid when he says,

Its [the world's] sickness is approaching the stage of utter hopelessness, inasmuch as the true Physician is debarred from administering the remedy, whilst unskilled practitioners are regarded with favor, and are accorded full freedom to act. ...[38]

Similarly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

This panacea [of religion] must, however, be administered by a wise and skilled physician, for in the hands of an incompetent all the cures that the Lord of men has ever created to heal men's ills could produce no health, and would on the contrary only destroy the helpless and burden the hearts of the already afflicted.[39]

The Writings clearly endorse such prioritizing since not all remedies and/or knowledge claims are equally effective as shown in the reference to “unskilled practitioners.” Furthermore, from the quotations given above, the Writings clearly privilege one side of the following binary oppositions: competent/incompetent; /rational/irrational; true/untrue; order/disorder; health/sickness and knowledge/ignorance; enemy/friend. The unskilled physician who pretends to be skilled is, in effect, an enemy to the patient; it is irrational to bar the “true Physician from the patient; to bar the “true Physician” also upends the proper order of things; it is also unjust. Other binary oppositions implicitly or explicitly found in the Writings and the Bahá'í grand narrative are essential/accidental; order/disorder; progressive/regressive; noumenal/phenomenal; true/untrue; moral/immoral; knowledge/superstition; rational/irrational, good/evil/”satanic”[40] and primitive/civilized.

These binary oppositions are an part of the Bahá'í metanarrative. Removing them undermines the Bahá'í teachings. For example, if we refuse to privilege truth, i.e. refuse to declare truth superior to untruth, we would also undermine every statement in which Bahá'u'lláh claims to speak the truth. He says, “Wherefore, should one of these Manifestations of Holiness proclaim saying: "I am the return of all the Prophets," He, verily, speaketh the truth.”[41] This statement, which is taken as true in the Bahá'í context, is privileged over its denial and, therefore, is more valuable than the denial of Bahá'u'lláh's words since it reveals something fundamental about the Manifestations and history. In short, the denial is simply wrong.[42] By means of these oppositions, metanarratives take on a prescriptive function not only for individuals but for entire societies which use them to construct their world views. In short, metanarratives help individuals and societies make sense of the world.

Privileging truth statements is also an example of the “legitimation of knowledge,”[43] which is to say that the metanarrative provides the standard for identifying truth. It provides the foundational principles by which to distinguish ‘real knowledge,’ fact or truth from error, superstition, myth or the utterances of the insane. Of course, the “legitimation of knowledge” is obvious in the Bahá’í Faith insofar as both Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá are regarded as infallible and Shoghi Effendi as infallible his interpretations of the Writings.

Say: This[revelation] is the infallible Balance which the Hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed, and their fate determined, if ye be of them that believe and recognize this truth. Say: Through it the poor have been enriched, the learned enlightened[44]

Because the Manifestation and His revelation are the balance for assaying the truth, He also has to clear away – uproot and destroy – falsehood. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

The divine Manifestations have been iconoclastic in Their teachings, uprooting error, destroying false religious beliefs and summoning mankind anew to the fundamental oneness of God.[45]

Thus, the metanarrative becomes the gatekeeper of knowledge.

The fourth major function of grand narratives is the “legitimation of power,” i.e. they provide a rationale to explain why certain individuals or groups have power and why or why not such power is legitimate or illegitimate. Such legitimization is necessary to maintain at least a certain minimum of social stability. The Bahá’í grand narrative also fulfills this function insofar as its metaphysical framework explains the unique metaphysical status of the Manifestations:

And since there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation, and no resemblance whatever can exist between the transient and the Eternal, the contingent and the Absolute, He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Unto this subtle this mysterious and ethereal Being He hath assigned a twofold nature; the physical, pertaining to the world of matter, and the spiritual, which is born of the substance of God Himself. He hath, moreover, conferred upon Him a double station. The first station, which is related to His innermost reality, representeth Him as One Whose voice is the voice of God Himself . . . The second station is the human station, exemplified by the following verses: "I am but a man like you."^[46]

This passage explains why, metaphysically speaking, the power of the Manifestations is legitimate: They are God’s representative on earth. Their power is justified or legitimated by Their omniscience[47] because They, not we, truly understand what is best for humankind inasmuch as Their knowledge of us is complete and not limited by time or space. Moreover, because Their power is metaphysically based, there is no legitimate replacement – Their status, power and omniscience are part of the basic structure of reality itself. Lyotard, Foucault, and others would, of course, portray God as a dictator but this critique overlooks the free will God has bestowed upon the individual as one of our essential attributes. We shall discuss this in more

detail below.

4: The Bahá'í Grand Narrative: Getting Started

There is, in our view, no question that the Bahá'í Writings establish a grand narrative of the gradual unification of humankind into a world federal commonwealth united in “one common faith.”[48] This will be achieved by the actualization of humanity’s physical, intellectual and spiritual potentials guided by the successive Manifestations of God Who each inaugurate a dispensation. Each dispensation passes through a spring, summer, autumn, fall and winter at which time a new dispensation begins. No culture or civilization is eternal and each has an inevitable, pre-ordained end. Thus the Bahá'í metanarrative reflects a synthesis of linear, i.e. progressive as well as cyclical theory of history which may be represented by an expanding and advancing spiral. Our progress is inspired and guided by the succession of Manifestations to the goal of unifying mankind into a federal world commonwealth united by “one common faith.” This final goal gives meaning to history. Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh is not only the Manifestation for this age but also the inaugurator of the next cycle of human development beyond global unity over the next 500,000 years. [49]

Regarded cosmically, the Bahá'í grand narrative begins with the intentional creation of the phenomenal world by a loving God[50] Who bestows on all things signs of “His names and attributes”[51] as well as the latent perfections[52] to be actualized over time. These divine bestowals are real and objective values which form an integral part of the cosmic historical process, i.e. the struggle to actualize the potentials inherent in all things. Since humans struggle to do the same, their evolutionary striving for complete actualization is a specialized case of the teleological striving of the entire phenomenal world. From this we may infer that history has a meaning, and exemplifies certain values like unity, self-overcoming and “awaken[ed] spiritual susceptibilities.”[53] The divine origin of the phenomenal, i.e. created world and the presence of God’s “names and attributes” in all things demonstrates that these values are real and objective aspects of phenomenal reality. It also demonstrates the sacred nature of reality as well as the sacred nature of the cosmic and human historical process.

The human historical process is the vanguard of cosmic evolution because God created man as the “supreme talisman”[54] who not only represents all “the names and attributes” of God in creation but is also the “fruit”[55] or ultimate purpose of cosmic evolution. Mankind is the highest expression of the cosmic process. Without humankind, the material world would have “no meaning.”[56] From this we may conclude that in the Bahá'í grand narrative, cosmic evolution and human evolution-history are integrated, i.e. aspects of a greater whole. Humankind plays a real part in the evolution of the cosmos – it is not a mere accident or fortuitous event[57]– but an essential part of the cosmos actualizing its own hidden potentials. This suggests that a proper understanding of humans and human nature is necessary for a proper understanding of the physical world. The fields in which this necessity makes itself felt most clearly is neuro-philosophy and neuro-science. Because the cosmic evolution has a purpose, it is both teleological and progressive and, thereby, rational, i.e. the purpose and the means are fitted to one another. The same is true of mankind’s historical development inasmuch as it is directed to achieving a goal set by “that invisible yet rational God.”[58]

In the historical process, we observe the expansion of the social unit, i.e. increasing inclusiveness to include previously excluded or marginalized groups. This process seems to be proceeding with increasing speed. The entire history of mankind from pre-historic times to the 21st Century can be understood in light of this theme. In the words of Shoghi Effendi,

This will indeed be the fitting climax of that process of integration which, starting with the family, the smallest unit in the scale of human organization, must, after having called successively into being the tribe, the city-state, and the nation, continue to operate until it culminates in the unification of the whole world, the final object and the crowning glory of human evolution on this planet. It is this stage which humanity, willingly or unwillingly, is resistlessly approaching.[59]

He re-emphasizes this by saying,

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end.[60]

We begin with the family, advance through clan and tribe, then proceed to city-states, nations, empires and collaborative supra-national alliances and end with a world federal commonwealth. The changes in spirituality and consciousness required for this development occur through the often unnoticed influence of the successive Manifestations, and in our age, of Bahá'u'lláh Whose teachings are the most advanced guidance for our time. In the process of actualizing our potentials, humankind starts coalescing into larger and larger social units which results in the further actualization of our social capacities as well as intellectual and spiritual capacities. In the end, worth noting the inevitability of mankind's integration into one global commonwealth in which "All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race, and become a single people." [61] Nor will this process be easy and smooth; as Shoghi Effendi tells us,

Much suffering will still be required ere the contending nations, creeds, classes and races of mankind are fused in the crucible of universal affliction, and are forged by the fires of a fierce ordeal into one organic commonwealth, one vast, unified, and harmoniously functioning system.[62]

From these statements we may conclude that the Bahá'í Writings portray history as teleological with a divinely fixed and inescapable goal. Our only choice is whether we shall advance towards this goal "willingly or unwillingly." Following the analogy of adolescence[63] used in the Writings, humanity may choose to grow up the hard way or the easier way, but in either case we shall grow up. Those who oppose global unification will end up working for it despite their intentions. As the Báb says, "All are His servants and all abide by His bidding!"[64] In other words, subjectively we may think our actions hinder the unificatory process but objectively, in actual effect, our actions help the process in the long run. This is illustrated by the Bahá'í diaspora after the 1979 revolution in Iran. The Bahá'í diaspora spread the teachings of the Faith on a global scale and drew world-wide attention which attracted more people to Bahá'u'lláh.

Progressing to the goal of world unification requires the actualization of intellectual potentials and the “awaken[ing of] spiritual susceptibilities in the hearts of mankind.”[65] Awakening the “susceptibilities” is a duty incumbent on all insofar as Bahá'u'lláh states, “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”[66] In this process, humanity is guided by the successive Manifestations of God each of Whom inaugurates a dispensation that passes through a spring, summer, autumn, fall and winter at which time a new dispensation begins to progress even further towards the ultimate goal. Two points are clear from this teaching. First, dispensations and their associated civilizations are not eternal. There is no final divine dispensation – a teaching contradicted by Judaism, Christianity, Islam and some interpretations of Buddhism – and there is no final civilization beyond which humans cannot progress. This doctrine undercuts the hubris of religious and cultural supremacist ideologies. Second, Manifestations are one of the ways in which God takes active part in human history. In other words, God is a ‘God of history’ insofar as He works through the actual, messy historical processes in which flawed human beings struggle through countless difficulties, many of them created by nature and/or their own behaviors. In other words, history manifests a salvational or providential plan to bring genuine peace and advance the material and spiritual evolution of mankind.

Shoghi Effendi outlines the mission of Bahá'u'lláh – and all other Manifestations – as follows:

Repudiating the claim of any religion to be the final revelation of God to man, disclaiming finality for His own Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh inculcates the basic principle of the relativity of religious truth, the continuity of Divine Revelation, the progressiveness of religious experience. His aim is to widen the basis of all revealed religions and to unravel the mysteries of their scriptures. He 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, and on this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even prophecies the inevitability, of their unification, and the consummation of their highest hopes.[67]

This passage shows that the Manifestations have all been working towards the final goal of the historical process as a whole. This is one of the outstanding and unique features of the Bahá'í grand narrative: it includes without any qualification, all the Manifestations of God from all major religions as equal partners in history and especially in the spiritual history of mankind. All Manifestations have an unqualifiedly rightful place in the unfolding of history and are not accepted merely as a courtesy, as a matter of ‘political correctness’ or as display of tolerance.

At this point, the Bahá'í grand narrative shows part of its metaphysical foundations:

We have formerly explained two stations for the Suns rising from the Day-springs of Divinity. One is that station of unity and condition of oneness, as previously mentioned. "We make no distinction between any of them." (K. S. 2) The other station is that

of distinction, creation, and human limitations. In this station, for each one a temple is designated, a mission is indicated, a manifestation is decreed, and certain limitations are assigned. Each one is named by a certain name, characterized by a quality, and appointed to a new Cause and Law[68]

At the spiritual level, all the Manifestations are ontologically one and the same which is why Bahá'ís must accept and value all Manifestations as completely equal in all respects. However, the Manifestations are also distinct historical individuals fulfilling particular mandates for particular places, times and circumstances. From this perspective it becomes clear that contrary to the apparent plethora of religions, there is only one religion for all of humanity. All past religions have revealed various aspects appropriate to various spiritual, intellectual and material conditions. In the words of Dr. Moojan Momen,

Thus, we may describe Bahá'u'lláh's project as that of creating a metareligion – a religion that encompasses and provides a theoretical framework within which it is possible to see the truth of all religion[69]

In other words, from the unity of the Manifestations' missions, we also find that there is, in the last analysis, only one human history to which partial histories contribute.

5: The Four Foundational Principles of the Bahá'í Grand Narrative

In our view, the Bahá'í grand narrative is built on four principles. All attributions to the Bahá'í metanarrative must agree with or converge on or, at least, not contradict these principles which form the rational and coherent foundation of this master narrative. With this narrative we may interpret major historical developments by contextualizing them, i.e. by locating them and their effects vis-à-vis the advance towards world unification. As shall be discussed below, such assessments must also take into account “the wisdom of God” which reconciles human free will with a pre-determined historical outcome.[70]

In our understanding, the first foundational principle of the Bahá'í historical metanarrative is the doctrine of “progressive revelation.” This doctrine asserts that mankind’s development is inspired and guided by successive Manifestations of God Who lead us to the continued actualization of our spiritual and material potentials. According to the Writings, “Without the teachings of God the world of humanity is like the animal kingdom”[71] i.e. without the Manifestations, humankind would never advance beyond the limits of materialistic thought to the higher levels of specifically human development. The Manifestations’ spiritual teachings enable humanity’s other capacities to develop and progress:

“Progress” is the expression of spirit in the world of matter. The intelligence of man, his reasoning powers, his knowledge, his scientific achievements, all these being manifestations of the spirit, partake of the inevitable law of spiritual progress and are, therefore, of necessity, immortal.[72]

Two statements are worth noting. First, matter becomes progressive through the action of spirit. Without spirit, matter is intrinsically in motion[73] but it is not progressive in the sense of having

an intrinsic final cause that leads it to transcend its inherent limitations in greater unities. Second, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, refers to "the inevitable law of spiritual progress" which makes it clear that, with the guidance of the Manifestations, human progress is pre-destined, unavoidable and certain. This guaranteed progress is a distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í grand narrative. Insofar as the Manifestations inspire mankind's progress, they are the origins of culture. As humanity advances spiritually and materially, additional Manifestations appear with new time-appropriate teachings that help us take the next step in spiritual and social progress. The essential teachings of the past are renewed, new teachings are added and the accidental features suitable to past times and places are abandoned. Shoghi Effendi writes the aim of each Manifestation is to

widen the basis of all revealed religions and to unravel the mysteries of their scriptures. He 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, and on this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even prophesies the inevitability, of their unification, and the consummation of their highest hopes.[74]

All these measures serve Bahá'u'lláh's command that "All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization." [75] It is worth noting that "civilization" is singular thereby reminding us that the ultimate goal of the historic process is one civilization joined in a global federal commonwealth united in "one common faith." [76] Each culture makes its contribution to the final whole, thereby safe-guarding the principle of unity in diversity. 'Abdu'l-Bahá prescribes other guidelines for contributing to an "ever-advancing civilization":

It is now the time in the history of the world for us to strive and give an impetus to the advancement and development of inner forces -- that is to say, we must arise to service in the world of morality, for human morals are in need of readjustment. We must also render service to the world of intellectuality in order that the minds of men may increase in power and become keener in perception, assisting the intellect of man to attain its supremacy so that the ideal virtues may appear.[77]

A key aspect of progressive revelation is that revelation is never-ending. Shoghi Effendi says, that Bahá'í

teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final. Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind. [78]

This declaration not only establishes the centrality of progressive revelation in the Bahá'í world view, but also outlines the basic grand narrative explicitly and implicitly present in the Writings. Divine revelations exist to guide humankind throughout the phases of its development in a way that is appropriate to its condition at any given time. Hence, it progresses, i.e. reveals more as the human condition warrants and as we "awaken spiritual susceptibilities." [79] There is no end to

this revelation and, therefore, no final Manifestation or final formulation of the truth. Truth is “relative” inasmuch as the expressions of the divine truth are adapted to human condition at any given time, but – and this is essential to note – these culture-formed relative expressions are all expressions of certain enduring truths or “eternal verities”[80] as Shoghi Effendi calls them. In other words, “truth is one, although its manifestations may be very different.”[81] The fact that revelation is progressive means that the Bahá’í grand narrative of mankind’s history is teleological, i.e. goal and purpose driven to a particular end, i.e. the unification of mankind into a global federal commonwealth joined in “one common faith.”[82] In other words, appearances to the contrary, history has an inherent order that includes some measure of predictability.

5.1: The Second Foundational Principle: The Oneness of Humankind[83]

The second foundational principle of the Bahá’í grand narrative is

the principle of the Oneness of Mankind, the cornerstone of Bahá'u'lláh's world-embracing dominion, implies nothing more nor less than the enforcement of His scheme for the unification of the world[84]

Without recognizing the essential one-ness of mankind, the vision of history as a grand narrative aimed at the unification of mankind would lack of workable foundation. Physical things, ideas and beliefs or events cannot be united in any durable way without sharing something in common.[85] 'Abdu'l-Bahá makes it clear that all human beings share an identical, essential nature in several ways. First, he declares that “there are two natures in man: the physical nature and the spiritual nature.[86] All human beings share this constitutional make-up. At the physical or natural level this essential nature is demonstrated by the universality of medical and physiological studies. While some medical differences between ethnic groups exist, they are not enough to change our essential human nature. Even more, all humans share the essential attribute of having a “rational soul” which “is the human reality”[87] or essence. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that 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.[88]

From these passages, we may conclude that humankind shares “the human spirit” or the “rational soul” as well as its dual constitution of our natural and spiritual aspects. Moreover, for all humans our natural or animal aspects are the source of “all imperfection” and the spiritual aspect is the “source of all perfection,” i.e. good.[89] In short, all human beings share the same ontological structure which, as we shall see, the natural and spiritual aspects of the soul explain the origins of good and evil in humankind, i.e. the vices and virtues. On the other hand, the powers of the rational soul explain why humans everywhere have, at least in principle, the universal capacities for learning and thought, for rational action like building societies, and for creative invention among other things. Of course, the presence of these capacities does not always mean they are used to the same degree or to the same advantage. Nor does it prevent

societies from getting ‘sick’ or succumbing to “maladaptive” i.e. self-destructive ideologies.[90]

5.2: The Third Principle: The Unification of Mankind

The third principle of the Bahá’í grand narrative is the ultimate goal of the unification of humankind in a “union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith.”[91] 'Abdu'l-Bahá expands on this ultimate goal, saying,

All men will adhere to one religion, will have one common faith, will be blended into one race, and become a single people. All will dwell in one common fatherland, which is the planet itself.[92]

Shoghi Effendi makes the international aspect of this goal clear:

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded.[93]

Clearly, the Bahá’í grand narrative is teleological in nature, a principle that allows us to understand and judge historical developments in light of the ultimate goal, i.e. whether they facilitate or hinder humanity’s progress to this endpoint.

At this point it is essential to note a unique feature of the Bahá’í grand narrative. It combines freedom of the individual will with the principle of a determined ultimate goal in history. In other words, world unification is an inevitable goal – ultimately pre-determined by God – but how we get there, by easy ways or hard or by whatever process we individually and collectively choose, history will arrive at a global federal commonwealth united by “one common faith.”[94] For example, humanity could have chosen the Most Great Peace when Bahá'u'lláh offered it but chose instead the trouble-ridden path to the Lesser Peace, leading Bahá'u'lláh to exhort, “Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.”[95]

Statistical science tells us there is nothing inherently contradictory about a process that combines free individual choices and predictable and pre-determined ends for groups. Consider the actuarial tables compiled by life insurance companies. Countless millions of uncoordinated free individual decisions about life-style lead to orderly patterns and trends in death statistics that enable us to make predictions about groups and as well as identify life-expectancy probability for individuals. Of course, there are always exceptions but the majority of people do, in fact, die as predicted which is why life insurance companies are so immensely profitable. The reason for this paradoxical result is the inherent limitations of human nature which constrain the number of possible outcomes which in turn leads inevitably to the formation of patterns and/or trends. Another illustration of this apparently self-contradictory phenomenon can be seen in the graph line of stock investments. The graph are the results of countless free uncoordinated individual

decisions, but the overall direction or trend shows a preferential movement in a certain direction even if contrary trends appear for a period of time. Many of these patterns and trends are so predictable that computers can be programmed to anticipate them and take action.

5.3: The Fourth Principle: The Means of Unification

Finally, the fourth principle of Bahá'í meta-history are the processes by which unification takes place. The first of these is the Manifestation of God Who comes to inaugurate a new stage of evolution in which humankind will make more spiritual, material and cultural progress. This process begins with destabilizing the established – though already disintegrating – order. Bahá'u'lláh says,

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System -- the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.[96]

In other words, God sends a new Manifestation when one phase of human development has run its course i.e. actualized its potentials and a new one is to begin self-actualizing. Because the previous revelation and its social order no longer meets the needs of human progress, the new Manifestation arrives to guide humankind through the next stage of spiritual, material and cultural growth. Through the Manifestations, God acts in the historical process.

The second aspect of the means by which God participates in history refers to the two-fold action when a new stage of development starts within a worn-out civilization without any new potentials left to actualize. Shoghi Effendi notes while one historical process is the death agonies of an old world order,

The second proclaims the birth pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive, that will inevitably supplant the former, and within Whose administrative structure an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing. The one is being rolled up, and is crashing in oppression, bloodshed, and ruin. The other opens up vistas of a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no age has ever seen.[97]

In other words, two historical processes operate at the same time – a degenerating

process of the old order of society and, growing within it, (Toynbee's "chrysalis" and "internal proletariat") a new revelation and its concomitant civilization. As the old civilization declines, the vigor of the new revelation and world order increases until it is established.[98] The new civilization will be better able to meet the challenges of the next stage of human development.

Finally, the means by which history advances is through the expansion of the social order, i.e. growing inclusivity. Shoghi Effendi states,

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which

a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships.[99]

In other words, social units show an increase in the number and variety of people who are considered ‘one of us’ or even ‘fully human.’ Conversely, the number of people who are considered as irredeemably ‘other’ are reduced. This must happen on an individual and collective level.

To reach the next, i.e. global stage of historical development, we must recognize that “nation-building has come to an end” at least in the traditional sense and it is now time to concentrate our efforts on building a global federal commonwealth united by “one common faith.” This involves numerous and radical changes in personal and collective self-image and self-definition; in the expansion of spiritual capacity; in personal and societal ethical standards; political and social world-views and practices; and in a re-alignment of our loyalties vis-à-vis national state and the world. However, we must not think this is necessarily a single straight-forward process especially in the contemporary world when two processes are at work. On one hand, we have the decline of the current

6: The Metaphysical Foundations of the Bahá’í Grand Narrative

The Bahá’í grand narrative of world history is grounded in the metaphysical and ontological teachings embedded in the Bahá’í Writings. The reason for this is clear: history is a part of the phenomenal world created by God and the metaphysical and ontological principles laid down in the Writings are the pre-conditions that inform and shape everything that exists or happens in the phenomenal world. Consequently, the historical process is necessarily linked to the appropriate metaphysical and ontological principles or pre-conditions. For that reason the most complete form of a grand narrative of world history is one capable of connecting the metaphysical foundations with the actual historical processes. This give us the greatest possible understanding we can obtain within the inherent epistemological limits of humankind. It also increases logical coherence because it contains within itself all the metaphysical principles needed to justify its own arguments, inferences and conclusions. Only three other metanarratives attempt such comprehensiveness: Hegel and Marx, and to a lesser degree Toynbee.

The metaphysical foundation of the Bahá’í grand narrative is the existence of God as the “the Creator of earth and heaven”[100] “the Sustainer”[101] of all that exists. This has at least five important consequences. First, the phenomenal world is intentional, i.e. it is intentionally brought into existence by an act of God’s Will:

Through His world-pervading Will He hath brought into being all created things
. . . All that is in heaven and all that is in the earth have come to exist at His bidding,
and by His Will all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being.[102]

It is important to notice that God intended, i.e. wanted the phenomenal world to exist because He loved it: 'Abdu'l-Bahá states “The cause of the creation of the phenomenal world is love”[103]

which also suggests that by virtue of God's love, creation, the phenomenal world has inherent value. This, in turn, establishes that in the Bahá'í grand narrative, at least some values are objective and real, and that ethical subjectivism does not universally apply. It also means that Hume's Guillotine – the impossibility of getting from a description to a prescription – does not work with the Bahá'í metanarrative because at least some values are inherent in phenomenal things.

What we also learn from the pervasiveness of the divine Will is that the phenomenal world cannot explain itself in strictly phenomenal terms – as materialist and atheist systems require – but must be referenced to something that is beyond it in capacity and power and is unavoidable. Any attempt to explain physical nature by strictly physical means ends in an infinite regress since any alleged ‘final’ explanation lapses into an infinite sequence of physical causes. Bahá'u'lláh also speaks of “the Divine Will that pervadeth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth [104] and notes that “Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will, that pervadeth all created things.”[105] Similarly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to “the divine breath which animates and pervades all things.”[106] Bahá'u'lláh also states,

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. [107]

Already at this point it is clear that the existence of a creator God Whose Will permeates all things will have a dramatic effect on how we contextualize and write world history. Whether or not human history is contextualized in a theistic, atheistic or agnostic way matters because the kind of world-view we espouse – either consciously or unconsciously – contextualizes our thinking and, thereby, influences our judgments about values, human nature, motivations, actions, events, society, politics, justice and truth to name only a few. Our understanding, evaluation and presentation of lives or events will be dramatically different if contextualized by an indifferent world of matter, random mutations and struggle for survival or by a world in which there are intentions, purpose, order and even love for our existence.[108] For example, the nature of the Bahá'í grand narrative will be in sharp contrast to the atheist Marxist grand narrative or agnostic grand narrative by the McNeil's The Human Web: A Birds-Eye View of World History. [109] Different questions will arise for historians such as ‘What is God’s intention or desire in creation?'; ‘How is this intention made known to us?'; ‘How do we best meet this intention?'; ‘What kind of values are implicit in this intention?' Furthermore, different events or kinds of events will be important, less important or unimportant depending on the metaphysical context.

It also follows logically that a phenomenal world with a purpose allows us to evaluate, prioritize, judge and interpret historical events and persons in light of that purpose which is objectively embodied in reality. This distinguishes the Bahá'í grand narrative from those like Marxism which attempts to explain world history in strictly immanent, i.e. non-transcendental and materialist terms. The problem is that without an objective standard by which to render evaluations, historical understanding ultimately becomes an exercise in personal and collective subjectivity and preferences. Furthermore, the context we choose also affects the kinds of evidence we are or are not willing to accept; the kind of explanations or possibilities we are willing to explore; the interpretation of events, actions and developments; the conclusions and judgments we draw and the values by which we draw them; the delineation of meaning; and the attitudes with which we approach our material. With the possible exception of chronicles, i.e. simple lists of events or objects, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to write any kind of history without these factors coming into play to one degree or another. It is also clear that even the effort to avoid metaphysics and ontology in history writing lands us in an alternate metaphysics.

It might be argued that historians do not – or should not – mix the study of history with any school of metaphysics and its theological implications. However, the problem with this position is that we cannot avoid taking metaphysical – and implicitly, theological – standpoints no matter what we do when studying history. It is obvious that empiricism, positivism, the scientific method et al. do not avoid metaphysics but merely assert a different kind of metaphysics and the implicit theologies or a-theologies. Each of the following propositions is metaphysical – and implicitly a-theological – to the core: (1) ‘There is no, or we can detect no, transcendentally originated purpose in the cosmos,’ (2) ‘The only valid and decisive evidence is physical/material evidence’ that is the same for all viewers; (3) ‘We seek only facts in history.’ The first two propositions are manifestly metaphysical in nature and the second is obviously self-refuting. No valid material evidence that such is the case can be produced – even in theory. The third statement is logically circular because those who support it will only accept material evidence as ‘facts’ to begin with. The argument that historians must reject ‘miracles’ i.e. divine involvement in history is also problematic – but only if we accept Hume’s definition of miracles violating the laws of nature.[110] If, on the other hand, we define miracles statistically, like quantum theory, we would say that a miracle is an event of an extremely low order of probability.[111] Being highly improbable and being absolutely impossible are two different things. In other words, the argument that a Bahá'í grand narrative contaminates history with metaphysics and theology is not in itself a valid reason to reject it because any objection inescapably makes the same ‘error’ of at least implicitly invoking metaphysics.

The second consequence of God’s role as Creator and Sustainer is that the Bahá'í metanarrative connects human history to natural history and the evolution of the universe. In other words, mankind’s history is an intrinsic part of the “divine milieu” [112] as Teilhard de

Chardin calls it and humankind is not as an accidental outcome of random mutations or chemical processes. Rather, humanity is a necessary goal of cosmic history.[113] As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

if the perfections of the spirit did not appear in this world, this world would
be unenlightened . . . By the appearance of the spirit in the physical form, this world
is enlightened. As the spirit of man is the cause of the life of the body, so the world is in
the condition of the body, and man is in the condition of the spirit. If there were no man,
the perfections of the spirit would not appear, and the light of the mind would not
be resplendent in this world. This world would be like a body without a soul.

This world is also in the condition of a fruit tree, and man is like the fruit; without
fruit the tree would be useless.[114]

We hardly need mention that the Writings support the concept of intelligent design of the
phenomenal world. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

This composition and arrangement, through the wisdom of God and His
preexistent might, were produced from one natural organization, which was composed
and combined with the greatest strength, conformable to wisdom, and according to
a universal law. From this it is evident that it is the creation of God, and is not a
fortuitous composition and arrangement.[115]

'Abdu'l-Bahá also speaks of the “the mysteries and creative purposes hidden within the
phenomenal world.”[116] Because the phenomenal world is an intentional creation of God, it is
inherently imbued with a purpose, i.e. God’s purpose which is the final cause of creation itself.
The final cause directs or guides the proximate causes – the material, efficient and formal
causes[117] – so that they harmonize with the final cause.

The third consequence of God’s role as Creator concerns purpose. If creation is intended
by God, it has a purpose. If something has a purpose – especially God’s purpose – it has intrinsic
value by which to judge whether a thing and/or event supports or opposes the purpose.
Furthermore, because it has intrinsic value, it also has meaning or significance or importance for
thought and action. This situation is noteworthy for grand narratives of world history because it
implies that human history is not embedded in a fortuitous and essentially chaotic universe but,
rather, is part of a universe with a final cause, a purpose, value and meaning. In other words,
history takes place in a “divine milieu,”[118] in an environment actualized and fashioned by
God’s presence through His divine Will and signs of His ubiquitous presence. Showing how at
least some of the major events of world history fit into and exemplify the divine signs either by
their presence or indirectly by their absence is one of the challenges of the Bahá’í grand
narrative.

When metahistorical studies are contextualized by a “divine milieu,” the next logical step is to discover what this purpose is and how it is reflected in human history. Our knowledge of purpose, value and meaning which comes primarily through the Manifestations, provides the standard or viewpoint from which evaluate the importance of historical events. Grand narratives that omit the intrinsic and objectively real purpose, value and meaning of historical developments become untenable since, in effect, they are distorting history by errors of omission. For example, the Bahá’í Writings say that the final goal of human history is the unification of mankind, from which it logically follows that it is unsound and short-sighted to neglect this information in interpreting and evaluating historical persons and/or events. Shoghi Effendi makes such a judgment when he says, that “Nation-building has come to an end,”[119] a statement

which, in effect, discourages “nation building” as a side-line of contemporary political action.

The fourth consequences of God’s act(s) of creation is that value is not only innate to all existence but is also objectively real and not merely a personally subjective or even socially subjective phenomenon. In other words, the Writings espouse value realism, i.e. the belief that at least some values – ethical or otherwise – do not depend on human observers, i.e. they are not subjective individually or socially. At least some values are objective, established in the natural by the presence of the signs and Names of God.[120] The objectivity of these values is confirmed by Shoghi Effendi who states that all the Manifestations assert the “eternal verities”[121] in each dispensation. Such “verities” are “eternal” precisely because they endure and are objectively real, i.e. not dependent on human opinion either individual or collective. The manner in which these “verities” are applied diverges among dispensations but the “verities” themselves do not. We might characterize this situation as ‘theme and variations’ or, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, “truth is one, although its manifestations may be very different.”[122] The application of these values such as the nature of the good, also varies with the level of creation. For the plants, animals and humans, the value is growth to its highest possible condition but ‘growth,’ while essentially the same in all cases has different attributes in a plant and a human. In other words, nature and the human history embedded in it, is value-laden and has been from the earliest beginnings of the phenomenal world. This implies that the struggles of history are unconscious or conscious efforts to attain the appropriate good. World history has an objective ethical dimension.

A fifth consequence of result of the fact of divine creation is that the historical process is essentially rational insofar as it is mandated by the “invisible yet rational God.”[123] Thus, it is divinely endowed with an innate purpose or goal and a correlated means of achieving this goal, i.e. the establishment of a global federal commonwealth united in “one common faith” achieved by means of the guidance of the successive Manifestations of God and the actualization of

humanity's intellectual and spiritual potentials. For this reason the holy Manifestations of God appear in the human world. They come to

educate and illuminate mankind, to bestow spiritual susceptibilities, to quicken inner perceptions and thereby adorn the reality of man -- the human temple -- with divine graces.[124]

Bahá'u'lláh explains the necessity for an orderly development in history:

Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation hath been vouchsafed unto men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light . . . Were it, all of a sudden, to manifest the energies latent within it, it would, no doubt, cause injury to all created things.... In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist.[125]

The divine Manifestations arrive in succession to inaugurate new dispensations, i.e. new steps towards the ultimate goal of world unity when humankind is socially, intellectually and spiritually ready to take the next step. This sequential order is rational in two senses of the word. First, it represents a 'natural' or 'organic' rationality in which each step is the fulfillment of the appropriate potentials (for the goal) of the previous step and the preparation for the actualization of the next stage. The underlying reason for each step is that it facilitates reaching the goal or final cause in an orderly manner. Second, the same principle applies in logical reasoning; each step in a chain of logical inferences must be the necessary and sufficient condition for the next inference. [126] Hegel's belief that the historical process functioned dialectically may have been mistaken, but his insight that there is an underlying rational sequence in history agrees with the Bahá'í Writings. Science also shows that the cosmic process itself is rational and orderly insofar as science is based on the observation that the universe works by means of classical and statistical laws and regularities.

We hasten yet again to add that the teleological and rational nature of the historical process does not necessarily deny individual free will. Our collective goal is pre-determined – the world commonwealth and the actualization of human potentials – but this does not pre-determine any of our personal decisions for good or bad. Morally speaking the individual remains free to make whatever choices s/he wants:

Some things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions; it is evident and clear that these actions are, for the most part, left to the will of man.[127]

In other words, individual free will operates within the context of a teleological historical process. To put it another way, God has determined the ultimate goal of the historical process insofar as He has endowed humanity with the potentials to work towards this goal, but as individuals we are personally and collectively free to decide whether or not to strive for this goal.

Furthermore, free will also means that we are free to do evil or to be “perverse.”

His purpose, however, is to enable the pure in spirit and the detached in heart to ascend, by virtue of their own innate powers, unto the shores of the Most Great Ocean, that thereby they who seek the Beauty of the All-Glorious may be distinguished and separated from the wayward and perverse[128].

God recognizes the difference between “the wayward and the perverse” choices that we make. Yet it is important to recall that without the potential of choosing evil, our will would not really be free. True freedom requires the right to do wrong. The Universal House of Justice explains,

Bahá'u'lláh also raises the possibility that possessing free will, human beings may well commit evil and "wittingly" break "His law." By the exercise of his free will, man either affirms his spiritual purpose in life or chooses to perpetuate evil by living below his highest station. The question is asked: "Is such a behaviour to be attributed to God, or to their proper selves?" And [Bahá'u'lláh] concludes: Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves.[129]

Consequently, the rationality of the historical process does not mean that there can be no disorder

because there most obviously is. However, this anarchy is accidental – the product of poor human choices and perversity – and is not essential to the historical process itself. Nor will man-made anarchy and crime divert the historical process from its ultimate goal. Even those who struggle to disobey and defy God will eventually discover that as the Qu’ran says, “they plotted, and God plotted; and God is the best of plotters.”[130] As the Báb states, “All are His servants and all abide by His bidding!”[131] In short, even their opposition will eventually be made to serve God’s purpose. This is reminiscent of Milton’s Paradise Lost in which God allows free will to Satan and his fallen angels and uses their evil actions as an opportunity to bring out greater good.[132] The same idea underlies Hegel’s concept of “the cunning of reason . . . [which] sets the passions to work for itself.”[133] Bahá’ís have a concrete example of this in our own history. The IRI sought to extirpate the Bahá’í Faith but by driving many Bahá’ís out of Iran, it effectively spread the Faith into more countries than ever before.

We should point out in passing that the Báb’s teaching forms the basis of a Bahá’í theodicy, i.e. an explanation of evil and its role in a divinely created universe. The basic question is, ‘If God is good, why does evil exist?’ According to the Writings, evil is “from yourselves”[134] as Bahá'u'lláh says, because evil is the result of our own free choices. (Evil choices should not be confused with genuine mistakes, accidents or inability.) If humankind is to have free will and freely love and worship God, the choice of evil must be possible since without it, good choices will merely be robotic. Unfortunately, we shall not be able to advance this topic in our paper.

End of Part 1 of 4

[1] Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, in Scholarship, p. 17; emphasis added;

[2] Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, 21, October, 1943 in Scholarship, p. 4’ emphasis added.

[3] Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, 5 July, 1949, in Scholarship, p. 11; emphasis added.

[4] Karl Popper, The Open society and its Enemies.

[5] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p.63.

[6] The ‘Big History’ movement begins its deliberations with the Big Bang and proceeds through evolution to human history.

[7] Kelly Boyd, Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writings, Vol. 1, p. 1245.

[8] Vladimir Lenin, The State and Revolution, #4,
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch01.htm> and Frederich Engels,

Anti-Duehring, Part 3, Chp. 2 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/anti-duhring/ch24.htm>

[9] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 162.

[10] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 202; emphasis added.

[11] Our remarks are confined to those grand narratives that apply to humanity as a whole, not to a particular nation, as for example with Sima Qian (China, circa 100.B.C.) and Ibn Battuta (14th Century CE).

[12] Matthias Reidel, “A Collective Messiah,”

http://www.revistamirabilia.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/2012_01_03.pdf

[13] Giambattista Vico, The New Science quoted in Gilderhus, History and Historians, p. 53.

[14] Mark T. Gilderhus, History and Historians: A Historiographical Introduction, p. 53.

[15] Ian Kluge, “Kant’s ‘Perpetual Peace’ and the Bahá’í Writings,” in Lights of Irfan, Vol. 13, 20012 or at <https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/kant-s--perpetual-peace--and-the-baha-i-writings.html>

[16] Immanuel Kant, Perpetual Peace and Other Essays, translated by Lewis White Beck, “Introduction,” emphasis added. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/kant/universal-history.htm>

[17] Immanuel Kant, Perpetual Peace and Other Essays, translated by Lewis White Beck, 8Th Thesis; emphasis added.

[18] Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 86.

[19] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 65.

[20] World History Association, Mission Statement, <http://www.thewha.org/about-wha/history-mission-and-vision-of-the-wha/>

[21] WHA, “Areas of Specialization,” <http://www.thewha.org/about-wha/areas-of-specialization-in-world-history/>

[22] David Christian, Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History.

[23] Grinin, Korotayev, Rodriguez, editors, Evolution: A Big History Perspective, p. 269.

[24] Juan J. Gomez-Ibarra, A Scientific Model of History.

[25] Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein and Immanuel Wallerstein, World-Systems Theory: An

Introduction.

[26] Sebastian Conrad, What is Global History?, p. 7.

[27] Sebastian Conrad, What is Global History? p. 7.

[28] J.R. MacNeil and W.H. MacNeil, The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History.

[29] Vladimir Alaykin-Izvekov, "Civilizational Science: The Evolution of a New Field," in Comparative Civilizations Review, Spring, 2011.

[30] Bahá'u'lláh Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXI, p. 217. Speaking of religions in general, Bahá'u'lláh says, "All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose."

[31] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 208; emphasis added.

[32] Pieter Geyl, Debates with Historians, p. 156.

[33] Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 208.

[34] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 118.

[35] `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 41.

[36] `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 339.

[37] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 108.

[38] Bahá'u'lláh Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XVI, p.39-40.

[39] `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 98.

[40] Bahá'u'lláh Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XIII, p. 19.

[41] Bahá'u'lláh Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXII, p. 51.

[42] For an in-depth discussion, see Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings" in Lights of Irfan, Vol. 14, 2013 or <https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/published-articles.html>

[43] Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p.31.

[44] Bahá'u'lláh Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXX, p. 136.

[45] `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 154.

[46] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXVII, p. 66.

[47] `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p 157.

[48] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 65.

[49] Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 7.

[50] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 298.

[51] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh XC, p. 178.

[52] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh CXXII, p. 259.

[53] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 7.

[54] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh CXXII, p. 259.

[55] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 6.

[56] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 196. See also p. 201.

[57] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 181.

[58] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 112.

[59] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 117;emphasis added.

[60] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 202; emphasis added.

[61] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 65.

[62] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 193.

[63] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 439.

[64] The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 214.

[65] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 7.

[66] Bahá'u'lláh Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214.

[67] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 107.

[68] Compilations, Bahá'í Scriptures, p. 107.

[69] Moojan Momen, The God of Bahá'u'lláh, <http://www.bahai.org/documents/essays/momen-dr-moojan/god-bahaullah>; emphasis added.

[70] “The shrewdness of God” is, of course, reminiscent of Hegel’s “the cunning of history” but I felt that ‘cunning’ has too many negative connotations to use in connection with God.

[71] `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 62

[72] `Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 90; emphasis added.

[73] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 233.

[74] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 108; emphasis added.

[75] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214.

[76] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 65.

[77] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 325; emphasis added.

[78] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 58.

[79] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 7.

[80] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 108.

[81] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p.121.

[82] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 65.

[83] One of the best contemporary books on this is Human Universals by anthropologist Donald E. Brown. See also The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature.

[84] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 36.

[85] As the French poet Lautreament says so memorably: such an attempted union of absolute differences would be like the chance meeting of a sewing machine and umbrella on an operating table.

[86] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 118.

[87] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 151.

[88] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 208.

[89] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 118.

- [90] Robert P Edgerton, *Sick Societies*, p. 43.
- [91] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 65.
- [92] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 65.
- [93] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah*, p. 203.
- [94] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 65.
- [95] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXIX, p. 253; emphasis added.
- [96] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXX, p. 136.
- [97] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 17; emphasis added.
- [98] Pitirim Sorokin as a similar vision of the alternation of sensate, ideational and integral culture types.
- [99] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah*, p. 202; emphasis added.
- [100] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 40.
- [101] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 144.
- [102] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLVIII, p. 318; emphasis added.
- [103] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 297.
- [104] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, II, p. 5; emphasis added.
- [105] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIX, p. 335; emphasis added.
- [106] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 58; emphasis added.
- [107] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 177; emphasis added.
- [108] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Arabic Hidden Words* # 4: "I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life."
- [109] J.R. McNeil and William H McNeil, *The Human Web: A Birds-Eye View of World History*.
- [110] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, "Of Miracles," Part I.

[111] Ian Kluge, July 9, A Dramatic Monologue.

[112] Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu.

[113] French Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin, similarly links natural and human evolution in The Phenomenon of Man.

[114] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 200; emphasis added.

[115] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 181.

[116] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 74.

[117] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 280. The Writings accept Aristotle's theory of four-fold causation.

[118] Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu.

[119] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 202.

[120] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 195.

[121] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 108.

[122] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p 128.

[123] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 112.

[124] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 330.

[125] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXXVIII, p. 87.

[126] Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings" in Lights of Irfan Vol 14, 2013.
<https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/>

[127] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 248.

[128] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXIX, p. 70; emphasis added.

[129] The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, p. 663.

[130] Qur'án 8:30 in Lawh-i-Sultan (Guardian Browne) Provisional translation.

[131] The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 216; emphasis added.

[132] John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book I, l. 159 – 165.

[133] Hegel, General Introduction in The Philosophy of History, trans by Robert S Hartman, III, 2, c. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/introduction.htm>

[134] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXVII, p. 149.GRAND NARRATIVES AND THE BAHA'I WRITINGS

Grand Narratives and the Bahá'í Writings Part 2

7: Essentialism and the Bahá'í Grand Narrative

The Bahá'í Writings and the metanarrative that grows out of them accept essentialism, i.e. the philosophical view that all things have specific nature and attributes that distinguish them from other things in a real and objective way. According to the Writings, all things have an essence, among them God[1]; “all created things;[2]” the human soul[3]; humankind[4]; justice[5]; beauty[6]; species of living things[7]; truth[8]; religion[9];“this new age”[10]; “existence”[11] and the spirit.[12] These references to the essence are even more wide-spread once we realise that such phrases as “inmost reality”; “the realities of,” the “inner reality,” and “inner realities” also refer to the essence of things.[13] As we shall demonstrate below, essentialism is the logical and ontological foundation of the doctrine of progressive revelation.

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, essences cannot be known directly and immediately by intuitive insight but can be known only indirectly by studying their actualized attributes or qualities:

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 . . . For example, the inner essence of the sun is unknown, but is understood by its qualities, which are heat and light. The inner essence of man is unknown and not evident, but by its qualities it is characterized and known. Thus everything is known by its qualities and not by its essence.[14]

This principle even applies to God:

That is to say, as things can only be known by their qualities and not by their essence, it is certain that the Divine Reality is unknown with regard to its essence and is known with regard to its attributes.[15]

These attributes are made known to us by the Manifestations.[16]

Furthermore, there are two kinds of attributes – essential and accidental. Essential attributes are those that a thing must have to be the kind of thing it is e.g. three wheels to be a tricycle. Accidental attributes are those which are “non-essential”[17] as illustrated in the statement that “that which is changeable is accidental, evanescent.”[18] The tricycle’s color can be changed and, therefore, may be seen as “evanescent” but the necessity of three wheels is permanent or essential. God, of course, has no accidental attributes since that would deny His unchangeable nature and perfect unity.

The distinction between essential and accidental attributes is the metaphysical foundation for progressive revelation. Writing about these two aspects of the divine teachings, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states,

Each one of the divine religions has established two kinds of ordinances: the essential and the accidental. The essential ordinances rest upon the firm, unchanging, eternal foundations of the Word itself. They concern spiritualities, seek to stabilize morals, awaken intuitive susceptibilities, reveal the knowledge of God and inculcate the love of all mankind. The accidental laws concern the administration of outer human actions and relations, establishing rules and regulations requisite for the world of bodies and their control. These are ever subject to change and supersedure according to exigencies of time, place and condition[19]

Elsewhere 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares,

We must remember that these changing laws are not the essentials; they are the accidentals of religion. The essential ordinances established by a Manifestation of God are spiritual; they concern moralities, the ethical development of man and faith in God. They are ideal and necessarily permanent -- expressions of the one foundation and not amenable to change or transformation. Therefore, the fundamental basis of the revealed religion of God is immutable, unchanging throughout the centuries, not subject to the varying conditions of the human world.[20]

Shoghi Effendi refers to this distinction between the essential and the accidental when he discusses the “eternal verities” that are permanent and underlie all religions in contrast to the “nonessential and spurious in their teachings.”[21] In a very apt metaphor, one author calls these “eternal verities” the “golden core”[22] of religion in contrast to the accidental adaptations to a particular time and place. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, “every one of the divine religions contains essential ordinances, which are not subject to change, and material ordinances, which are abrogated according to the exigencies of time.”[23] Moreover, he adds,

The second division comprises laws and institutions which provide for human needs and conditions according to exigencies of time and place. These are accidental, of no essential importance and should never have been made the cause and source of human contention[24]

Here we see how the Bahá'í principle of rejecting religious conflict of any kind is logically justified by its metaphysical basis in the essence/accident distinction. The rejection of religious conflict is not solely a matter of good will towards men but also a matter of strict philosophical reasoning. This also demonstrates 'Abdu'l-Bahá's dictum that “The world of minds corresponds with the world of hearts[25] insofar as our good will towards humankind is correlated to rational philosophical principles.

Finally, the essence/attribute distinction allows us to avoid the apparent contradiction between the unchangeable “eternal verities” which are absolute and unchangeable by virtue of being “eternal” and statement that “religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final.”[26] The seeming self-contradiction is solved by recalling that the changes are in the accidental or culture-bound attributes of a revelation and not in its unchangeable inner essence or “eternal verities.” This distinction meets the requirements of both stability and growth. The “eternal verities” provide a stable foundation for knowledge and faith, without which, ethics would be inescapably reduced to subjectivity and preference. The accidental qualities allow – under the guidance of the Manifestation for a specific age –

adaptation of the essentials to various cultural conditions.

8: The Ontology of Potentials

Another aspect of the metaphysics underlying the Bahá'í grand narrative of world history

is the ontology of potentials that characterizes the nature of created things. The ontology of potentials – which has its roots in Aristotle[27] – states that (1) all things are characterized or defined by particular set of potentials or changes they can or cannot undergo; (2) this set of potentials is their essence as a member of a species or group and as a unique individual within that group; (3) all things seek to actualize their potentials to an optimal degree, i.e. the principle of perfectibility which is especially true of the human soul.[28] This principle is at work in the doctrine of progressive revelation which depends on continual progress in our self-actualization to operate. Let us examine an example of these ideas. At birth, a puppy has a certain set of potentials that make it (a) a member of the dog species and (b) a specific set of potentials that make it a particular puppy. No matter what happens, it has no potentials to become a grasshopper or a duck. During its life-time, a dog can actualize its potentials for protection, playing Frisbee and Flyball and obeying certain commands. In most dogs, the potential to hunt and mate is unrealized. However, few if any beings – dogs or humans – exist long enough to actualize their full potentials for which reason unactualized attributes/potentials are necessary aspects of their essence. In that sense, there is a mystery in all created beings.

The Writings make it clear that potentials are not small physical ‘things’ embedded in an entity like raisins in a bun.[29] According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá potentials are present but not visible or apparent: branches and leaves are “in the seed, potentially, though not apparently.”[30] Elsewhere he states,

One of the functions of the sun is to quicken and reveal the hidden realities of the kingdoms of existence. Through the light and heat of the great central luminary, all that is potential in the earth is awakened and comes forth into the realm of the visible.[31]

The Writings reject strict empiricism in which being real is equivalent to being perceptible[32], and assert the existence of “intellectual realities” which “do not exist outwardly . . . that is to say, intellectual realities which are not sensible, and which have no outward existence.”[33] Furthermore, since potentials are an aspect of an entity’s essence, and the essence of things is not available for direct human knowledge[34] it follows that the potentials of things are not knowable, i.e. not visible to humankind. In the sciences, the subject of non-sensible and unpredictable potentials, i.e. hidden, undetectable possibilities is covered by the subject of

‘emergence.’ For example, nothing in oxygen and hydrogen atoms provides empirical evidence that the combination of these atoms, i.e. water, will (1) be clear; (2) be a liquid and (3) will expand when cooled below 4 degrees C unlike all other materials. This and other examples of emergence – the symmetrical and fractal based patterns of snowflakes – support the Bahá’í view of potentials.

The ontology of potentials is essential to the Bahá’í grand narrative insofar as it grounds the concept of the perfectibility of man which is itself essential to the doctrine of progressive revelation. According to Bahá'u'lláh we must “Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.”[35] Bahá'u'lláh informs us that only education can actualize these gem-like potentials and make them visible, and, thereby allow us to fulfill His command that “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”[36] It is important to notice the universal and categorical term “all” which tells us there are no exceptions to this purpose. The actualization of potentials and most especially the actualization of the higher spiritual potentials are vital to the goal of the unification of humankind. Only by striving for self-transcendence and self-overcoming can this goal be reached. [37]

Only by improving spiritually as well as materially can we make any real progress, and become perfect beings. It was in order to bring this spiritual life and light into the world that all the great Teachers have appeared. They came so that the Sun of Truth might be manifested, and shine in the hearts of men, and that through its wondrous power men might attain unto Everlasting Light.[38]

In this passage, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá connects the three concepts of spiritual and material progress with the doctrine of progressive revelation as initiated and guided by God’s Manifestations.

The ontology of potentials is the basis of an objective standard by which to measure human progress, i.e. the degree to which potentials have been actualized in any given individual or society. In regards to individuals – including ourselves – 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

The only real difference that exists between people is that they are at various stages of development. Some are imperfect -- these must be brought to perfection. Some are asleep -- they must be awakened; some are negligent -- they must be roused; but one and all are the children of God. Love them all with your whole heart; no one is a stranger to the other,

all are friends.[39]

This can be applied not only to individuals (including ourselves) who, for whatever reason, have not actualized their potentials but also to cultures and nations, as seen in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's question about Persia: "Must she now, for this contemptible sloth, this failure to struggle, this utter ignorance, be accounted the most backward of nations?"[40] Similarly, he says of Paris, and by extension, the West, that "her spiritual progress is far behind that of her material civilization."[41] Shoghi Effendi refers to "backward peoples"[42] in various parts of the world. The standard by which to assess progress is the degree to which this person, or this culture have actualized or expanded the actualization of their latent potentials. From a Bahá'í perspective, the answer seems clear: advanced individuals or cultures are those which have actualized the most potentials and provided more opportunities for more people to develop their potentials, i.e. their "inestimable gems."

However, it must be emphasized that the actualization of potentials must not be one-sided, especially in the materialist direction:

I want to make you understand that material progress and spiritual progress are two very different things, and that only if material progress goes hand in hand with spirituality can any real progress come about . . . The laws of God may be likened unto the soul and material progress unto the body. If the body was not animated by the soul, it would cease to exist. It is my earnest prayer that spirituality may ever grow and increase in the world, so that customs may become enlightened and peace and concord may be established.[43]

In other words, progress consists of the actualization of our material, intellectual and above all our spiritual potentials to the greatest degree possible in the greatest possible number of people. Of course, in light of the final goal of world history, we are all spiritually and/or materially "backward," albeit not necessarily in equal measure.

9: Controversies about Grand Narratives

Grand narratives are sharply criticized and strenuously rejected by contemporary postmodern philosophers, historians and cultural studies scholars. Since the Bahá'í Writings explicitly present a grand narrative, it is, in my view, imperative to understand at least some of these critiques and the possible answers – especially those from the Bahá'í Writings. Such knowledge is not only valuable to Bahá'ís engaged in teaching or apologetics but also to scholars of comparative religion and philosophy.

Ever since the publication of Spengler's Decline of the West (1919) and Toynbee's A

Study of History (1934 – 1961) grand narratives have been a highly controversial subject among philosophers, historians and cultural studies scholars. Among the philosophers, Karl Popper, an influential philosopher of science, was the most persistent and systematic opponent who not only rejected grand narratives as intellectually mistaken but also as a potent source of evil. In The Poverty of Historicism (1957) and The Open Society and Its Enemies (1962) Popper strives to undermine the philosophical underpinnings which make grand narratives possible. In so doing, he anticipates most of the postmodernist – e.g. Lyotard – critiques about the “totalization”[44] and “terrorism”[45] supposedly inflicted by metanarratives.

In The Poverty of Historicism and The Open Society and Its Enemies Popper blames metanarratives from Plato to Hegel and Marx for the rise of totalitarian regimes in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. In fact, he dedicated The Poverty of Historicism to all those who “fell victim to the fascist and communist belief in Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny.”[46] His objection to grand narratives and the implied ability to predict – or identify possible or probable developments – is that grand narratives lead to all the associated ills of totalitarianism with omnipresent state planning and *gleichschaltung*, i.e. an enforced coordination of all aspects of public and private life and the reduction of the individual to a mere means or tool of the state. For Popper grand narratives have no redeeming features.

According to Popper, grand narratives (although the term had not yet been invented) are a part of “historicism” which he defines as

an approach to the social sciences which assumes that historical prediction is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the ‘rhythms’ or the ‘patterns’ the ‘laws’ or the ‘trends’ that underlie the evolution of history.[47]

In Popper’s view, there are no laws manifested in history, which means, in effect, there are no regularities, patterns or trends to be seen and, therefore, no grand narrative to be established. Therefore, “History has no meaning.”[48] Because it has “no meaning” it has no goals or even a general direction, i.e. is not teleological. He continues, saying that, “There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life.”[49] With this statement, Popper, like the postmodernists, asserts a nominalistic view of history by breaking up all concepts of a universal ‘human history’ into a multitude of smaller individual histories of localities, nations and so on. Toynbee aptly describes Popper’s view as “antinomian”[50] insofar as the historical process is not subject to any regularity or law.

In light of our foregoing discussion of the Bahá’í grand narrative, the clash between the Bahá’í teachings and Popper’s views are inescapable. However, in our view, none of Popper’s critiques of metanarratives are especially salient, i.e. there is less than meets the eye. Let us begin with the four main weaknesses that undermine his argument.

The first weakness is blatant self-contradiction at the most fundamental level: to make his complaint about ‘historicism’ and grand narratives, Popper indulges in ‘historicism’ himself. He claims that there are no predictable patterns in history and yet he asserts the existence of such patterns on the basis of historical events in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Communist Russia and then predicts that such grand narratives necessarily and inevitably lead to totalitarian states.

If history has no pattern and cannot be predicted, on what basis does he make his prediction? And without evidence, i.e. patterns or laws – or even the possibility of evidence – why should we accept his word. him? On this score, Popper's argument is logically flawed and unpersuasive.

There is a second weakness, namely, if history is too complex to allow grand generalizations or grand narratives of history, then there is no basis for Popper's thesis that history lacks order and is too complex to be known. How could he know this if history is too complex to be knowable? Such a judgment already pre-supposes a complete knowledge of history – something he says is beyond us. The most he can say is that he can discover no order – but it does not logically follow therefrom that no order exists. Nor is his inability to find an order in history logically sufficient to reject all other attempts to disclose such order and meaning. In short, Popper asserts but he does not prove.

A third weakness is that Popper's denial of meaning in history is, in effect, no more than a proposal for a different meaning of history, i.e. for an alternate grand narrative of the historical process even though his argument supposedly forbids metanarratives. To say that human actions lack order and meaning and exhibit no value or purpose is, in effect, an alternative interpretation of history, albeit a negative one. This is no logical caprice such as claiming that 'nothing' is 'something.' Popper's negative metanarrative resembles positive metanarratives insofar they both embed a certain set of beliefs, principles and values and both prohibit certain other views. In short, both function in a similar manner. Popper's grand narrative endorses or at least encourages a particular set of beliefs and values, i.e. those usually associated with atheist secular humanism which recognizes humankind as the only source of values and only the physical as real.

Despite his arguments against grand narratives, Popper still feels the need for some sense of meaning in history: "Although history has no ends, we can impose these ends of ours upon it; and although history has no meaning, we can give it a meaning."^[51] Unfortunately, there is an obvious problem here. If we know that the historical process is intrinsically chaotic and complex beyond all human understanding, it is difficult to see how we can successfully "impose" our own order on it. Either this man-made order is entirely fictional and, therefore, of dubious, or it reflects or connects to something real in the historical process. However, in the latter case Popper's rejection of grand narratives would be at least partially false, i.e. there is at least some genuine order we can connect with.

The fourth – and the most important problem with Popper's theories – is clearly SHOWN by the Bahá'í Writings: history is turbulent and sometimes even chaotic but there is one constant throughout: human nature. The essential oneness of human nature is the field on which all the historical turmoil plays out. Whatever the historical events, the responses are inevitably shaped and limited by human nature itself. As W.H. Walsh notes, "history is properly concerned with human experiences,"^[52] adding that "History is intelligible . . . because it is a manifestation of mind."^[53] History is constituted by our understandings of and reactions to what we experience. R.G. Collingwood expresses the same idea as follows: "For history, the object to be discovered is not the mere event, but the thought expressed in it."^[54] Thought, "the object to be discovered" is also shaped and limited by human nature no less than action. The conclusion is inescapable: the human mind – or the "rational soul" as the Bahá'í Writings call it – is the underlying common denominator that unifies all the various histories of humankind. W.H. Walsh

concludes that “[A] fundamental set of generalizations, belonging to the science of human nature, is presupposed in all historical work.”[55]

The unity of human nature is a foundational principle of the Bahá’í Writings. It is most obviously evident at the physical level. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says,

When we observe the human world, we find various collective expressions of unity therein. For instance, man is distinguished from the animal by his degree, or kingdom. This comprehensive distinction includes all the posterity of Adam and constitutes one great household or human family, which may be considered the fundamental or physical unity of mankind.[56]

In other words, human nature as a whole is distinguished from animal nature and, therefore, humans make up one family that illustrates “the physical unity of mankind.” The sciences provide decisive evidence for this “physical unity.” It is self-evident that medical science, i.e. doctors, surgeons, physiologists and pharmacologists study the same basic texts the world over because our physiological processes and organs are essentially the same regardless of ethnic origins. Moreover, in the 1950’s, humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow established his widely influential[57] hierarchy of physical, psycho-social and even spiritual needs which characterize human nature everywhere.[58] All humans have D-needs for survival – air, water, food, shelter, protection, appropriate clothing and opportunities to look after ourselves – and B-needs which we need not to survive but to thrive, to be fulfilled as specifically human individuals. Among these needs are purpose and meaning, friendship and appreciation.

Further evidence for the essential oneness of mankind comes from anthropology and cognitive science. As noted by prominent anthropologist Donald E Brown in Human Universals, “human biology is a key to understanding many human universals.”[59] In The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature, Steven Pinker, a cognitive scientist, explores the philosophical history leading to the rejection of the concept of a universal human nature. Based on but also extending the work of Donald Brown, he lists over three hundred traits as universal.[60]

The Bahá’í Writings also inform us that the universal attributes of humankind are not only physical but also spiritual and intellectual:

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[61]

The message is clear: regardless of culture, time, place or circumstance, all people share one human nature because they all have a rational soul. We also share a higher, spiritual nature and a lower animal nature which the higher nature must control.[62] In addition, we all possess “spiritual susceptibilities”[63] which must be cultivated in order to make spiritual progress possible. Since there is a universal human nature it must be manifested in historical human actions. Indeed, a universal ethic is also possible because of our universal human nature insofar as at least some ethical rules apply to everyone at all times and in all places. Since God is the

creator of human nature, no one is better qualified than God to establish what this ethic is and His Manifestations to reveal it. As Shoghi Effendi notes, all the Manifestations teach the “eternal verities . . . [64] Consequently, there are objective ethical standards valid across all cultures, places, times and circumstances and that cross-cultural moral judgments are possible.

Not only is human nature universal, it is also stable over time, i.e. it is stable in history. This is evident in Shoghi Effendi’s statement that the successive Manifestations “restate the eternal verities”[65] over the course of human history. If human nature changed, then the “eternal verities” would not be relevant or applicable any longer. `Abdu'l-Bahá, reinforces this point when, writing of evolution, he says that man’s “species and essence undergo no change.”[66] In short, human nature is constant. The actualization of hidden and latent potentials is not, of course, a change in nature but a fulfillment or completion of our nature. Such actualization of potentials is what occurs during the historical process that, in the Bahá'í grand narrative, culminates in a world-wide federal commonwealth united by “one common faith.”[67]

Another criticism of grand narratives is that they do not follow the methods of ‘scientific history.’ The demand for ‘scientific history’ is itself problematic and, therefore, weak. It is hard to know what this demand is supposed to mean. Clearly, grand narratives cannot follow the methods of the experimental sciences though it can follow the scientific method of forming a hypothesis, gathering evidence, testing the hypothesis and then arriving at a conclusion. However, as we shall see, the three writers examined by this study – Spengler, Toynbee and Sorokin – fulfill the requirements of the scientific method.

However, if by ‘scientific’ we mean limiting all conclusions to what can be directly and literally documented, then R.G. Collingwood makes the obvious point that history is more than just documentable events and is the history of “the thoughts out of which these events grew?”[68] Elsewhere he says, history cannot be limited to external events. William H McNeil expresses this issue more dramatically, commenting that “ink-soiled paper does not and never has embraced all the parameters of human life with which historians might appropriately concern themselves.”[69] William H Dray notes, “For it is surely the historian’s task . . . not only to establish the facts, but to understand them. And this will involve him in giving explanations.”[70] Explanations require interpretations and interpretations lead to judgments. He adds,

Application of the evidence criterion to history isn’t contentious: we do not find theorists arguing that history should be written in contravention of the evidence. Nonetheless, to ask how and to what extent the evidence should guide historical accounts does permit substantive debate . . . The extent to which historical accounts are constrained by the evidence invites consideration of the question of under-determination. It may be that historical accounts are determined by the evidence to a significantly lesser extent than are scientific accounts; in particular in so far as those historical accounts are interpretive or narrative.[71]

Other criticisms of grand narratives assert that they require the marginalization of certain knowledge, beliefs, and peoples as individuals or groups. This critique is invalid insofar as the Bahá'í teachings reject the marginalization of people and argue for the essential oneness of

mankind. However the marginalization of people is not the same thing as the marginalization of ideas and knowledge-claims. Marginalizing individuals qua individuals cannot be justified but, the entire concept of ‘progress’ which is integral to the Writings (see below) necessitates leaving some knowledge behind as mistaken, impractical, malevolent or even “the outcome[s] of human perversity”[72] as Bahá'u'lláh says of “a few” religions. The rejection and marginalization of human beings and the rejection and marginalization of ideas, knowledge, beliefs and customs are not at all the same things. Bahá'u'lláh’s foregoing words about some religions as the “outcome[s] of human perversity” demonstrates, the Bahá'í Writings themselves show no hesitation in rejecting certain beliefs as false and superstitious and, in the case of a few religions, even perverse. Indeed, the Writings clearly acknowledge the existence of “error”[73], “idle fancies and vain imagining,”[74] “ignorance,”[75] “heedlessness and superstition,”[76] “futile”[77] and even “absurd.”[78] Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh advises us to “meditate profoundly . . . so that light may be distinguished from darkness, truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error, happiness from misery, and roses from thorns.”[79] In other words, the Writings privilege some truth-claims over others because this is necessary to human progress. Indeed, the whole concept of progress which plays such an essential role in the Writings, means that some knowledge, some beliefs, some practices must be abandoned, i.e. permanently marginalized. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh’s assertion that “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization”[80] virtually requires us to leave behind all those beliefs, attitudes, loyalties and practices that hinder progress, and most notably, those that hinder progress towards the unification of humankind. His statement also requires us to recognize that humanity as a whole shares the same divinely given task.

A final critique of grand narratives is that they artificially impose a pattern or agenda on the historical process. It is difficult to understand this critique since to one degree or another, all histories except, perhaps, the simplest lists of names or events can avoid some ‘imposition’ – but even there we cannot avoid some choice of what to include and leave out and, thereby, the judgments and interpretation doing so entails. All histories must do this and more: choices about what to accept as evidence (documents, oral traditions, eye witnesses, logical deductions); judgments about importance and relevance; meaning and implications of various kinds. Thus, making imposing patterns a special misdeed for grand narratives is an obvious case of special pleading. Imposing an ‘agenda’ is no unique sin of metanarratives. Nor is it necessarily dishonest or obfuscating if we are open about writing to prove a certain viewpoint. Such statements of intent allow readers to investigate for themselves and form independent judgments. Moreover, criticizing an author like Toynbee for finding religious truths illustrated in history seems hypocritical in light of the respectful reception given to Marxists like Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson. Marxism itself is a grand narrative and those who work within the Marxist metanarrative are fleshing out smaller fragments of it. In our view, the common sense attitude to this issue lies with Sebastian Conrad’s defense that the concept of world history is, in principle, no less viable than other, more limited, historiographical theories and practices.[81] Such efforts are not inherently and necessarily flawed and, therefore, cannot be rejected a priori.

10: Global Grand Narratives

To help us understand the nature of grand narratives of global history in particular, we

must reflect on two inter-connected problems – scale and order. All global grand narratives claim that if we study history on a world scale we will be able to observe patterns of that are not visible at sub-global scales. However, this leads to a problem with other historians who work with smaller units of study such as nations. Georg Iggers writes that world historians like Fukuyama and Huntington are not

taken seriously in recent historiography not only because of the political implications of their work but also because they operate on a speculative plane of global history alien to historians who avoid such schemes in their empirical work. However, the developments of past decade and a half have shown that neither the turn to micro-history nor the older patterns of national and regional history are sufficient for dealing with the transformations that are taking place on a global scale . . . it is indisputable that there are processes of modernization taking place before our eyes, most clearly in the scientific, technological and . . . economic spheres, and . . . [modernization] has transformed societies globally . . . [and] must be taken seriously on a world scale.[82]

Sebastian Conrad makes a similar point arguing that contrary to what opponents[83] of grand narratives assert,

No unit [local, national, global] of study is inherently superior . . . No unit is the one and only true unit of inquiry. What is more, different units direct our attention to different processes. Different units . . . are not only different windows on the same subject, but each window allows us to see processes that might not have come into view through another window. The common criticism that the grand narratives get the details wrong is beside the point – they aim at larger processes and trends.[84]

In other words, there are some kinds of historical knowledge we can only obtain by taking a larger, global view. This is not difficult to illustrate. A close sociological study of a family lets us focus very specifically on individual situations, self-images, familial dynamics, motives and actions among other things. We acquire detailed knowledge of individuals. However, such a narrow study does not tell us much about the trends and patterns in family life at the regional or even national level. Indeed, at the smaller scale, such knowledge is not available for observation. In statistics it is established that a small sample size is unreliable for drawing general conclusions about very large groups of people because some causal factors, correlations, trends and patterns only become significant when the sample size is sufficiently large. Appropriate sample size also washes out the outliers, those anomalies that can easily distort the knowledge we get from small scale studies. The difference in gathering knowledge at different scales is why historian William H McNeil states, “historian’s fixity of attention on national and local affairs is misleading.”[85] Similarly, Sebastian Conrad explains, “Global history thus acknowledges the causal relevance of factors that do not lie within the purview of individuals, nations, and civilizations.”[86] What the foregoing discussion suggests is that insisting that only one scale or perspective is valid, denies us access to knowledge that may be essential to humankind.

Sebastian Conrad rejects complaints about grand narratives getting factual details wrong as being “beside the point”[87] because grand narratives “aim [] at larger processes and trends.”[88] Larger processes or statistical sample sizes are not as sensitive to errors in detail as

smaller processes and sample sizes where they can have undue influence on a smaller pool of data. Conrad makes the same point about errors allegedly found in meta-historians like Arnold Toynbee and Oswald Spengler. By itself, the existence of the outlier or detail error is not enough to disprove anything in large scale studies. W.H. Walsh makes the same point by saying that in the sphere of global history “a man can be wrong in detail and sound in essentials.”[89] To assert that an outlier or error invalidates a general trend or pattern or a grand narrative, we must show in each case the reasons why this difference causes a severe distortion in the pattern that has been found. The mere assertion of error is not enough. We shall now get into more details of the Bahá’í grand narrative in comparing and contrasting them with the work of Spengler, Toynbee and Sorokin

End of Part 2 of 4

Footnotes

- [1] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 148.
- [2] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,, p. 111.
- [3] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXXII, p. 159.
- [4] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 184.
- [5] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXXIII, p. 167.
- [6] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLI, p. 321.
- [7] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CXXXVIII, p. 300.
- [8] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLIII, p. 328.
- [9] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 344.
- [10] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 304.
- [11] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,, p. 157.
- [12] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,,p. 167.
- [13] For a complete list with specific references, see Ian Kluge, “The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá’í Writings” in Lights of Irfan, Vol. 4, 2003 and Ian Kluge, “Bahá’í Ontology: Part One: An Initial Reconnaissance” in Lights of Irfan Vol. 6, 2005 and “Bahá’í Ontology: Part Two

Further Explorations, Vol, 7, 2006; or <https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/> .

[14] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 220; emphasis added.

[15] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 220.

[16] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 147.

[17] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. 3, p. 562.

[18] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 416.

[19] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 338; emphasis added.

[20] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 365.

[21] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 108.

[22] Alexander Skutch, The Golden Core of Religion.

[23] The Promulgation of Universal Peace 106.

[24] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 393; emphasis added.

[25] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 270; emphasis added.

[26] Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh 58; see also the Preface to The Promised Day is Come.

[27] Ian Kluge, "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Baha'i Writings," in "Lights of Irfan Lights of Irfan, Vol. 4, 2003 or <https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/>

[28] `Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 85.

[29] To argue that in living things, DNA is the physical potential simply pushes the problem back into an infinite regress. From what did DNA arise and get the ability to determine development? As a result of this infinite regress we eventually conclude that something non-material, i.e. an essence must be part of the explanation.

[30] `Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 199; emphasis added.

[31] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 74; emphasis added. See also p. 186.

[32] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 297.

[33] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 186; emphasis added.

- [34] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 220.
- [35] Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, CXXII, p. 259.
- [36] Baha'u'llah, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, CIX, p. 214.
- [37] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 143.
- [38] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 63.
- [39] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 171.
- [40] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 8.
- [41] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 27.
- [42] Shoghi Effendi, The Unfolding Destiny of the British Baha'i Community, p. 25.
- [43] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 108.
- [44] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p.34.
- [45] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, p.63.
- [46] Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, the dedication page.
- [47] Karl Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, p. 3.
- [48] Karl Popper, The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol. 2, p. 269.
- [49] Karl Popper, The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol. 2, p. 270.
- [50] Arnold Toynbee, quoted in "Toynbee" in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volume 7/8, p. 153.
- [51] Karl Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. 2, p. 278; emphasis added.
- [52] W.H. Walsh, Philosophy of History, p. 45.
- [53] W.H. Walsh, Philosophy of History, p. 49.
- [54] R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, p. 214.
- [55] W.H. Walsh, Philosophy of History, p. 71. We might note in passing that if the basis of history is the "science of human nature" then grand narratives have at least a scientific basis, and, in the Baha'i case, represent a close convergence of science and religion.

- [56] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 190; emphasis added.
- [57] A Review of General Psychology survey, published in 2002, ranked Maslow as the tenth most cited psychologist of the 20th century; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Maslow
- [58] Abraham Maslow, *Towards a Psychology of Being*. 1962.
- [59] Donald E Brown, *Human Universals*, p. 6. Brown adds “the study of universals has been effectively tabooed as an unintended consequence of assumptions that have predominated in anthropology and other social sciences.” p. 6.
- [60] Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, p. 433 – 439.
- [61] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 208.
- [62] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 118.
- [63] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 339.
- [64] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 107.
- [65] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 108.
- [66] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 183,
- [67] `Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 65.
- [68] R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, p. 132.
- [69] William H. McNeil, *Mythhistory and Other Essays*, p. 73.
- [70] William H Dray, *Philosophy of History*, p. 5; emphasis added.
- [71] Mark Day, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 55; original emphasis.
- [72] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXI, p. 217.
- [73] Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 149.
- [74] Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 15.
- [75] Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Question*, p. 6.
- [76] Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh, p.95.

[77] Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 278.

[78] Abdu'l-Baha, Tablet to August Forel, p. 18

[79] Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-Iqan, p. 8.

[80] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214.

[81] Sebastian Conrad, What is Global History?, p. 8 and throughout the book.

[82] Georeg G. Iggers, Historiography in the Twentieth Century, pp. 155 – 156; emphasis added.

[83] British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper one of Toynbee's severest critics described "Toynbee's work as a "Philosophy of Mish-Mash." Pieter Geyl described Toynbee's ideological approach as "metaphysical speculations dressed up as history" Walter Kaufmann also sharply rejected Toynbee. French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard who invented the terms 'grand narrative' made the rejection of such narratives an integral part of postmodernism.
http://www.liquisearch.com/arnold_j_toynbee/reception_and_criticism

[84] Sebastian Conrad, What is Global History?, p. 133 – 134; emphasis added.

[85] William H McNeil, Mythistory and Other Essays, p. 79.

[86] Sebastian Conrad, What is Global History, p. 89.

[87] Sebastian Conrad, What is Global History, p. 134.

[88] Sebastian Conrad, What is Global History, p. 134.

[89] W.H. Walsh, Philosophy of History: An Introduction, p. 166.

Grand Narratives and the Bahá'í Writings Part 3

PART B

The Bahá'í Grand Narrative and Spengler, Toynbee and Sorokin

Oswald Spengler's two-volume The Decline of the West published in Germany in 1918 is one of the best known metanarratives of the 20th Century. Despite the largely academic

controversies surrounding his two volume magnum opus, it is still widely available in various translations and in both book and e-format which suggests that it still arouses interest. In 1952, H. Stuart Hughes wrote that despite the “bitter invective, icy scorn, urbane mockery or simply pretending that it is not there,”[1] Spengler’s work continues to attract readers and generate “intellectual excitement.”[2] Half a century later, Neil McInnes’s article “The Great Doomsayer”[3] provides a cavalcade of the major contemporary thinkers who have been influenced by Spengler, despite his continued poor reputation amongst academics. Among them we find Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History* and *The Origins of Political Order*; Hans Robert Jauss, the originator of reception theory; Henry Kissinger; F. Scott Fitzgerald; and Michael Foucault.[4] Others include Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, Theodor Adorno, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, Camille Paglia, Ernest Hemingway and Hans Morgenthau.[5] His far-reaching influence alone makes his ideas worth careful study. Adda B Bozeman notes this need for more careful study in “Decline of the West? Spengler Reconsidered.”[6] W. Reed Smith explains Spengler’s and Toynbee’s contemporary relevance in his 2009 article “Megalopolis versus Social Retardation: The Continuing Relevance of the Views of Spengler and Toynbee on the Variability of the Rate of Cultural Change.”[7] Mehdi Mozafari’s *Globalization and Civilization* also notes Spengler’s wide-ranging influence on contemporary thought.[8] Neil McInnes points out that if nothing else, “there gradually arose after Spengler a sustained interest in what was variously called the science of civilization, cultural studies and comparative macrosociology.”[9] A renewed appraisal of Spengler’s continued relevance was published in 2001 by John Farrenkopf, a professor of history and political science.[10] This curious contrast between Spengler’s negative reception among academic historians and his widespread influence among major writers and thinkers is something that requires further exploration. Such a serious disconnect suggest that something important is being overlooked in his work. Later, we shall see that the same may be said of Arnold Toynbee.

In its outlines, Spengler’s theory is clear. The first issue to note is Spengler’s distinction between ‘Culture’ and ‘civilization.’ As such, this distinction does not exist in the Bahá’í Writings. For Spengler, Culture is the phase in which all later civilizations have their start; according to Spengler, “The Civilization is the inevitable destiny of the Culture.”[11] The transition from Culture to Civilization is “the victory of the inorganic megalopolis over the organic countryside which was henceforward to become spiritually ‘the provinces.’ ”[12] W. Reed Smith notes,

The California wine country may still be semi-rural, but it is nevertheless thoroughly megalopolitan in outlook and lifestyle. One can live in rural Mississippi and still be thoroughly megalopolitan in outlook. Indeed, megalopolitanism is a world-view, a way of life; and although it is springing forth from the overgrown urban centers such as New York and Los Angeles, it cannot and should not be misunderstood to be somehow limited to people living within the city limits of the great cities.[13]

Culture contains all the potentials that it and its subsequent civilization can actualize. Culture is the time of true creativity in all areas of human endeavor and a time genuinely experienced religiosity. Perhaps the most basic aspect of a culture is its “world-feeling”[14] i.e. its feeling about the nature of reality as, for example, inherently alive, or inherently sacred, or, or as an image of a greater reality, or, as in materialism, inherently utterly passive or ‘dead.’ This underlying “world-feeling” shapes all of a culture’s artistic, intellectual and practical activities. What Spengler says about mathematics and different theories of number in the following passage is true of everything else:

We find an Indian, an Arabian, a Classical, a Western type of mathematical thought and, corresponding with each, a type of number — each type fundamentally peculiar and unique, an expression of a specific world-feeling, a symbol having a specific validity which is even capable of scientific definition, a principle of ordering the Become which reflects the central essence of one and only one soul, viz., the soul of that particular Culture.[15]

Another important aspect of the “world-feeling” is the “Destiny-idea [in which] the soul reveals its world-longing, its desire to rise into the light, to accomplish and actualize its vocation.”[16] Spengler believes that the eight ‘high cultures’ he has selected possess the “Destiny-idea” to a superlative degree although he admits that “to no man is it entirely alien.”[17] In other words, both individuals and cultures possess a “Destiny-idea” at least during their growing cultural phases. For Spengler, “world-feeling,” “Destiny-idea” and “prime symbol” are connected.

the Destiny-idea manifests itself in every line of a life. With it alone do we become members of a particular Culture, whose members are connected by a common world-feeling and a common world-form derived from it. A deep identity unites the awakening of the soul, its birth into clear existence in the name of a Culture, with the sudden realization of distance and time, the birth of its outer world through the symbol of extension; and thenceforth this symbol is and remains the prime symbol of that life, imparting to it its specific style and the historical form in which it progressively actualizes its inward possibilities[18]

The “prime symbol” which is connected to the “world-feeling” and “Destiny-idea” grows out of the intuitions of space and time whose importance has been grossly underestimated by academic

historians.[19] For the Classical or Apollonian Greek world, time and space were a single point in the present as illustrated for example in ancient Greek drama. Greek drama required (1) unity of time: the action could take no more time than the duration of the play; (2) unity of space: the action could not require a change of scene; (3) unity of action: there could only be one action/plot with only minimal subplots, if any. Throughout *The Decline of the West*, Spengler shows how Greek culture, e.g. mathematics and art reflected their prime symbol of ‘oneness.’ Greek philosophy, for example, was heavily focussed on the problems of the one and the many, being and becoming, essence and attribute – all of which are aspects of their prime symbol. Western, or Faustian culture’s prime symbol was “an infinitely wide and profound three dimensional space”[20] as reflected in the invention of calculus, i.e. the mathematics of movement and approaching infinity; in invention of multi-dimensional, i.e. unlimited geometries, and the fugue which is an attempt at infinite complexity in music. The Magian or Arab, Hebrew and Iranian prime symbol is a cavern which is marked by

that “Semitic” primary-dualism which , ever the same under its thousand forms, fills the Magian world. The light shines through the cavern and battlers against the darkness (John i, 5) Both are Magian substances. Up and down, heaven and earth become powers that have entity and contends with one another.[21]

In more general terms, the Magian Cavern is an inherently mysterious place inhabited by enigmatic and shadowy beings whose cryptic struggles are reflected in the sinewy complexities of Arabesques and in the transformations of algebra. [22]

As in the Bahá’í Writings, each culture and civilization lasts about one thousand years the last centuries of which are a hardening of flexible creative culture into a civilization which marks the final phase of its existence. Moreover, each culture is an organic entity that passes through its phases of development without any chance of deviation. In human terms, this process resembles human growth, from birth, to childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood and old age. More commonly, though, Spengler uses the seasonal cycle as his organic analog; here, too, there is no chance of avoiding the inevitable. No act or cultural-political program can deflect this order. The last season – the one in which Spengler locates us – is winter, which is dominated by technology, commercialism and vulgarity. It is in the winter phase that the “Destiny-idea” is “overpowered by matter-of-fact feeling and mechanizing thought.”[23] In other words, most people no longer have any ability to conceive of themselves anything more than physical beings with a super-natural destiny of vocation. They feel soul-less and rootless who confuse being lost with being free. This time of confusion gives rise to a period of “let’s pretend” spirituality or what Spengler today would call ‘new age hocus pocus,’ along with the mock-spirituality of Hollywood supernaturalism intended to entertain. However,

The fact that the latter [pseudo spirituality] is possible at all foreshadows a new
and genuine spirit of seeking that declares itself, first quietly, but soon emphatically
and openly, in the civilized waking consciousness . . . [However] The material of the
Second religiousness is simply that of the first, genuine, young religiousness.[24]

He also sees the loss of genuine religiosity as a sign of the autumn and winter season, i.e. taking over a culture:

It is this extinction of living inner religiousness, which gradually tells upon even the most insignificant element in a man's being, that becomes phenomenal in the historical world-picture at the turn from the Culture to the Civilization, the Climacteric of the Culture, as I have already called it, the time of change in which a mankind loses its spiritual fruitfulness for ever, and building takes the place of begetting. Unfruitfulness — understanding the word in all its direct seriousness — marks the brain-man of the megalopolis, as the sign of fulfilled destiny, and it is one of the most impressive facts of historical symbolism that the change manifests itself not only in the extinction of great art, of great courtesy, of great formal thought, of the great style in all things, but also quite carnally in the childlessness and "race-suicide" of the civilized and rootless strata,

a phenomenon not peculiar to ourselves but already observed and deplored — and of course not remedied — in Imperial Rome and Imperial China.[25]

As a civilization approaches its end, it also experiences a "Second Religiousness"[26] which is marked by a "deep piety." [27] However,

neither in the creations of this piety nor in the form of the Roman Imperium is there anything primary and spontaneous. Nothing is built up, no idea unfolds itself — it is only as if a mist cleared off the land and revealed the old forms, uncertainly at first, but presently with increasing distinctness. The material of the Second Religiousness is simply that of the first, genuine, young religiousness — only otherwise experienced and expressed . . . finally the whole world of the primitive religion, which had receded before the grand forms of the early faith, returns to the foreground, powerful, in the guise of the popular syncretism that is to be found in every Culture at this phase.[28]

Because all cultures pass through the same life-cycle in the same seasonal order for

roughly the same length of time, the meaning of the word ‘contemporary’ is decisively altered inasmuch as events may be separated by a thousand years, but if they occur at the same phase or season in the life cycle of two cultures, these events are ‘contemporary.’ For example, Spengler sees Julius Caesar and Napoleon as contemporaries because they fulfilled the same basic role at the same point in the seasonal cycle albeit in different cultures. Both mark the beginning of the winter season of their cultures.[29] Furthermore, the history of a culture is predictable insofar as the specific phases of development can be foretold as well as the sub-phases, such as the “second Religiousness” or, in the last phases of civilization, “Caesarism” i.e. the rule of strong leaders able to impose their will on society as well as the rule of money. Ironically, Caesarism “grows on the soil of Democracy”[30] although it eventually asserts itself over popular will, money or aristocracy. According to Spengler, the West is now in the middle of its winter or civilizational phase.

As cultures harden into the winter of civilization the “destiny-idea” in individuals is replaced by “matter-of-fact-feeling and mechanizing thought.”[31] Spengler does not limit the “Destiny-idea” to any particular race, class, nation or culture. The eight “high Cultures” he mentions are simply the outstanding achievers among humanity. The intuited “Destiny-idea” “manifests itself in every line of a life”[32] and connects us by a common world-feeling and a common world-form”[33] to the culture in which we live. For Spengler, destiny is more important than external causality because destiny is what we choose to do as opposed to what is forced upon us. Our intuition of time and space becomes “the prime symbol of that [cultural] life, imparting to it its specific style and the historical form in which it progressively actualizes its inward possibilities.”[34] The hidden influence of the “prime symbol” shapes all aspects of life in every culture as it actualizes its potentials.

According to Spengler, “High Cultures” are the true focus of historical studies, not nations, races, states or empires. The latter are subunits of what Spengler calls “High Culture”[35] which are subject to the seasonal cycles. There have been eight major cultures in the past: the Babylonian, Egyptian, Chinese, Indian, Mayan/Aztec, Classical Greco-Roman, Arabian (including Jewish and Persian) or Magian, Western or Euro-American. These are “high Cultures.”[36]

The group of the high Cultures is not, as a group, an organic unit. That they have happened in just this number, at just these places and times, is, for the human eye, an incident without deeper intelligibility.[37]

This list demonstrates two important aspects of Spengler’s theory of history. First, not all cultures are “High Cultures” i.e. cultures with a strongly developed “Destiny-idea” and the

subsequent unity and strength that grow out of this idea. Second, “High Culture” is not dependent on a biological conception of race as shown by the presence of only one Western or Euro-American High Culture. In fact, Spengler had no use for biological and darwinian concepts of race, and, like Nietzsche, thought of ‘race’ as a matter of character, style and form, and tradition.[38] His list includes no African cultures – he does not, of course, think Egyptian culture was Black – because from his perspective no “High Cultures” existed in Africa. As the rest of his list shows, biological race was not a factor in this judgment. His contempt for Hitler – despite the Nazis’ attempt to enlist Spengler as a fore-runner – is wittily summarized by his statement that Germany needs a hero, “not a heroic tenor.”[39] In regards to the Jews, he viewed the tensions between Jewish and Christians as being about cultural heritage, not blood.

The foregoing examples of Spengler’s method of historical study reveal three important aspects of his work.

First, he unequivocally rejects the linear view of history as a progressive sequence from ancient to modern with its implied superiority of Western culture. He regards this as a distorted view of history. [40] In Spengler’s view, there is no progress in history – cultures simply go through their life-cycle but they are not working towards anything but the actualization of their potentials as their natural goal. The Writings and Spengler are in glaring disagreement about progress as indicated by the Bahá’í doctrine of progressive revelation and Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.”[41] However, this progress is not confined to any one particular culture but – as the ‘riverine’ metaphor of the Bahá’í grand narrative suggests – is made with contributions from different cultures at different times. No one culture or people bears the entire burden of making progress. However, the progress made by humankind is objectively real and the Writings set an objective standard for assessing progress in both individuals and cultures: the degree of actualization of inherent physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities. More advanced cultures actualize more potentials in more people than less advanced cultures. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, implicitly applies this standard when he speaks of some peoples and tribes as “savage”[42] and the necessity for education i.e. actualization of the intellectual and spiritual capacities to lift them out of this state. [43] He asks, rhetorically,

How long shall we drift on the wings of passion and vain desire; how long shall we spend our days like barbarians in the depths of ignorance and abomination? God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it.[44]

In contrast, Spengler does not think that any such standards among cultures and civilizations exist and, therefore, there is no such thing as ‘progress’ in history. He is unable to do so because

the monadic nature of each culture and civilization make impossible the application of any common standard of assessment.

Second, Spengler rejects the limitations of ‘scientific’ history, i.e, the belief that

history joins astronomy and volcanology in being an evidentially but non-experimental discipline . . . Nonetheless, to ask how and to what extent the evidence should guide historical accounts does permit substantive debate . . . It may be that historical accounts are determined by the evidence to a significantly lesser extent than are scientific accounts; in particular in so far as those historical accounts are interpretive or narrative.[45]

Historical understanding based strictly on material evidence is, in Spengler’s view,

inappropriate and insufficient for dealing with the complexities and depths of human thought, feeling, personal and socio-political action values, religion and culture. Concepts like “world-feeling,” “Destiny-idea” and “prime symbol” play an extremely important role in the inner, often unconscious motivation for actions, beliefs and values. That is why, in his view, we also need intuition, empathy and ‘einfuehlung’[46] (‘feeling our way into the life and perspective of another being’) are necessary in the process of understanding, explaining and interpreting history.[47] Because history is made by humans, we need not only facts but also assessment and interpretation of facts and their implications. In other words, according to Spengler, the ‘hard’ basic facts of history are necessary but not sufficient to understand the past that humans make. This conclusion has a major impact on how we view – and write – history.

In regards to historical methodologies, there is a clear convergence – though not full agreement – between the Bahá’í Writings and Spengler. Both agree that by themselves, “materialistic” methodologies and attitudes,”[48] i.e. methods and attitudes limited to what can be known via documents or other physical evidence – are insufficient for an adequate understanding of the past. Humanity cannot be understood by way of its physical remnants alone. However, the Writings go further than Spengler (or Dilthey) insofar as they see the necessity of developing our “spiritual susceptibilities” which includes “the quickening of mental capacity.”[49] With such a spiritually-based “quickenings” of our intellects historians will be able gain new, and hitherto invisible, insights into the historical process. In other words, clinging to the “materialist methodologies” hinders the progress of acquiring historical insights both for Spengler and the Bahá’í Writings.

Third, Spengler studied history not on the basis of sequential events and cause-and-effect relationships but rather on the basis of forms, structures and functions, or, as he put it, “morphologically.”[50] He completely rejects the division of history into ancient, medieval, renaissance and modern as being Euro-centric and, thereby, distorted. Instead, he focussed on the repetitions that occurred as cultures went through the various phases in their life-cycles. His morphological studies examine the forms, structures and functions in which cultures express their ideas, feelings, art, sciences, religion and politics among others. He found there are amazing correspondences and analogs between unalike cultures in the same phases of existence.

One of the most controversial aspects of Spengler’s theory is that each culture is self-contained and can neither influence or be influenced by other cultures. The reason is, to paraphrase Thomas Aquinas, whatever influence is received from the outside, is always received in the terms of the receiver’s beliefs[51] i.e. in ways that the receiver can understand. This is also because each culture has its own “world-feeling,”[52] “Destiny-Idea” and “prime symbol” are essentially incomprehensible to other cultures. Their fundamental “world-feelings,” “Destiny-ideas” and “prime symbols” are too different for that to happen. Each culture can only see other cultures from its own perspective and, therefore, never really ‘contact’ or understand the other culture in itself.[53] The influence that is ‘sent out’ is not the same as the influence that arrives. Intercultural influence as usually understood does not occur. Furthermore, [c]onnotations are not transferable’[54] are an enormous part of any culture’s communication. Because each culture is essentially isolated each culture also has its own character that shapes all aspects of its life, beginning with the “world-feeling” and including the sciences, arts, philosophy, mathematics, music and religion. The Bahá’í Writings, as will be shown below, reveal the serious short-coming of this view.

One of the unavoidable consequences of that cultures are self-enclosed monads is a strong epistemological and ethical relativism. ‘Truth’ is truth for one culture – there are no universal truths just as there is no universal good. As we shall see later, Spengler undermines his own position in this regard by positing a number of universal attributes of humans and cultures.

6.1: Comparing the Bahá’í Writings with Spengler

One of the first questions we might ask vis-a-vis the Bahá’í Writings and Spengler is if there are any correlations with Spengler’s “Destiny-idea,” “world-feeling,” and “prime symbol.” In our view, the strongest such correlation concerns the “Destiny-idea.” The Bahá’í Writings

exemplify the concept of “Destiny-Idea” insofar as the Manifestations have a general and a unique mission that informs all cultures They inaugurate. 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares that

The mission of the Prophets, the revelation of the Holy Books, the manifestation of the heavenly Teachers and the purpose of divine philosophy all center in the training of the human realities so that they may become clear and pure as mirrors and reflect the light and love of the Sun of Reality[55]

This is the general mission of all Manifestations. However, each Manifestation also has a unique mission within the historical process. In addition to their station of “essential unity”[56] the Manifestations have another station.

The other station is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation, and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined revelation, and specially designated limitations.[57]

From this perspective, each culture inaugurated by the Manifestation as a general purpose or mission and a particular task in achieving the general mission. In this way a “Destiny-idea” is imparted to the cultures receiving guidance from the Manifestations.

In our understanding, the Writings also exemplify what Spengler calls “world-feeling,” i.e. our attitude and feelings about the world around us. For example, it is possible to have a “world-feeling” of mistrust as in Sartrean existentialism, a power struggle as in Marxism or Fascism, or disenchantment as in much modern literature and philosophy. The fact that all things but especially humanity exemplify the names of God is, indeed, a “re-enchantment of the world” as a sacred place, and all beings as fundamentally sacred. Every being is a moment of divine revelation in its own way.

How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled

or surpassed.[58]

In our view, Bahá'u'lláh's statement expresses the Bahá'í "world-feeling" of the sacred nature of reality and the high station of humankind and its spiritual vocation and destiny. This "world-feeling" pervades the Writings and should pervade Bahá'í life. Indeed, this statement is a potent encapsulation of many Bahá'í teachings as well as the Bahá'í "world-feeling."

In our view the "prime symbol" in Spengler's sense of the term, in the Bahá'í Writings is 'light' which, of course, implicitly includes space since light has to be 'somewhere,' i.e. perceived in some perceptual or conceptual space. (Spengler's "prime symbol" involves varying intuition of space.) The pervasive sun, light and dark imagery used throughout the Writings; the emanationist metaphysics associated with the image of the sun[59]; and the importance of 'planes' suggest – to this author at least – that light is the underlying symbol of the Writings.

Another concept important to Spengler is 'pseudomorphosis' which happens when

an older alien culture lies so massively over the land that a young Culture, born in the land cannot get its breath and fails not only to achieve pure and specific expression forms, but even to develop its own self-consciousness.[60]

This concept has some obvious similarities to post-colonial situations in which an alien culture smothers or almost smothers a newer culture struggling for existence. Although the concept of pseudomorphosis has no counterparts in the Writings, it is relevant in another, pragmatic way. It serves to alert us to the temptation or danger of allowing "an attempt [to be] made to impose, on the Bahá'í community's own study of the Revelation, materialistic methodologies and attitudes antithetical to its [the Faith's] very nature."[61] A pseudomorphosis is precisely what might happen if such an imposition of "a purely materialistic interpretation of reality [were] imposed on scholarly activity of every kind, at least in the Western world."[62] Those who support such a "materialistic framework . . . have even gone so far as to stigmatize whoever proposes a variation of these [materialistic] methods as wishing to obscure the truth rather than unveil it."[63] To forestall a pseudomorphosis – at least in the culture of scholarship – it is necessary to avoid undue reliance and trust on "materialistic methodologies."

Perhaps the most important similarity between the Bahá'í grand narrative and Spengler

are the concepts of societies, the world, cultures and civilizations as being organic in nature. In other words, they embody highly complex inter-active relationships that transcend the mere sum of their constituent parts. The underlying belief that the Writings and Spengler share is that society is more than a collection of atomic, i.e. separate and distinct individuals who are not intrinsically connected in any way. Rather, society has an emergent character, i.e. a nature or essence that cannot be reduced to its constituent parts. A classic illustration of emergent characteristics is water which has qualities and behaviors that cannot be reduced to or predicted from oxygen and hydrogen by themselves. When two hydrogen and one oxygen atom are joined, a whole new level or plane of reality becomes manifest with new, hitherto unknowable attributes such as liquidity and expansion when frozen. The organic view of society makes the same point about groups of individuals. Bahá'u'lláh points to this organic nature of society when He says, "Regard the world as the human body." [64] 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of "the great body of human society" [65]

The seasonal analogy supports the organic view of society insofar as we are expected to take it seriously as a model for a natural process it directs our analysis and judgment into that direction. Moreover, 'Abdu'l-Bahá relates the physical and spiritual seasons in Some Answered Questions in a series of passages too long to quote here. [66] In this section, he explains the correspondences between the physical and spiritual seasons. After explaining the physical and spiritual spring, summer and autumn, he says,

and winter arrives -- that is to say, the coldness of ignorance envelops the world, and the darkness of human error prevails. After this come indifference, disobedience, inconsiderateness, indolence, baseness, animal instincts and the coldness and insensibility of stones. It is like the season of winter when the terrestrial globe, deprived of the effect of the heat of the sun, becomes desolate and dreary. When the world of intelligence and thought has reached to this state, there remain only continual death and perpetual nonexistence. [67]

It must be noted that "nonexistence" in the Writings is relative, i.e. it means 'existent' or 'nonexistent' relative to something that is higher or lower in the scale of being. For example, the human world is nonexistent from the perspective of the mineral world because the mineral world cannot perceive and comprehend mankind's existence. [68] The spiritual world of the "rational soul" does not exist for the animal soul. In other words, by living more according to their "animal instincts" and not according to the "rational soul," people slip into 'nonexistence' in regard to their specifically human capacities.

Spengler agrees that societies and cultures are organic in nature. H. Stuart Hughes writes,

Spengler called his method ‘morphological.’ That is, it represented an application to history of the biologists’ concept of living forms. Each culture, in his view, was an organism, which like any other living thing went through a regular and predictable course of birth, growth, maturity and decay. Or in more imaginative language, it experienced its spring, summer, autumn, and winter. This biological metaphor provided the conceptual frame giving unity and coherence to the rest.[69]

As already noted, the Writings accept the organic “conceptual frame” for thinking about culture.

In addition to the seasonal metaphor, the Writings also use the metaphor of human growth from birth to old age as an explanatory principle in understanding the life-cycles of societies and cultures. For example, Shoghi Effendi writes

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.[70]

Obviously, the seasonal and the human growth metaphor deliver the same message: societies and cultures are living things and go through the appropriate phases of development and, eventually, die. Such a life course applies to all living things, i.e. is predictable. The Writings and Spengler agree on this issue.

Predictability is one of the most controversial issues in regards to historical metanarratives. Can historians predict future events and/or developments? Of course, Bahá'u'lláh can do so – and does so in His letters to the monarchs of Europe – but He is a Manifestation with privileged access to timeless knowledge. Ordinary historians lack such divine insight. However, they can – if they wish – make use of three sources of information to make well informed guesses about the general course of coming events. The first is the recognition of repeating patterns in the past, for example, all cultures undergo birth and death; power struggles

occur within them; the deaths are often violent. There is a long history of historians finding various patterns even in our time as seen in the rise of “Big History” and Global History[71] as an academic discipline and such publications as *The Human Web* by two distinguished historians.[72] These studies provide positive reasons for believing such patterns are real.

The belief that there are patterns in the historical process is supported by the universality of human nature. The Bahá’í Writings recognize the oneness of human nature explicitly, while Spengler’s vision of detailed correspondences in the phases of eight unconnected “High Cultures” implicitly pre-supposes the universality of human nature. The Bahá’í Writings go even further – they predict specifics such as the decline and degeneration of religion and civil society, the arrival of a new Manifestation and the persecution and ‘war’ against the new faith. The exact outward attributes of these events depends on time, place and situation but the essential events re-occur. That is because human beings are specific kinds of entities and, therefore, have a wide but limited range of responses to situations. There are, for example, only so many ways to deal with a severe drought: we can stay and try to survive; we can migrate to better weather; we can make deals for food e.g. labor; we can wait for others to donate food; or we can plunder food from other groups either by raids or outright conquest. Since human nature is universal, i.e. human responses to various situations fall within certain parameters – as we see in clinical and social psychology – we would logically expect repeating patterns and a resulting ability to predict the future, at least in outline.

The third support for belief in historical patterns comes from the organic nature of society. Like all other organisms and organizations, societies have needs that must be met for survival. For example, as the Writings indicate, unity or social cohesion based on a common goal and/or world-view; they also need structure and a willingness to work within it.[73] It is possible to predict that if these needs are not met, society will disintegrate.

The organic metaphors have a number of far-reaching consequences in regards to our understanding of cultures and history. One of the most important is how they shape the relationship between the individual in society, especially in regards to freedom. To exist, organisms require a balance between the nature and the interests of the individual and the nature and interests of the whole, i.e. society. Cancer, for example, is precisely the result of this balance being lost and individual cells going out of control, act only for their own interests and, thereby, destroy the organism itself. In short, it is an excess of individual ‘liberty’ by one part at the expense of the whole. That, i.e. the necessity of “reciprocity,”[74] in organic systems is why the Bahá’í Writings do not present individual liberty as an isolated end-in-itself that trumps all other values under all circumstances. It is an important value but not the only one and, therefore, must be balanced with others. For that reason, Bahá’u’lláh states, “We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others.” [75] He adds,

men Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much of understanding may favorably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men.[76]

Indeed, He goes on to warn us that “If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.”[77]

He also states,

Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition, whose flames none can quench. Thus warneth you He Who is the Reckoner, the All-Knowing. Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance . . . Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness . . . We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others. We, verily, are the All-Knowing.[78]

In our understanding of this declaration, the rights of the individual should not extend to the point of damaging the society on which s/he depends, or to demean “the dignity of his station” as a human being. Spengler has similar ideas about freedom of which he says, “now what is understood by freedom is in fact indiscipline,”[79] which rejects the “submission” we need to act in accordance with our “dignity.” Elsewhere, Spengler says, that people want “freedom from something;”[80] i.e. something that “is always, purely negative. It consists in the repudiation of tradition, dynasty, Caliphate.”[81] These words imply, that freedom – as stated by Bahá’u’lláh – needs to be ‘disciplined,’ i.e. kept within proper bounds in order not to become a destructive part of the social organism.

As noted above, cultures and dispensations inevitably decay and die and will be replaced. Bahá’u’lláh and Spengler agree that modern Western civilization is in its winter phase. Spengler tries to comfort us by saying that there is nothing we can do about this[82] and that like ancient Rome, the time for greatness in art, philosophy and great literature is past, and that engineers, financiers and inventors are the genuinely pre-eminent ‘philosophers’ of our time.[83] He sums up his view by saying “We have descended from the perspective of the bird to that of a frog.”[84] I suspect 'Abdu'l-Bahá would approve of this metaphor which suggests we have fallen

from a spiritual or transcendental view of the world to a lower, strictly materialist view of reality.

Living in the winter or old age of a culture is extraordinarily difficult even if we know that a new and even greater will arise from the ruins of the old. Shoghi Effendi refers to the

steadily deepening crisis which mankind is traversing, on the morrow of the severest ordeal it has yet suffered, and the attendant tribulations and commotions which a travailing age must necessarily experience, as a prelude to the birth of the new World Order, destined to rise upon the ruins of a tottering civilization[85]

Bahá'u'lláh predicts the world's "perversity will long continue.[86] Statements like these are not negativistic but, on the contrary, are intended encourage an 'evolutionary attitude.' Such an attitude ensures we do not become obsessively attached to any particular cultural or dispensational form and defend it as the necessary and final form a society or a religion can take. These dire predictions may also be seen as an intellectual anti-dote against clinging to the past. We might also see it as an on-going reminder to remain humble. In summary, this life-cycle model of history emphasizes that cultures and dispensations are both unique and limited in the potentials they have to actualize and that cultural death is normal. Shoghi Effendi makes a similar point about the fall – and rise – of cultures saying,

Such simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind.[87]

However, the Bahá'í Writings differ from Spengler insofar as they note that the exhaustion and fall of one civilization is closely connected to the rise of a new one through the influence of a new Manifestation. The new culture originates with the inspirational power of a new Manifestation until it, too, is exhausted and disintegrates.[88] This sequence of events constitutes the basis of progressive revelation which is another Bahá'í concept incompatible with Spengler's grand narrative. In his view, there is no progress in any human activities; instead, there is only an accumulation of absolutely irreconcilable creations rooted in different "world-feelings," "Destiny-ideas," and "prime symbols." Consequently, Spengler advocates epistemological and ethical relativism because he does not believe there is any objective, 'Archimedean point' from which to judge as to truth and morality. On this score, too, he is in

conflict with the Bahá'í Writings which see the Manifestation i.e. Bahá'u'lláh, as being such an ‘Archimedean point.’ Moreover, Spengler’s relativism also requires him to reject progressive revelation since the idea of progress entails making epistemological and moral judgments about the value, moral legitimacy and truthfulness of cultural practices and achievements. However,

Spengler’s relativism must not be conflated and confused with Shoghi Effendi’s statement that for Bahá’í’s, “religious truth is not absolute but relative.”[89] In our understanding, Shoghi Effendi refers to the manner in which “religious truth” is expressed is “relative,” i.e. adapted for specific times, places and circumstances but does mean that the essential religious truths, the “eternal verities,”[90] are dependent on us or our situations.[91]

Indeed, unlike the Writings, Spengler sees no connection between the rise and falls of the “high Cultures” and in that sense, history is random and irrational. In his view, no real contact between cultures and civilizations is possible. The Bahá’í Writings, on the other hand, see the fall of one civilization as the necessary prelude to the ascent of the next. Precisely because the destruction of the old is necessary for the construction of the new. Speaking of contemporary Christianity, Shoghi Effendi states, it

weakened, and was contributing, in an increasing measure, its share to the process of general disintegration -- a process that must necessarily precede the fundamental reconstruction of human society.[92]

In regards to these twin disintegrative and integrative processes, Shoghi Effendi notes,

How striking, how edifying the contrast between the process of slow and steady consolidation that characterizes the growth of its infant strength and the devastating onrush of the forces of disintegration that are assailing the outworn institutions, both religious and secular, of present-day society![93]

In other words, in the Bahá’í grand narrative correlates a process of disintegration with a process of construction and integration, both of which work simultaneously because both have the same immediate cause, viz. a new dispensation inaugurated by a new Manifestation of God. The disintegrative phase is also necessary because without it, the new dispensation and culture would have no space to grow and expand. Knowledge of the twin processes also gives Bahá’í a confidence in life in the contemporary historical processes and, thereby, protection against depression, despair and the temptations of nihilism in regards to the future. Unfortunately, in

Spengler's theory of cultures as isolated monads and no connection between the fall and rise of cultures, such pessimism, despair and nihilism come all too easily. We should also note at this point that Spengler's concept of a "Second Religiousness" does not correspond to the arrival of a new Manifestation and surge of new spiritual energy; rather, it refers to a fresh but uncreative burst of enthusiasm for old religious forms and in that sense is a reactionary not revolutionary development.

Another major similarity between the Writings and Spengler is the view that cultures and civilizations are based in religion and succumbs with the fall of religion:

Every soul has religion, which is only another word for its existence. All living forms in which it expresses itself — all arts, doctrines, customs, all metaphysical and mathematical form-worlds, all ornament, every column and verse and idea — are ultimately religious, and must be so . . . As the essence of every Culture is religion, so — and consequently — the essence of every Civilization is irreligion — the two words are synonymous . . . It is this extinction of living inner religiousness, which gradually tells upon even the most insignificant element in a man's being, that becomes phenomenal in the historical world-picture at the turn from the Culture to the Civilization the Climacteric of the Culture . . . the time of change in which a mankind loses its spiritual fruitfulness for ever, and building takes the place of begetting . . . the change manifests itself not only in the extinction of great art, of great courtesy, of great formal thought, of the great style in all things, but also quite carnally in the childlessness and "race-suicide" of the civilized and rootless strata, a phenomenon not peculiar to ourselves but already observed and deplored — and of course not remedied — in Imperial Rome and Imperial China.[94]

The Bahá'í Writings see "Divine Revelation" and the cultures that arise from it, as "orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final." [95] In other words, the Manifestations do not appear in accidental order but appear according to the evolutionary needs of humankind. As we have already mentioned above, the Bahá'í view is that history is rational, not fortuitous. By contrast, no inherent order exists between the rise and fall of Spengler's "High Cultures."

This sequence of events constitutes the basis of progressive revelation which is another Bahá'í concept incompatible with Spengler's grand narrative. In his view, there is no progress in any human activities; instead, there is only an accumulation of absolutely irreconcilable creations rooted in different "world-feelings," "Destiny-ideas," and "prime symbols." Consequently, Spengler advocates epistemological and ethical relativism because he does not believe there is any objective, 'Archimedean point' from which to judge as to truth and morality. On this score, too, he is in conflict with the Bahá'í Writings which see the Manifestation i.e. Bahá'u'lláh, as being such an 'Archimedean point.' Moreover, Spengler's relativism also requires him to reject

progressive revelation since the idea of progress entails making epistemological and moral judgments about the value, moral legitimacy and truthfulness of cultural practices and achievements. However, Spengler's relativism must not be conflated and confused with Shoghi Effendi's statement that for Bahá'í's, "religious truth is not absolute but relative." [96] In our understanding, Shoghi Effendi refers to the manner in which "religious truth" is expressed is "relative," i.e. adapted for various times, places and circumstances but does mean that the essential religious truths, the "eternal verities," [97] are dependent on us or our situations. [98]

Considerations like these lead to the question, 'Is knowing about such patterns and the possibility of prediction useful to us?' First, it seems obvious that we can expect different attitudes and actions between a world-view that sees history as having some explainable order and one that sees history as a haphazard sequence of events. Bahá'í who sees the twin processes of disintegration and construction at work now and in the past, will actually be able to view the current world situation with an attitude of hope, a sense of meaning, a clear sense of values, a clear commitment to purposive action and a sense of compassion for those who flounder in confusion in the changes of our time. Such knowledge provides understanding of our spiritual, social and political environment and with such understanding comes a certain sense of control; confidence; an enhanced capacity to analyze, assess and judge; in other words, it enhances our capacity for rational thought and – sometimes – even for rational action. These psycho-spiritual assets may seem trivial when limited to an individual but can have enormous socio-political impact if wide-spread throughout society. It might conceivably affect leadership decisions – although we find this unlikely given the need for popularity to win elections. However, the understanding facilitated by a knowledge of future historical phases, allows us to evaluate current developments and policies vis-à-vis the inevitable changes that must come.

Historical patterns enable us to make predictions about the future but we must still determine if these predictions are general and/or specific. Knowing in which season we are e.g. winter allows us to predict some of the phenomena mentioned in the Writings, as the attributes of the winter season:

Divisions appear, firmness is changed into instability, and spirits become dead; hearts
anguish, souls become inert, and winter arrives -- that is to say, the coldness of
ignorance envelops the world, and the darkness of human error prevails. After this
come indifference, disobedience, inconsiderateness, indolence, baseness, animal instincts
and the coldness and insensibility of stones. It is like the season of winter[99]

Shoghi Effendi is even more explicit about the general trends:

The signs of moral downfall, consequent to the dethronement of religion and the enthronement of these usurping idols, are too numerous and too patent for even a superficial observer of the state of present-day society to fail to notice. The spread of lawlessness, of drunkenness, of gambling, and of crime; the inordinate love of pleasure, of riches, and other earthly vanities; the laxity in morals, revealing itself in the irresponsible attitude towards marriage, in the weakening of parental control, in the rising tide of divorce, in the deterioration in the standard of literature and of the press, and in the advocacy of theories that are the very negation of purity, of morality and chastity -- these evidences of moral decadence, invading both the East and the West, permeating every stratum of society, and instilling their poison in its members of both sexes, young and old alike, blacken still further the scroll upon which are inscribed the manifold transgressions of an unrepentant humanity.[100]

However, while general trends and patterns may be predictable, nothing in either the Writings or Spengler allows us to make specific predictions about future events. Of course, this applies to us and not to Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'u'lláh, for example, foretold specific events like the catastrophes awaiting France and Germany and the downfall of Sultan Abdu'l-Aziz.

[1] H. Stuart Hughes, Oswald Spengler, p. 1.

[2] H. Stuart Hughes, Oswald Spengler, p. 2.

[3] Neil McInnes, "The Great Doomsayer," in The National Interest, Summer, 1997.
<http://nationalinterest.org/bookreview/the-great-doomsayer-oswald-spengler-reconsidered-915>

[4] Neil McInnes, "The Great Doomsayer", in The National Interest, Summer, 1997.
<https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-19657029/the-great-doomsayer>

[5] Wikipedia, "The Decline of the West,"
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Decline_of_the_West#Reception

[6] Adda B Bozeman, "Decline of the West? Spengler Reconsidered" in VQR, Spring 2016,
[http://www.vqrone.org/essay/decline-west-spengler-reconsidered](http://www.vqronline.org/essay/decline-west-spengler-reconsidered)

[7] W. Reed Smith, "Megalopolis versus Social Retardation: The Continuing Relevance of the Views of Spengler and Toynbee on the Variability of the Rate of Cultural Change." in Comparative Civilizations Review, Vol 61, Fall 2009.
<https://journals.lib.bsu.edu/spc/index.php/CCR/article/viewFile/12966/12830>

[8] Mehdi Mozafari, Globalization and Civilization,
2002; <https://www.questia.com/read/108216509/globalization-and-civilizations>

- [9] Neil McInnes, “The Great Doomsayer”, in *The National Interest*, Summer, 1997.
- [10] John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Doom: Spengler on World History and Politics*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001.
- [11] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 31.
- [12] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 148.
- [13] W. Reed Smith, “Megalopolis versus Social Retardation: The Continuing Relevance of the Views of Spengler and Toynbee on the Variability of the Rate of Cultural Change.” in *Comparative Civilizations Review*.
- [14] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 59.
- [15] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 118.
- [16] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 118.
- [17] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 118.
- [18] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 174.
- [19] Spengler spent part of his university studies in advanced mathematics.
- [20] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 174.
- [21] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 233.
- [22] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p.
- [23] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 118.
- [24] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 310.
- [25] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 359.
- [26] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 310.
- [27] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 310.
- [28] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 310 – 311; emphasis added.
- [29] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 418.

[30] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 464.

[31] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 118.

[32] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 174.

[33] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 174.

[34] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 174.

[35] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 179.

[36] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 179.

[37] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 37.

[38] H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, p. 124 – 127.

[39] H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, p. 127.

[40] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p.17.

[41] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* CIX, p. 214.

[42] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 18.

[43] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 214.

[44] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 3; emphasis added.

[45] Mark Day, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 55; emphasis added.

[46] This term was introduced by Wilhelm Dilthey in his theory of historical studies.

[47] William H Dray, *Philosophy of History*, p. 5.

[48] The Universal House of Justice, 1997, July 20, "Scholarship and Related Subjects." Ocean.

[49] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 340.

[50] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 4.

[51] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 76, Article 1, Objection 3.

[52] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p.14.

[53] This is the Kantian – or solipsistic – side of Spengler and much contemporary philosophy: all things are locked into their own perspectives. This view has become a political and social ideology in the 21st Century.

[54] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 57.

[55] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 60.

[56] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXII, p. 52

[57] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXII, p. 52.

[58] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XC, p. 176.

[59] Bahá'u'lláh,, *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 234; *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 60; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 14, 59 89, 256, 286, 313, 423; *Some Answered Questions*, p. 108, 202, 203, 294, 295;

[60] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 189.

[61] The Universal House of Justice, 1998, March 19, Complete Compilation on Scholarship, Ocean.

[62] The Universal House of Justice, 1997 Jul 20, Scholarship and Related Subjects. Ocean.

[63] The Universal House of Justice, 1998 Feb 08, Materialistic Elements in Academic Scholarship, p. 4.

[64] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXX, p. 254.

[65] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 233; *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 33; Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 122.

[66] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, "Spiritual Proofs," p. 72

[67] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, "Spiritual Proofs," p. 75.

[68] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.

[69] H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler*, p. 10.

[70] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 202.

[71] See, for example, Global History degrees at Heidelberg http://www.uni-heidelberg.de/courses/prospective/academicprograms/global_history_en.html or the Oxford University Centre for Global History, <http://global.history.ox.ac.uk/>

- [72] J R McNeil and William H McNeil, *The Human Web*, 2003.
- [73] Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahai World*, 1950 – 1957, p. 103.
- [74] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 338.
- [75] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIX, p. 335.
- [76] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CX, p. 216.; emphasis added.
- [77] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXIV, p. 342.; emphasis added.
- [78] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIX, p. 335.
- [79] Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, Vol.1, P. 292.
- [80] Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 413; emphasis added.
- [81] Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, Vol. 2, p. 456.
- [82] Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 44.
- [83] Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 44.
- [84] Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 43.
- [85] Shoghi Effendi, *The Citadel of Faith*, p. 39.
- [86] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXI, p. 118; emphasis added.
- [87] Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 72.
- [88] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West* 3, p. 173.
- [89] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 115.
- [90] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 108.
- [91] This depends on the distinction between appearance and underlying reality and essence and accidental attribute. For an example of this distinction see *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 199.
- [92] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 186.
- [93] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 154.

- [94] Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Vol. 1, p. 358 – 9.
- [95] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 115.
- [96] Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 115.
- [97] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 108.
- [98] This depends on the distinction between appearance and underlying reality and essence and accidental attribute. For an example of this distinction see *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 199.
- [99] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 75.
- [100] Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, p. 114.
- [101] Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?*, p. 57.
- [102] J.R. McNeil and William H. McNeil, *The Human Web*, p. 6.
- [103] The Bab, *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, p. 216.
- [104] Stephen Epstein, “History Man” in *The Weekly Standard*, December 13, 2010, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/history-man/article/520688>
- [105] Hugh Trevor-Roper, “Testing Toynbee’s System” in Ashley Montague editor, *Toynbee and History*, p. 122.
- [106] W. H. Walsh, “The End of a Great Work,” in Ashley Montague, editor, *Toynbee and History*, p. 125; original emphasis.
- [107] Pieter Geyl, *Debates with Historians*, p. 185.
- [108] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 4, p. 36.
- [109] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVI, p. 213.
- [110] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 97; also *A Study of History*, Volume 1, p. 271.
- [111] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 97.
- [112] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study in History*, Volume 1, p. 233, states “we must infer that the capacity for civilization is not a monopoly of an fraction or fractions of the human family . . . there is no warrant for supposing that one particular fraction – the Black Race – has been born

without this birthright and is congenitally incapable of civilization just because it has failed to make one of these creative contributions so

far.” Toynbee would probably not have written this if knowledge about the Kingdoms of Kush or Benin or the Empire of Ghana had been prevalent in his time. It would be fascinating to see how his theories fit these civilizations. In his final, one volume abridgement, Toynbee refers to “the philosophies of the African Civilizations” p. 161; also p. 71.

[113] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 96.

[114] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 3, p. 192

[115] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 2, p. 322 – 392.

[116] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 2, p. 291.

[117] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 132.

[118] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 58.

[119] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 29.

[120] The Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973*, p. 57.

[121] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 138.

[122] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 137.

[123] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 3, p. 192.

[124] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 140.

[125] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 197.

[126] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 12, p. 75.

[127] Ian Kluge, “Reason and the Bahá’í Writings,” in *Lights of Irfan* # 14, 2013.

[128] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 12, p. 81.

[129] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 328.

[130] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 1, p. 249; Volume 1, p. 270; Volume 3, p. 125; emphasis added.

[131] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 378.

[132] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 168; emphasis added.

[133] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 140.

[134] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 166.

[135] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 334.

[136] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 108.

[137] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 326.

[138] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 326.

[139] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 326.

[140] Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour*, p. 23.

[141] Shoghi Effendi, *The Citadel of Faith*, p. 39.

[142] CF Volney, *Les Ruins*, in *Oevres Completes*, p. 12 – 13 in Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 161.

[143] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXVII, p. 149.

[144] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 4, p. 245.

[145] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 4, p. 261.

[146] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*," p. 161.

[147] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156.

[148] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*," p. 169.

[149] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*," p. 363.

[150] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 161.

[151] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 162.

[152] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 171.

[153] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 180

[154] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 194.

[155] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 108.

Grand Narratives and the Bahá'í Writings Part 4

Toynbee and Pitirim Sorokin

7: Toynbee and the Bahá'í Grand Narrative

Arnold Toynbee is one of the most controversial historians of the 20th Century, the main reason for this being his twelve volume magnum opus *A Study of History*, published between 1934 and 1961. In the years before he died, Toynbee, with the aid of Third Reich historian Jane Caplan, released a huge one volume abridgement of his twelve volume magnum opus in which he gave his final responses to criticisms and made final adjustments to his ideas. This is the text to which we shall generally refer because it represents Toynbee's thought in its final form. When necessary, we shall consult his original twelve volume work. An incredibly prolific author, Toynbee also wrote more than a dozen works about history and historiography. It is worth noting that Toynbee was highly critical of the West's representation of Islamic cultures decades before Edward Said.

The reception of Toynbee's *A Study of History* was and remains sharply divided. He is the only historian to have been on the cover of *Time* magazine (March 17, 1947) which indicates just how famous he had become – and still is – among the general public. During the 1990's, his advocacy of a civilizational rather than national approach to history has gained "renewed currency"^[1] with the rise in academia of Big History, Global History, World Systems Theory and the World History Association. Sebastian Conrad's book, *What is Global History?* suggests that in light of social, economic and cultural globalization, civilizational not national studies of history not only will but must come to the fore. Particularly noteworthy on this issue of the words of J R McNeil and William H McNeil, who write in *The Human Web* that history shows

clear patterns of increasing development and expansion in communication, trade, ideas, and competition throughout history. They write, “So the general direction of history has been toward greater and greater social cooperation – both voluntary and compelled – driven by the realities of social competition.”[2] This statement strikes a Bahá’í ‘note’ for three reasons. First, it asserts that history has a “direction” or goal; second, it harmonizes with Shoghi Effendi’s statements about the expansion of the social units, i.e. the expansion of co-operation; third, this development will occur with or without the consent or wishes of the historical actors. As the Bab says, “All are His servants and all abide by His bidding!”[3] From a Bahá’í standpoint, the only major omission here is failure to refer to the Manifestations. These new developments in historiography suggest that Toynbee – and Spengler and Sorokin – dogs have simply been too far ahead of his time for a majority of academics.

Among academic historians, however, the response to his work ranges from open hostility and even mockery to respectful and carefully reasoned disagreement. According to H. Trevor-Roper, Toynbee was “the Messiah” of his own concocted “religion of Mish-Mash …

his mind is . . . fundamentally anti-rational and illiberal.”[4] Trevor-Roper misreads Toynbee as saying that we should “all creep back under the skirts of a received medieval church.”[5] In contrast to Trevor-Roper’s spleen, we have the respectful but rigorous critique of W.H. Walsh, an important philosopher of history who asks if “any amount of historical knowledge can serve as an adequate ground of such deductions about the meaning of history as are drawn here?” [6] The problem with this question concerns what is included “historical knowledge.” Toynbee, like Spengler, answer this important question by showing the limits of strictly empirical knowledge and the need for empathy, intuition, and judgment in understanding history and acquiring “historical knowledge.” Pieter Geyl is similarly meticulous but respectful in his criticism of “apriorism”[7] i.e. Toynbee’s imposition of his ideas upon the historical materials. There is one major problem with this critique. First, it is easy to make but virtually impossible to prove. The extreme wealth of historical data in Toynbee’s twelve volume opus does not support the belief that Toynbee’s schema did not develop from or engagement with his empirical studies. It is not credible to assert that such breadth and depth of engagement did not play a major role in the formation of his schema. In fact, we know empirical evidence played a key role in shaping his ideas because they led Toynbee to revise his conclusions in Volume 12 and in his personal one volume abridgement. Second, the apriorism critique can be made of almost any historical study, because bare facts seldom simply ‘speak for themselves’ – they must be evaluated and understood and doing so requires bringing other, external concepts to bear. The Holocaust provides a classic example. There is no physical document of any kind linking Hitler personally to the Wannsee Conference (January, 1942) when the decision to annihilate European Jewry was made. The diaries of Goebbels, Hitler’s closest confidant, and Hitler’s Table Talk mention nothing about this. What does this fact tell us by itself? Contrary to what Holocaust deniers say, this fact tells us very little. To understand this fact, we must bring in, among other things, our empathy, intuition and “Einfuehlung” – all non-empirical factors – to make sense of this.

Let us now turn to Toynbee's grand narrative in outline. One of the most obvious similarities concerns the structure of the historical process. As we understand them, the Bahá'í Writings combine a two-fold pattern in the unfolding of civilizations: the "circle of life" as The Lion King calls it, with a cycle of seasons, birth and death, and the linear progress as seen in "progressive revelation." We have previously described this as an expanding stretch out spiral, or, in Toynbee's terms as a chariot's wheels and axle. In Toynbee's words, the wheel and axle of a chariot is such that "under the repetitive movement of the wheel . . . the vehicle . . . attains its unique realization . . . and its unique goal."^[8] This common structure of the historical process is significant for three reasons. First, it means that history is not a random process, a mere sequence of events without any long-term structure, direction or goal. Appearances to the contrary, history is teleological and has order. This is significant because of the tremendous effect the realization of such order will have on the world-views of both individuals and collectives. In turn, this affects life choices, values, motivation, conduct and virtually all other aspects of the human psyche. For proof we need look no further than the tremendous motivating effect Marx's equally teleological theory of history had on his followers and their willingness to suffer and sacrifice.

Second, these models of history mean that history – at least in its broad strokes – is predictable, especially if we are aware of our position – such as winter or a period of moral disintegration – in the process. We can, as a minimum, know what sort of developments to expect. Finally, because we can, at least broadly, predict future developments, we are also better equipped to serve the needs of our time. As Bahá'u'lláh says, "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."^[9]

The heart of Toynbee's theory is the concept of "challenge-and-response,"^[10] i.e. the belief that all cultures and civilizations face challenges to which they must respond successfully if they are to continue their growth and development. The image he uses is that of mountain climbers scaling a cliff: some succeed and reach the next challenge; some remain stuck, or "arrested" at a certain point; and some barely get started and are "abortive," i.e. stop. Failure means either repeatedly facing the same challenge until they are conquered or succumbing to them or giving up and 'aborting' their climb. However, no response is pre-determined – challenge-and-response is not the same as cause-and-effect^[11] – and neither tools nor race^[12] nor other physical advantage guarantee success. As with the Bahá'í Writings, personal and collective free will are essential features of Toynbee's grand narrative. What matters ultimately in the success or failure of a civilization is "the vision, initiative, persistence and above all, self-command . . . [and] the spirit in which Man responds"^[13] to the challenges s/he faces.^[14]

Toynbee applies the challenge-and-response criteria to 28 civilizations. Nineteen of these are major: Egyptian, Andean (Incan), Sinic or Shang, Minoan, Sumerian, Mayan, Indian, Hittite, Western or European, Russian Orthodox Christian, Far Eastern (China, Korea, Japan from 500 CE to 1912 CE), Persian, Arabic, Hindu, Mexican or Aztec, Yucatec and Babylonian. Some of these civilizations are related or "affiliated" to earlier predecessors in the same region as for example, the original Sinic civilization around the Yellow River and the later Far Eastern

civilization. The Yucatec and the later Aztec civilization are another example. Among the aborted civilizations, he includes the Irish[15] and Scandinavian,[16] and among the “arrested” civilizations i.e. those which attained a certain point and never moved on to the next challenge, he includes the Inuit or Eskimo and the Ottoman.[17] There is, of course, controversy about some of what he designates as separate ‘civilizations’ – e.g. the Sinic and the Far Eastern – but the list is sufficiently long and varied to preclude criticisms of having too narrow a base and being tainted by racism.

Another major similarity is the most essential criteria of growth in a civilization is inward, spiritual growth not material progress. 'Abdu'l-Bahá reminds us that

no matter how far the world of humanity may advance in material civilization, it is nevertheless in need of spiritual virtues and the bounties of God. The spirit of man is not illumined and quickened through material sources.[18]

Elsewhere he reminds us that

hearts must receive the Bounty of the Holy Spirit, so that Spiritual civilization may be established. For material civilization is not adequate for the needs of mankind and cannot be the cause of its happiness. Material civilization is like the body and spiritual civilization is like the soul. Body without soul cannot live.[19]

This statement clearly establishes the primacy of the spiritual over the material in the development of civilization. Without inward spiritual development, true civilization cannot arise or thrive. It is possible to be “materially advanced but spiritually backward.”[20] Toynbee has similar views regarding what he calls the “movement of transference”[21]:

True growth consists in a progressive change of emphasis and transfer of energy and shifting of the scene of action out of the field of the macrocosm and into that of the microcosm ; and in this new arena victorious responses to challenges do not take the form of overcoming an external obstacles but manifest themselves instead in a progressive self-articulation.[22]

Toynbee's term for this "transfer of energy" from the outer phenomenal world to his inner psycho-spiritual nature is "etherialization . . . in which challenges do not impinge from the outside but arise from within." [23] This, too, corresponds with the primacy of inward growth over external, material development in the Bahá'í Writings. "Etherialization" is a sign of growth because

Growth means that the growing personality or civilization tends to become its own environment and its own challenge and its own field of action. In other words, the criterion of growth is progress towards self-determination [24]

'Abdu'l-Bahá shows a similar connection between inward freedom – becoming one's own challenge and thinking for one's self – and growth:

When freedom of conscience, liberty of thought and right of speech prevail -- that is to say, when every man according to his own idealization may give expression to his beliefs -- development and growth are inevitable. [25]

The material factors present the human and natural environmental challenges but the human spirit – in both its secular and religious sense – decides whether or not to confront the challenges and how and with what persistence. This spirit cannot be reduced to material explanations and consequently, purely materialist explanations are inadequate to explain why civilizations arise or fail. Here, too, Toynbee's thought converges with the Bahá'í Writings insofar as both are premised on religion as essential for an adequate understanding humankind. Moreover, Toynbee's "trans-rationalist" [26] views – reason can tell us some things but not everything – agrees with the "moderate rationalist" [27] views found in the Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Writings. Both the Writings and Toynbee agree that the understanding and wisdom about human experience gathered by the "Higher Religions" [28] has relevance to our interpretation and understanding of history which is, after all, the record of human actions. In other words, both the Writings and Toynbee recognize that non-material factors, i.e. spirit are definitive in civilizational success or failure. As Toynbee says, "the spiritual progress of individual souls in this life will in fact bring with it much more social progress than could be attained in any other way." [29]

The issue of spirit inevitably raises the question of God or the divine in Toynbee's theory

of history. Toynbee certainly recognizes the transcendent and imminent as ontologically real forces in history. He borrows his term for this ground-of-being from Henri Bergson, i.e. the “elan vital.” Toynbee writes that he has

attained the conception of one omnipresent power which manifests itself in the performance and achievements of all Mankind and all Life. We may conceive of this power as a transcendent first cause and call it God, or as an imminent source of continuous creation and call it (as Bergson calls it) Evolution Creatrice or Elan Vital.[30]

Like the Bahá’í Writings, Toynbee recognizes that a non-material power is manifesting itself through the phenomenal world and that ‘what we see is not all that we get.’ This elan vital, which is referred to throughout A Study in History serves as the ground-of-being of all things. Like the Bahá’í concept of God, Toynbee’s elan vital is both a “transcendent final cause” and an omnipresent “immanent source of continuous creation.” It is important to note that the elan vital is the immanent source of creation and is not creation itself as in pantheism. As in the Writings, creation is an on-going process. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá informs us that the “creation thereof [the universe] is without beginning and without end”[31] and Bahá’u’lláh says, “Endeavour now to apprehend from these two traditions the mysteries of “end,” “return,” and “creation without beginning or end.”[32] In other words, the concept of God in the Writings and in Toynbee is ontologically similar but not necessarily the same inasmuch as Toynbee’s concept does not include an exact counterpart of the concept of divine Manifestations as messengers of God. However, he has an analogous concept, i.e. the creative individuals who provide the creative impulse at the start of a civilization. They

are superhuman in a very literal for they have attained self-mastery which manifests itself in a rare power of self-determination . . . they are privileged human beings whose desire it is . . . to set the imprint of the elan upon the whole of mankind . . . The creative personality feels the impulse of internal necessity to transfigure his fellow men by converting them to his own insight[33]

Elsewhere he states that it is “creative personalities . . . [who are] in the vanguard of civilization.”[34] From statements such as these, we can observe that Toynbee’s thought was moving in the direction of recognizing Manifestations as originators of civilization. Like the Writings, Toynbee recognizes that strictly materialist explanations of the birth of civilizations are inadequate. While such explanations can describe the conditions under which a civilization started to grow, they cannot explain why in similar or even the same conditions, the civilizational process begins in one place but not in another. In fact, the creative elan or drive of a civilization

requires what Toynbee calls a “creative minority” which devises solutions to the challenges and unifies a shapeless social mass to give it direction and a new spirit. A good example of such a creative minority would be Charles Martel and his grandson Charlemagne – although the ultimate source of their power comes from Christ Who is the fountainhead of Western Civilization. When civilization starts top breakdown, the “creative minority” is replaced by a “dominant minority” which cannot rule by attraction and loyalty but rule through violent oppression, marginalizing or even ‘crusades’ as did Catholicism during the Albigensian campaigns (1209 – 1229 CE).

The importance of spiritual and religious aspects of civilizations is also evident in the later development of civilizations. Toynbee uses the term “higher religions that liberate human beings from their servitude to their ancient civilizations.”[35] In other words, they are explicitly, i.e. consciously addressed to all of humanity and not to a portion of it. (This, of course, creates a confusions with Judaism which has elements of both insofar as some groups stress universal appeal and others stress the matrilineal blood-line to determine ‘Jewish identity.’) Interestingly enough, Toynbee’s definition bears some resemblance to the Bahá’í teaching of overcoming ancestral imitations in the process of progressive revelation. To break out of an ancestral religious mindset and culture obviously requires that we abandon at least some inherited attitudes, beliefs, laws, formulations and practices by recognizing them as growth-inhibiting or even harmful.

The challenges faced by civilizations are not necessarily external military threats but could also involve the natural environment as in droughts, floods, human or animal disease or internal problems with governance, economics, technology, culture or spiritual issues. For this reason, according to Toynbee, when civilizations fall, the external military attacks usually finish off a culture that is already fatally weakened from within. The fall of a corrupt Rome to the Germanic barbarians in 410 CE, 450 CE and finally in 476 CE is an obvious example of fatal inward weaknesses inviting conquest by vigorous external enemies. Here, too, is a strong convergence with the Bahá’í Writings inasmuch as both agree that the inner life of a civilization i.e. its spiritual and moral life, its “spirit” plays a decisive role in deciding whether a civilization collapses or survives to face a new challenge. Material means are secondary. To remind us of this truth, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

I want to make you understand that material progress and spiritual progress are two very different things, and that only if material progress goes hand in hand with spirituality can any real progress come about.[36]

This strong emphasis on the inward mental, spiritual and moral condition of a civilization as the crucial element in its rise or fall is another reason why strictly materialist understandings of history are inevitably inadequate. The information they provide is necessary but is not sufficient. Empathy, intuition and “Einfuehlung” are also necessary. We shall discuss this issue in greater depth later.

In Toynbee’s grand narrative, all civilizations go through a “time of troubles” i.e. a period of conflict between members of a civilization – e.g. WW I and WW II – for example. This time of troubles ends with the establishment of a “universal state” which is the guarantor of order and relative peace within a particular civilization, e.g. the United States after WW II. However, we must not forget that the “universal state” is only a stop-gap measure to prevent an inevitable decline of a particular civilization. Two consequences follow. One is the rise of an “external proletariat” whose aim is to bring down the “universal state” in one way or another. The Germanic tribes were the “external proletariat” to Rome which they wore down until the final conquest in 476 CE. The other is the “internal proletariat,” the excluded classes within the civilization, the disenfranchised and marginalized, but within the proletariat, we often find a “chrysalis”[37] which are the form of a new religion, or what Toynbee calls a “universal church.”[38] “Our survey . . . has shown that principle beneficiaries of universal states are universal churches . . . [and that] the church is flourishing while the state is decaying.”[39] In short, “universal churches lead to new civilizations. Let us, therefore, take note of the following quote from Shoghi Effendi who reminds us of the “twin processes of internal disintegration and external chaos are being accelerated every day and are inexorably moving towards a climax.”[40] This “twin process[]” is what Toynbee observes when he refers to the “universal church” growing amid the tumbling ruins of the “universal state.” Shoghi Effendi refers to the

steadily deepening crisis which mankind is traversing, on the morrow of the severest ordeal it has yet suffered, and the attendant tribulations and commotions which a travailing age must necessarily experience, as a prelude to the birth of the new World Order, destined to rise upon the ruins of a tottering civilization[41]

Here, too, the Bahá’í Writings are in general agreement with Toynbee’s theory.

Having examine some of the factors that make civilizations grow, let us now examine their breakdown and decline. Let us start by recalling that the Bahá’í Writings assert that “the source of his calamities . . . resides within Man himself; he carries it in his heart.”[42] Bahá’u’lláh reminds us that, “Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from

yourselves.”[43] In other words, we cannot blame the decline of a civilization on God. As already noted, both the Writings and Toynbee agree that the spirit within people determines our creative or destructive reactions to events in the material world. Individuals and collectives have free will, i.e. the power of self-determination, and, therefore, are responsible for their fates. In his examination of the characteristics that encourage and/or carry forward the process of disintegration, Toynbee lists behaviors that the Bahá’í Writings describe as being “imitations” and, therefore, to be rejected. He defines imitation as an orientation towards the elders and a simultaneous turn away from “the pioneers.”[44] As a result, a passive attitude develops and there is a loss of flexibility and freedom in dealing with new challenges. He also says that idolatry has its roots in

intellectually and purblind worship of the part instead of the whole, of the creature instead of the Creator, of Time instead of Eternity; and this abuse of the highest faculties of the human spirit . . . has its fatal effect upon the object of idolization . . . In practical life this moral aberration may take the comprehensive form of an idolization of the idolator’s own personality or own society . . . or may take the limited form of idolization of some institution or particular technique[45]

Bahá'u'lláh warns us about the dangers of imitation, saying

Imitation destroys the foundation of religion, extinguishes the spirituality of the human world, transforms heavenly illumination into darkness and deprives man of the knowledge of God.[46]

He adds, “The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation” [47] 'Abdu'l-Bahá points out that “Man must leave imitation and seek reality”[48] The notion that imitation is a way of avoiding reality is one that plays an extremely important role both in the Bahá’í grand narrative as well as Toynbee. Simply imitating past beliefs and past practices destroys the prospects for human progress by making impossible the actualization of new personal and collective potentials. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Therefore, we learn that allegiance to the essential foundation of the divine religions is ever the cause of development and progress, whereas the abandonment and beclouding of that essential reality through blind imitations and adherence to dogmatic beliefs are the causes of a nation's debasement and degradation.[49]

As the foregoing quotation shows, what makes A Study of History especially interesting for Bahá'í is that it explores in great detail the various forms of imitation and how they destroy a civilization. The first of these is “mimesis,”[50] i.e. following examples in behavior, thought and attitudes. To a certain extent mimesis is necessary for social cohesion. The problems with mimesis begin with its inevitable “mechanization of human movement and life.”[51] The essential danger is that it prevents taking original and creative, often tradition-breaking action to engage new problems and situations. It destroys the flexibility, strength, willingness as well as daring needed to succeed in a constantly changing historical process in which new challenges are the rule and not the exception. Too much mimesis, i.e. too much of a good thing, can apply to social relationships, financial and economic structures, military thinking, religion and values and technology among other things. Too much mimesis also destroys individual freedom and all the advantages it brings.

A second form of mimesis or imitation is what Toynbee calls “the idolization of an ephemeral self.”[52] Civilization is self-satisfied and content to be what it is instead of seeking new and creative ways to secure inward growth and/or meet external challenges. Toynbee’s main examples are Athens and Venice both of which ‘worshipped’ themselves in their most successful form until they were destroyed. This “idolization” can also affect “ephemeral institutions.”[53] In other words, institutions are so convinced of their perfection that they cannot conceive of any

reason to change their thinking and/or modus operandi. Toynbee’s prime examples are the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. As shown by His letter to Pope Pius IX, Bahá'u'lláh shows the need for Catholicism to abandon its self-adulation as it is and to make the changes necessary to serve humankind. The current Pope, Francis 1, highlights Bahá'u'lláh’s epistle in the changes he has announced for the Vatican’s curia.

A third kind of imitation is the “idolization of an ephemeral technique.”[54] For Toynbee this applies chiefly to military techniques as seen in the story of David and Goliath. The Philistines relied on slow moving but heavily armored warriors who were successful against all enemies – except a man with a sling. We observe this story even today with the success of asymmetrical, i.e. low-tech warfare against the highly sophisticated war machinery of the First World. Of course, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not specifically mention this vis-à-vis warfare, but They does deal with it in another form, i.e. the West’s continued reliance on material methods, i.e. technology to solve problems that can only be solved by spiritual means. There are no material and technological remedies for spiritual problems. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness
of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and coordinated

will happiness be assured.[55]

Pitirim Sorokin, was a Russian-American sociologist and founder of the sociology department at Harvard, is regarded as one of the foremost sociologists of the 20th Century. Employing quantitative, i.e. statistical methods to support his qualitative judgments and conclusions about world history, he developed a cyclical theory of history based on the identification of three types of ‘culture complexes’ which alternate as the dominating force in a society. Sorokin calls these three types the sensate, the ideational and the idealistic or integral culture complex. Each of them presents a complete world-view with its own

metaphysics or theory of reality;

epistemology or theory of truth and knowledge:

logic or beliefs about rationality and reasoning;

methods of validation;

philosophy of human nature;

ethics, justice and law;

theory of governance and politics;

aesthetics or theory of beauty and art;

theory of science;

theory of society, its nature and requirements;

We shall explore these three forms of culture complexes in more detail below. Before beginning, we must note that Sorokin goes to great lengths to show how his three culture complexes manifest in philosophy, especially in epistemology; in science; in religion; in the fine arts; in ethics and law; and in politics, government and economics. In a paper such as this, it is impossible for us to follow him across this broad swath of human activity. We shall, therefore, focus most of our attention on the philosophical aspects of his studies because the “defining characteristic of each type derives from its principles of ultimate truth through which it organizes reality.”[56] In short, Sorokin’s central principle is philosophical and we shall follow his lead.

Perhaps the most unique feature of Sorokin's philosophy of history is the voluminous use of statistics. Historian Richard L. Simpson, states,

He and his assistants did a more complete and systematic job of classifying cultural items and tracing their fluctuations than anyone before or since has attempted. Staggering numbers of artistic and literary works, legal and ethical codes, and forms of social relationships are classified, and their changing proportions of Sensatism and Ideationalism are graphed. Sorokin has shown quantitatively, where others have only argued qualitatively, to what extent fluctuations in thought patterns parallel fluctuations in other departments of life. His numerical time charts should enable historians in the future to delineate the boundaries of such periods as the Middle Ages and the Hellenistic Age with a precision never before possible.[57]

This statement calls for several comments. The use of quantitative and statistical methods makes a significant contribution to bringing history and the methods of science closer together. Through the statistical analysis of large numbers of events in the sciences, arts, philosophy, religion, economics and so on, Sorokin and his collaborators were able to identify large scale patterns and trends in the historical process. In other words, despite seemingly overwhelming amounts of data, Sorokin provided scientific, i.e. quantitative proof that patterns and trends exist. The existence of such patterns and trends opens the possibility of making the same kind of statistical predictions used in the life insurance industry. Despite virtually endless amounts of data generated by millions of customers all making independent decisions, actuarial tables are able to identify patterns and groups among policy holders. They use these patterns to make predictions about mortality among various groups. Although actuarial tables cannot predict the death of any individual, they can accurately predict when people with a defined set of health and life-style attributes tend to die. Using this information, they set your life insurance rates. The enormous profitability of the life insurance industry is quantitative proof that this method works. Sorokin's use of statistical methodology provides quantitative, i.e. scientific proof that Popper, Geyl and Montagu are factually wrong in their rejection of historical patterns and trends as well as the absolute unpredictability of historical patterns and trends.

Sorokin and his co-workers discovered that there are three basic types of culture complexes and that the "defining characteristic of each type derives from the principles of ultimate truth through which it organizes reality." [58] On this basis, we can deduce a significant portion of a culture's attributes. Sorokin writes,

the distinguishing of one variable of a culture enables us to construct logically a large network of connections with many of its other variables; to forecast what will be the nature of each of these variables if the culture is logically integrated; and, in this way, to comprehend quickly the

enormous diversity of its traits, qualities, quantities, in one united and all-embracing system . . . If we discover that this culture does contain the appropriate body of traits and variables, by one stroke we obtain several important cognitive results: (1) a highly intimate and certain understanding of many of the important aspects of the culture; (2) an insight into the nature and workings of most of its significant components; (3) a knowledge of the spectrum of its dominant mentality; (4) a comprehensive grasp of the very complex network of relationships between many of its traits which otherwise would escape us ; and (5) an answer to the question as to whether or not, and to what extent and in what parts, the culture is indeed logically integrated. [59]

In his numerous works, Sorokin demonstrates how these culture-complexes manifest in actual societies. It shows not only the alternating dominance of one culture-complex or another but also that the dominance of one culture-complex is not absolute, i.e. vestiges of the other complexes remain active. We shall discuss this “superrhythm”[60] of history in more detail below.

Ideational Culture

The first of Sorokin’s three culture complexes is the ideational or spiritually oriented culture. Sorokin writes,

By Idealism as philosophy, metaphysics, or mentality is meant a system of ideology which maintains that the ultimate, or true, reality is spiritual, in the sense of God, of Platonic ideas, of immaterial spirit, of soul, or of psychical reality[61]

In other words, the most obvious – and most important – is the existence of God, or a ground of being, or a mysterious and unknowable Tao, or a cosmic process of dependent origination as the origin and ultimate governor of the universe. Of course, this transcendent orientation may be expressed differently in different cultures but is ultimately the same everywhere: “truth is one, although its manifestations may be very different.”[62] The Bahá’í Writings are clearly ideational in this regard. As ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says, “That which we imagine, is not the Reality of God; He, the Unknowable, the Unthinkable, is far beyond the highest conception of man”[63] and Bahá'u'lláh reminds us that God is “the Inaccessible, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, the Holy of Holies.”[64] The foundational importance of the Transcendent is significant because it means that ideational cultures views human existence sub specie aeternitatis i.e. in relationship to the Transcendent and not only in relationship to the phenomenal world or human ambition, desire and convenience. Indeed, human desires and ambition take second place not only because

it is the Transcendent Who determines truth, beauty, justice, goodness and all other genuine values but also because the omniscient and omnipotent Transcendent knows our nature and understands our best long-term advantages better than we do. As Bahá'u'lláh says, "It is incumbent upon everyone to observe God's holy commandments, inasmuch as they are the wellspring of life unto the world,"[65] i.e. they bring true life to us. Furthermore, ideational cultures, have a long-term time perspective on existence; they think and evaluate in terms of eternity and not in terms of short-term effects.

According to the ideational world view, the ultimate truth and ultimate basis for truth is an inherently unknowable Transcendental entity, process, power or ground of being. It is absolutely independent of any other beings although these individual beings are completely dependent on this Transcendental whatever it may be. Since its existence does not depend on itself alone, creation is not 'fully' real. Some like Plato regard the world as a shadows of a transcendent ideal world; others as an illusion or a dream or as a sinful distraction from the quest for salvation for the soul. While the Bahá'í Writings do not denigrate the phenomenal world, they make it clear that it is of secondary importance insofar as it is only a stage, a transition period on the journey of our existence. It is not the final stopping point and, therefore, cannot be an ultimate value. That is the inescapable conclusion that follows from our spiritual nature. Throughout the Writings we find reminders that we shall not find our final destiny in this world:

Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out. A shadow hath no life of its own; its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water, and seeming as pictures to the eye.[66]

Because of its transcendental orientation, the ideational culture regards intuition, spiritual insight and mystical experiences as valid sources of knowledge and concomitantly places little trust in sensory or empirical knowledge and values logic only insofar as it supports intuition or revelation or the quest for salvation: "Pure logical reasoning and the testimony of the organs of sense have only a subsidiary role and only insofar as they do not contradict revealed Scripture."^[67] Knowledge about the empirical or sensory world is secondary (but not worthless) to knowledge about personal salvation or one's ultimate destiny. The Bahá'í Writings also recognize the importance of intuition in the quest for knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá declares,

True distinction among mankind is through divine bestowals and receiving the intuitions of the Holy Spirit. If man does not become the recipient of the heavenly bestowals and spiritual bounties, he remains in the plane and kingdom of the animal.[168]

Elsewhere he refers to the necessity of receiving the bounties of the Holy Spirit to make reason

effective.[69] This harmonizes with ideational cultures which are more open to what Sorokin calls “the supraconscious mode of cognition”[70] which comes from the “supraconsciousness” an aspect of the mind above the unconscious, the ego or super-ego. It is “egoless”[71] i.e. beyond all sense of individuality. As a sociologist, Sorokin avoids explicitly drawing any metaphysical conclusions from the existence of the supraconsciousness (which he deduces from cultural evidence) but it is clear that he believes in the reality of a Transcendent with which all cultures try to harmonize. The supraconsciousness which puts us into touch with the Transcendent is the source of human inspiration not only in religion but also in the arts, sciences and social relations.

From the ideational perspective, humankind is essentially spiritual in nature and, therefore, a spiritual destiny beyond the material world. Our destiny is not here. The challenge of attaining our proper destiny is to achieve the “ennoblement of character.”[72] Bahá’u’lláh states,

From the heaven of God's Will, and for the purpose of ennobling the world of being and of elevating the minds and souls of men, hath been sent down that which is the most effective instrument for the education of the whole human race.[73]

Either acting through Manifestations or inspiring the supraconscious, the Transcendent sets the standards of what is or is not true, good, just and beautiful; human considerations about utility, pleasure, convenience or rationality are simply irrelevant because the underlying assumption is that God knows us – and what is good for us – better than we know ourselves. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá may be referring – at least in part – to the supraconscious when he instructs us “to awaken spiritual susceptibilities in the hearts of mankind, to kindle anew the spirit of humanity with divine fires and to reflect the glory of heaven to this gloomy world of materialism.”[74] The “spiritual susceptibilities” like the supraconsciousness connects us to the Transcendent or God and thereby helps us understand ethics (the good), law (the just), art (the beautiful) and knowledge (the true) are based on revelation or divine commands or the inspiration of the supraconscious through which we are connected to the Transcendent. This means that ideational ethics are not utilitarian in the material sense, but rather, in a spiritual sense, seeking to bring us closer to God[75] by actualizing above all our spiritual potentials. They do not aim at “the greatest happiness or comfort or self-esteem for the greatest number” but rather at living harmoniously with the will of the Transcendent.

Sorokin identifies two kinds of ideationalism. “Ascetic ideationalism” seeks to suppress physical and social needs as much as possible, and often seeks to dissolve rejects the ego or sense of self. The Bahá’í Writings, of course, prohibit extreme asceticism and permanent withdrawal from the

world.[76] Sorokin also recognizes what he calls “active ideationalism”[77] which seeks to fulfill its spiritual mission by minimizing and controlling but not suppressing physical needs and by seeking to transform or spiritualize itself and the world and everyone in it.[78] This, of course, is the mission which all Bahá’ís undertake as their life’s work. Indeed, towards the end of his life Sorokin published *The Ways and Power of Love* (1954) in which he extolls altruistic and universal love, not only as a necessary social feeling but as an organizing principle for societies and the world as a whole. The affinities with the Bahá’í Teachings are too obvious to require in-depth discussion.

Ideational cultures share other important characteristics. They value self-control of the senses and emotions. They do not view self-expression of feeling as necessarily intrinsically valuable for its own sake. Nor do they see liberty or freedom as an ultimate value in all aspects of life. Rather, they emphasize what Sorokin calls “ideational liberty” or an “inner liberty”[79] which concerns reducing demands and restraining desires or surrendering our will to the Transcendent. This emphasis on self-control is clearly evident in Bahá’u’lláh’s statements regarding freedom or liberty.

Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition . . . Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness.[80]

In short, liberty must be [t]rue liberty [which] consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments.” [81] God’s commandments are “true liberty” because they bring our thoughts and actions into alignment with our true nature or essence as human beings.

Ideational economic beliefs and practices must also reflect or be compatible with revelation and intuition. For example, in the Middle Ages taking interest or usury was forbidden to Christians and the principle of a “just price” was applied to sales of all kinds. The modern principle that price is what the traffic will bear i.e. what people are willing to pay is viewed as an invitation to limitless greed – and, therefore, as damaging to the soul. The Bahá’í Writings also present economic teachings to enact spiritual values in the phenomenal world. Economic principles must reflect that human beings are spiritual entities made in the image of God and in whom “are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him.”[82] In other words, Bahá’í teachings recognize that in economics more than strict economic matters must be taken into consideration. To a certain degree, economics are always a matter of psychology and

spirituality, and when these change so will the economic operations. Bringing economics more into line with a spiritual outlook is precisely what ideational cultures do.

From the foregoing survey of the major attributes of ideational cultures, it is clear that the Bahá'í Writings have many ideational attributes. However, for reasons to come, we would not describe the Writings as ideational. What this survey of ideational attributes also demonstrates

Sensate Culture

Sorokin asserts that “Sensate culture is the opposite of the Ideational in its major premises.”[83] It asserts that reality is strictly material/physical and that there are no super-sensory beings and processes of any kind. Truth is wholly empirical and sensory, i.e. all truth-claims must be based on sensory or material evidence that can be subjected to the scientific method with its requirements of quantifiability; objectivity; repeatability and falsifiability. In Sorokin’s words, “The Sensate mentality, knowledge, science, is characterized by materialism, empiricism, mechanisticism, determinism, quantitativism.”[84] In other words, all knowledge has a material basis; all material processes are explainable in mechanistic, i.e. cause-and-effect terms which enshrine determinism and reject free will; and only things that can be counted and quantified are real. Conversely, “inner experience — divine inspiration, mystical union, revelation, pure meditation, ecstasy, trance”[85] as well as the assistance of the Holy Spirit in acquiring knowledge[86] are rejected as delusional. At this point it is already clear that the sensory culture-complex and the Bahá'í Writings are incompatible at the most fundamental level vis-à-vis metaphysics, ontology and epistemology. The dismissal of non-sensory, i.e. transcendental ‘being’ like God is not reconcilable with belief in an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscience God Who is the willing creator and organizer of all things; Who gives all things their nature and Who is, therefore, the source of all knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of course, rejects materialism as an adequate world-view in his talks at Stanford and compares it to the natural outlook of animals. “Then why should we go to the colleges? Let us go to the cow.”[87]

For the sensate cultures, humankind is an entirely physical being which can be studied and known completely by strictly empirical methods. Because we have no soul we have ‘spiritual needs’ which will be shown to have biological explanations nor need we be concerned about the after-life. Furthermore, all values, e.g. ethical, theological, societal values must be based on sensory evidence; must be testable by scientific means; and must be justified by tangible utilitarian benefits such as health, pleasure (“hedonism”) convenience, power, wealth or other tangible [88] They define ‘good’ and ‘right’ in strictly practical terms. Sorokin writes that the “sensate mentality

chooses and emphasizes predominantly the sensate, empirical, material values. Eudaemonism, hedonism, utilitarianism, sensualism; the morals of “Carpe diem,” . . . Man should seek pleasure and avoid pain; utility is positive, disutility is negative. The maximum pleasure for the greatest number of beings, this is in essence the motto of Sensate moralists. The second characteristic of the moral systems of a Sensate culture type is that they are never absolute, but are always relativistic, varying “according to circumstances and situations.” They can be modified, have no sacred, unalterable, eternal imperatives.[89]

Obviously, sensate moral relativism is logically incompatible with Shoghi Effendi’s statement that the Manifestation “insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, restates the eternal verities they enshrine . . . distinguishes the essential and the authentic from

the nonessential and spurious in their teachings”[90] In relativism, “eternal verities” are logically impossible because verities that are eternal are true under all circumstances and from all perspectives. According to the Bahá’í Writings, the accidental outward expression of the verities might change, but the essential truth always remains. In practical application, the philosophy of materialism supplies the principles on which society, law, economics, science and technology and even the arts are built. In a sensate culture people think primarily in materialist terms on such issues as ‘the good life,’ ‘success,’ a ‘good person,’ a ‘good job;’ the soul or spirit is reduced to physical brain function or to computer soft-ware, spirituality is reduced to feeling good or strong self-esteem and belief in God to childish fear. To paraphrase Oscar Wilde, they reduce ‘value’ which is not necessarily sensory with ‘price’ which can easily be measured. [91] Naturally, sensate cultures have a strong, natural tendency to atheism and secularism, often in militant forms, as seen, for example, in the new atheist movement. In our view, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sums up the sensate perspective when he says,

Mankind is submerged in the sea of materialism and occupied with the affairs of this world. They have no thought beyond earthly possessions and manifest no desire save the passions of this fleeting, mortal existence. Their utmost purpose is the attainment of material livelihood, physical comforts and worldly enjoyments such as constitute the happiness of the animal world rather than the world of man.[92]

How compatible is the sensate world-view with the Writings? Insofar as the sensate culture’s thorough-going materialism in metaphysics, ontology and epistemology are concerned there is no compatibility. The denial of any non-sensory beings, entities or truths cannot be reconciled with the assertion that a non-sensory God, soul and spiritual truths exist – they are logical negations of one another.[93] Claiming that each is valid from its point of view does not actually reconcile their specific contradictions but simply compartmentalizes them in separate boxes

where their actual contradictions remain unresolved. However, we might ask if there are certain issues on which the two might be seen as compatible, i.e. two aspects of a whole like the yin/yang symbol. For example, the Bahá'í Writings do not deny the need for an existence free from physical deprivations and disease, a sense of well-being, security and opportunities to earn a reasonable living. Nor do they deny that to some degree utilitarianism, i.e. “the greatest happiness for the greatest number” or the good of the community as a whole is an important consideration. Because of their underlying metaphysics, ontology, epistemology and philosophy of human nature, the Writings proclaim that these goals cannot be attained by strictly material means but must include the spiritual aspects of existence. In short, the sensate beliefs are necessary but not sufficient. Here is where the reconciliation breaks down because the sensate view cannot by virtue of its materialist metaphysic admit that spiritual entities and beliefs have any role in the quest for well-being. The Bahá'í Writings have no difficulty including the material needs of mankind despite their spiritual foundations whereas the sensate view is logically unable to make any such accommodations.

This last point brings us to Sorokin's integral culture which is precisely a synthesis of the ideational and sensate.

Integral Culture

Sorokin's third culture is the integral culture which dominated Greece in 4th and 5th century BCE and Europe during the 13th and 14th centuries CE. Naturally, we must recall that no one culture-complex dominates society absolutely but always exists with ideational and sensate undercurrents at work. In Greece during this time the most influential philosophers were Plato and Aristotle, both of whom combined the ideational, intuitive “truth of faith” with the empirical “truth of the senses” to form a coherent philosophy or world-view. Plato's intuitive “truth of faith” concerned the Ideal Forms of which all phenomenal things are shadows as noted by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá: “Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place [the phenomenal world] is only its shadow stretching out.”[94] In other words, the phenomenal world merely an image that is dependent on the original and, thereby, less real than the Kingdom which “is a spiritual world, a divine world, and the center of the Sovereignty of God.”[95] For Plato, the Ideal Forms can only be understood by intuition within the limits of human capacity. For Aristotle the “truth of faith” was in the ‘forms’ i.e. Platonic ideas that are embedded within things, just as the Names of God are immanently reflected from within things. Plato, Aristotle (and later Thomas Aquinas) and the Bahá'í Writings unite these kinds of truth into a rational and coherent world-view.[96] Moreover, because integralist truth “combines into one organic whole the truth of the senses, the truth of faith and the truth of reason”[97] it has a more complete understanding of reality, and, thereby, is closer to the truth. He writes,

the integral truth is not identical with any [one] of the three forms of truth, but embraces all of them. In this three-dimensional aspect of the truth of faith, of reason, and of the senses, the integral truth is nearer to the absolute truth than any onesided truth of one of these three forms . . . The threefold integral system of truth gives us . . . a more adequate knowledge of the reality . . . Each of these systems of truth separated from the rest becomes less valid or more fallacious,[98]

In practical terms, this means that the current Western, i.e. predominantly sensate culture has an inadequate and thereby misleading concept of reality.

the major premise [of integral culture is] that true reality is partly supersensory and partly sensory – that it embraces the super-sensory and the super-rational aspect plus the rational aspect and finally the sensory aspect, all blended into one unity, that of the infinite manifold, God.[99]

On the basis of this statement, one might conclude that the one-sided sensate view of reality also presents obstacles to thinking about God. As the contemporary debates about God demonstrate, a one-sided view of reality makes it especially difficult to think coherently about God. A question like ‘Can God lift an object heavier than Himself?’ is a good example of such confusion of the material with the spiritual.[100]

Continuing with epistemology, we note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, the “four criteria according to the declarations of men are: first, sense perception; second, reason; third, traditions; fourth, inspiration.”[101] He includes “tradition” as a source of knowledge which Sorokin does not acknowledge formally but admits implicitly in his sharp critique of the compulsive quest for the up-to-date [102] which is uncritically assumed to be superior. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also informs us that the only way to acquire real knowledge is through the “promptings of the Holy Spirit which is light and knowledge itself.”[103] As a sociologist, Sorokin does not appeal to the Holy Spirit but refers to an analogous concept which has a similar function in his work – the supraconsciousness in mankind by which we acquire inspiration and knowledge from the Transcendent. He writes that the supraconsciousness has a “transpersonal source . .

. providential, guiding culture through history with a definite plan.” [104] In other words, Sorokin also recognizes the need for transcendental assistance in the quest for adequate knowledge. He believes this supraconsciousness connects us to an “infinite manifold, God” Who cannot be known by the finite human capacities of senses, reason or faith but Whose presence and action can be experienced through the supraconsciousness. In the same way, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, “the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives the true method of comprehension which is

infallible and indubitable.”[105]

Finally, both the Writings and Sorokin view humans as dual in nature – as material and spiritual with the spiritual being our higher nature. Sorokin notes that man is “a supersensory and superoperational being,” [106] who possesses a “supraconsciousness” connecting him to a transcendental reality from which he draws inspiration and understanding. 'Abdu'l-Bahá informs

us that “In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone.”[107] For both the Bahá’í Writings and Sorokin ignoring our spiritual or supraconscious we is a devastating mistake because we fail ourselves by not actualizing all our potentials for knowledge and spiritual development.

The kinship of integral culture and the Bahá’í Writings is obvious insofar as they agree on the foundations of metaphysics notably on the dual nature of ‘existence’ which has two aspects or ‘levels.’ The first and primary aspect is the Transcendent i.e. “transpersonal source . . . [that is] providential, guiding culture through history with a definite plan.” [108] In other words, the integralist culture not only recognizes a superior Being Who is the source of phenomenal reality and all knowledge about it. It also plays a role in “guiding” human history according to a plan of some kind, i.e. plays a role in humankind’s unfolding history through the inspirations of the supraconscious in particular people. Sorokin’s descriptions of integral culture make no mention of Manifestations of God or prophets; the gifted people inspired through the supraconscious are the closest to that exalted position. The second aspect or level of reality is the phenomenal world, i.e. physical existence, which, as we seen above, is a “shadow” i.e. an image of something more real than itself. Like a shadow it is completely dependent on its original. Both the Bahá’í Writings and integral culture reject any extreme denials or mortifications of our physical nature as a proper response to living in this shadow world. They advocate a moderate, i.e. balanced approach to self-discipline or self-control. As we shall see below, the Writings and Sorokin’s theories also agree that metaphysics is includes by a potentialist ontology that

characterizes all individual things.

How, we may ask, is Sorokin’s theory of culture-complexes relevant to the philosophy of history and the subject of grand narratives and to the Bahá’í grand narrative in particular? Sorokin’s answer is clear: cultures and history have empirically demonstrable patterns, they go through empirically demonstrable cycles and show empirically demonstrable progress in our understanding of reality – albeit not in a simple linear form as the Enlightenment thought. Moreover, the three culture complexes dominate societies in an oscillating pattern whereby the decline of one leads to the rise of another. The periods of domination are not always of the same length and no one culture complex is ever absolutely dominant; the two remaining

culture-complexes remain active as undercurrents one of which will be ‘ready’ to take the dominant position by meeting the needs. These three culture-complexes and their alternating periods of dominance in a society constitute what Sorokin calls the “superrhythm”[109] of history.

This “superhythm” brings up the issue of progress. Does Sorokin’s philosophy of change in history include the concept of ‘progress, i.e. improvement in knowledge or social practice? Does history have a direction or is it subject to divine guidance? He clearly rejects the Enlightenment view of an “Omnipotent Evolution and Providential Progress unerringly lead mankind ever nearer to some goal or toward some ‘bigger and better’ state.” [110] Obviously this conflicts with the Bahá’í teaching of “progressive revelation” and belief in an “ever-advancing civilization” under the guidance of the Manifestations.

However as Barry V Johnston points out, in effect, Sorokin re-introduces the concept of progress in another form that turns out to converge with the Bahá’í Writings. Sorokin wanted a solution for the problem that the “superrhythm” of three culture-complexes would simply go on forever without any movement towards ultimate truth or at least towards improvements, expansions, of knowledge and understanding. Without such a direction, without improvement the cycles of history would be rather pointless. Sorokin sees the solution in the periods of integral culture which embrace and connect ideational, sensate and integral views of truth i.e. connected the “truths of reason, senses and faith”[111] and thereby gained a broader and deeper understanding of reality. Consequently, integral culture more accurately reflects human nature with its intellectual, sensory and intuitive faculties. Insofar as our understanding of reality has improved, there has been and will be progress in history, although it is not necessarily an unbroken linear progress as imagined by the Enlightenment. Consequently, we conclude that like the Bahá’í Writings, Sorokin recognizes epistemological progress which, in turn, leads to progress in other areas of humanity’s existence as new knowledge is applied. In this sense it seems clear that over the long term humanity has advanced beyond its ancestors. This is at least a partial reconciliation between the Writings and Sorokin.

There are several reasons why the dominance of the three culture-complexes oscillates. According to Sorokin, the most important is that in each culture-complex, “the system of truth is partly true and partly false”[112] and as the falsities expand a society has “either to continue the dangerous drift and suffer fatal atrophy or else to correct the mistake”[113] by adopting a more adequate system of truth. He adds, “Some cultures, like the Graeco-Roman and the Western were able to make such a shift several times; others could not do so.”[114] In other words, the inadequacies in each culture-complex help drive the historical process forward.

Furthermore, another reason for change occurs from within the three culture-complexes as well as all other things. The basis of this change is the potentialist ontology the Bahá’í Writings and Sorokin share. The Writings recognize this in their references to the “potential in the seed;”[115] of the sun awakening “all that is potential in the earth;”[116] of the “virtues potential in mankind;”[117] of the inventions “potential in the world of nature;”[118] and of the embryo progressing until “that which was potential in it--namely, the human image—appears.”[119]

Sorokin's sociology and philosophy of history is also potentialist. He discusses this under the "principle of immanent change"[120] by which he means that the basis of change is in the potentials or essence immanent in a thing. Each thing possesses "immanent self-regulation and self-direction." "[121] The environment can stimulate change but it cannot determine the kind of change we will see. No amount of environmental influence can make a duck manifest the attributes of a donkey. The potentials for such a change are not present. Things are not simply the passive playthings of the environment. [122] As Sorokin says, Sorokin puts it, the essence of a thing "the determining potentialities of the system are the system itself and are its immanent properties"[123] The Bahá'í rejection of "environmentalism" is found not only in its potentialist ontology but also in the spiritual guidance we received from Bahá'u'lláh: the "the faith of no man can be conditioned by anyone except himself"[124] even if all others in society oppose him or her. Elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh says of the true believers that they will persevere in faith "even if all the powers of earth and heaven were to deny Him." [125] Logically, if "environmentalism"[126] or "externalism"[127] are false, then all things – but at least humans – must have some degree of free will. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that

Some things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions; it is evident and clear that these actions are, for the most part, left to the will of man.[128]

In the phenomenal world, we are subject to the laws of physical existence but we have the capacity to be spiritually free. Sorokin does not specifically discuss free will but a reading of his texts clearly shows that he assumes it as real and effective.

Finally we should note that more than any other historian – even Toynbee – Sorokin has made a careful study of the "over-ripe" conditions of our sensate culture and its ills.

Pre-Conclusion

Because – as Shoghi Effendi urged us to do – we have examined so many correlations vis-à-vis grand narratives in history, we believe it is fitting to end with a review of some of the aspects which make the Bahá'í grand narrative of mankind's history unique and especially suitable for the religious and cultural divisions in the contemporary world. From our perspective, the doctrine of progressive revelation is the 'flagship' teaching of the Faith in regards to a global

metanarrative. Numerous other teachings are implicitly present in this doctrine. First, is its hitherto unprecedented religious inclusiveness. Other religions are not merely recipients of good will and toleration, they are incorporated as equal, necessary and essential parts of a single global “meta-religion” of which the Bahá’í dispensation is the latest but by no means the final phase. It is difficult to imagine a more rational and more morally satisfying alternative to the problem of religious and cultural disunity among humankind. Second, embedded in progressive revelation is the concept of progress primarily in spiritual progress but also in material progress. This also shows that in the Bahá’í Writings, the idea of progress has a theological basis as a necessary part of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation. The sequence and nature of different divine revelations depends on the degree of spiritual progress a society has made: “Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation hath been vouchsafed unto men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity.”[129] In this way their progress is expedited to the next stage. Furthermore, “All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization,”[130] a statement which, in effect, makes spiritual and material progress a religious duty for all. This is doctrine is especially suited to a world harshly divided by sectarian prejudices and horrible material inequities. From the foregoing, we observe the objective ethical standard to evaluate individual and collective acts. This avoids the quagmire of ethical relativism which creates confusion because it can justify anything.

Because religion and culture are so intimately connected, progressive revelation leads logically to the conclusion that eventually humankind will be united into a federal global commonwealth united by “one common faith.” Religious history – and history in general – exhibit a clearly foreseeable purpose. The clarity of this purpose leads to the next implicit concept in progressive revelation: the Universal House of Justice. If we have a clear goal, then the obvious question is ‘How shall we get there?’ As noted in our Introduction, the Bahá’í Writings are not limited to mere diagnosis of human history but also provide a prescription for healing the world’s ills as well as the institution for putting the healing into practice. Recommending universal love – as Toynbee and Sorokin do – is not in itself a prescription except in the vaguest sense especially in the contemporary world. What humankind requires is a program of practical steps on the practice of love and an institution or vanguard to guide this practice. This is especially true when we think on a global inter-cultural and international scale. While good will and good feelings are necessary, they are not sufficient in humanity’s new situation. Moreover, the Universal House of Justice develops plans to bring both individuals and societies closer to the goal of unification. Such planning and coordination are necessary because individual action while necessary is not sufficient at this time in history.

In addition, the teaching of progressive revelation also implies the essential oneness of human nature. We cannot expect the world to become united if we do not believe that human nature has certain universal aspects that can be the common basis for unity. The essential oneness of humankind also points to the “eternal verities” i.e. the universal ethical principles on which unity can be established to become the foundation for spiritual evolution. Finally, the harmonization of science and religion as part of our material and spiritual progress since both of

them are necessary and inescapable aspects of human existence. The apparent conflict between science and religion is symptom of short-sightedness and lack of true understanding that must be over come because both of them are undeniable aspects of human nature.

Conclusion

Our conclusion consists of four major points.

First, the Bahá'í Writings present a well-developed, spiritually based grand narrative of human history that lays the foundations for the unification of humankind.

Second, the Bahá'í Writings share numerous similarities with the historical theories of Spengler, Toynbee and Sorokin but go much farther in developing spiritual and practical responses to the problems explored in these other grand narratives. Unlike the other grand narratives, the Bahá'í Writings provide not only a description or diagnosis of the historical process but also a prescription or plan of action and an institution to put these plans into action as guided by Bahá'u'lláh, the Manifestation of God for this age. This institution is the Universal House of Justice.

Third, the grand narratives we have studied show that provided one adopts a “world-embracing” vision identifiable patterns and trends exist in the historical process and that using these patterns it is possible to make testable predictions about future trends. The existence of these patterns based on a universal human nature allows greater understanding of our position in the historical process.

Fourth, the various attempts to undermine and invalidate grand narratives are often logically self-contradictory; unscientific vis-à-vis the use of statistics; inaccurate in their presentation of human nature; and motivated more by political than scholarly concerns, especially in the case of Popper and the postmodern philosophers. None of the arguments against grand narratives present insuperable obstacles for advocating the Bahá'í grand narrative.

- [1] Sebastian Conrad, What is Global History?, p. 57.
- [2] J.R. McNeil and William H. McNeil, The Human Web, p. 6.
- [3] The Bab, Selections from the Writings of the Bab, p. 216.
- [4] Stephen Epstein, “History Man” in The Weekly Standard, December 13, 2010, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/history-man/article/520688>
- [5] Hugh Trevor-Roper, “Testing Toynbee’s System” in Ashley Montague editor, Toynbee and History, p. 122.
- [6] W. H. Walsh, “The End of a Great Work,” in Ashley Montague, editor, Toynbee and History, p. 125; original emphasis.
- [7] Pieter Geyl, Debates with Historians, p.185.
- [8] Arnold Toynbee, A Study of History, Volume 4, p. 36.
- [9] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CVI, p. 213.
- [10] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, A Study of History, p. 97; also A Study of History, Volume 1, p. 271.
- [11] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, A Study of History, p. 97.
- [12] Arnold Toynbee, A Study in History, Volume 1, p. 233, states “we must infer that the capacity for civilization is not a monopoly of an fraction or fractions of the human family . . . there is no warrant for supposing that one particular fraction – the Black Race – has been born without this birthright and is congenitally incapable of civilization just because it has failed to make one of these creative contributions so far.” Toynbee would probably not have written this if knowledge about the Kingdoms of Kush or Benin or the Empire of Ghana had been prevalent in his time. It would be fascinating to see how his theories fit these civilizations. In his final, one volume abridgement, Toynbee refers to “the philosophies of the African Civilizations” p. 161; also p. 71.
- [13] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, A Study of History, p. 96.
- [14] Arnold Toynbee, A Study of History, Volume 3, p. 192
- [15] Arnold Toynbee, A Study of History, Volume 2, p. 322 – 392.
- [16] Arnold Toynbee, A Study of History, Volume 2, p. 291.

- [17] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 132.
- [18] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, p. 58.
- [19] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, '*Abdu'l-Bahá in London*', p. 29.
- [20] The Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973*, p. 57.
- [21] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 138.
- [22] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 137.
- [23] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 3, p. 192.
- [24] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 140.
- [25] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 197.
- [26] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 12, p. 75.
- [27] Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan* # 14, 2013.
- [28] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 12, p. 81.
- [29] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 328.
- [30] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 1, p. 249; Volume 1, p. 270; Volume 3, p. 125; emphasis added.
- [31] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 378.
- [32] Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 168; emphasis added.
- [33] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 140.
- [34] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 166.
- [35] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 334.
- [36] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 108.
- [37] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 326.
- [38] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 326.

[39] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 326.

[40] Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour*, p. 23.

[41] Shoghi Effendi, *The Citadel of Faith*, p. 39.

[42] CF Volney, *Les Ruins*, in *Oevres Completes*, p. 12 – 13 in Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 161.

[43] Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXVII, p. 149.

[44] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 4, p. 245.

[45] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Volume 4, p. 261.

[46] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 161.

[47] Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 156.

[48] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 169.

[49] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 363.

[50] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 161.

[51] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 162.

[52] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 171.

[53] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 180

[54] Arnold Toynbee and Jane Caplan, *A Study of History*, p. 194.

[55] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "The Promulgation of Universal Peace," p. 108.

[56] Barry V. Johnston, "Pitirim A. Sorokin on Order, Change and the Reconstruction of Society: An Integral Perspective" in *Comparative Civilization Review*,
<https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/CCR/article/view/12695>

[57] Richard L Simpson, "Pitirim Sorokin and His Sociology" in *Social Forces*, (Oxford University Press) http://www.suz.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:00000000-36d7-41d4-0000-000064b51e55/simpson_sorokin.pdf

[58] Barry V. Johnston, "Pitirim A. Sorokin on Order, Change and the Reconstruction of Society: An Integral Perspective" in *Comparative Civilization Review*,

<https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/CCR/article/view/12695>

[59] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 15; emphasis added.

[60] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 682.

[61] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 284.

[62] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 128.

[63] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks, p. 25.

[64] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, I, p. 5.

[65] Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 126.

[66] 'Abdu'l-Bahá,, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 177.

[67] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, II, p. 9.

[68] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 316; emphasis added.

[69] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 302.

[70] Pitirim Sorokin, The Basic Trends of Our Time, p. 29.

[71] Pitirim Sorokin, The Basic Trends of Our Time, p. 30.

[72] Pitirim Sorokin, The Reconstruction of Humanity, p. 38.

[73] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XLIII, p. 93,

[74] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 7.

[75] Pitirim Sorokin, The Crisis of Our Age, p. 111.

[76] Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitab-i-Aqdas, p. 195.

[77] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 27.

[78] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 27.

[79] Pitirim Sorokin, The Crisis of Our Age, p. 143.

[80] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLIX, p. 335; emphasis added.

- [81] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLIX, p. 336.
- [82] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XC, p. 177.
- [83] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 28.
- [84] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 34.
- [85] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 33.
- [86] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 302.
- [87] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 361.
- [88] Pitirim Sorokin, The Basic Trends of Our Times, p. 18; also Social and Cultural Dynamics, p. 14.
- [89] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 35.
- [90] Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 108.
- [91] Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Chp. IV, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/174/174-h/174-h.htm>
- [92] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 335.
- [93] Claiming that each is valid from its point of view does not actually reconcile them but simply compartmentalizes them in separate boxes without solving the contradictions as required by genuine reconciliation. Separating two antagonists does not actually remedy their differences.
- [94] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 178.
- [95] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 241.
- [96] Ian Kluge, "Reason and the Baha'i Writings" in Lights of Irfan 14 (2013) or <https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/>
- [97] Pitirim Sorokin, The Crisis of Our Age, p. 68.
- [98] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 690 – 691.
- [99] Pitirim Sorokin, The Crisis of Our Age, p. 18; emphasis added.
- [100] The assumed premise is that God is heavy, i.e. is material. That reduces God to a physical object among others which is obviously not God as being discussed.

- [101] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 20.
- [102] Pitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, (abridged), p. 319 – 320.
- [103] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 21.
- [104] Pitirim Sorokin in John Ubeursax, "Culture in Crisis: The Visionary Theories of Pitirim Sorokin," in Satyagraha, Dec. 10, 2010. <https://satyagraha.wordpress.com/>; emphasis added.
- [105] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 296.
- [106] Pitirim Sorokin, *The Basic Trends of Our Time*, p. 38.
- [107] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 61.
- [108] Pitirim Sorokin in John Ubeursax, "Culture in Crisis: The Visionary Theories of Pitirim Sorokin," in Satyagraha, Dec. 10, 2010. <https://satyagraha.wordpress.com/>; emphasis added.
- [109] Pitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, (abridged), p. 682.
- [110] Pitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, (abridged), p. 652.
- [111] Barry V. Johnston, "Pitirim A. Sorokin on Order, Change and the Reconstruction of Society: An Integral Perspective" in *Comparative Civilization Review*, <https://ojs.lib.byu.edu/spc/index.php/CCR/article/view/12695>
- [112] Pitirim Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*, p. 94.
- [113] Pitirim Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*, p. 94.
- [114] Pitirim Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*, p. 94.
- [115] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 91.
- [116] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 74.
- [117] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 70.
- [118] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 309.
- [119] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* 359.
- [120] R.F. Braun, "Sorokin, Popper and the Philosophy of History" in *Intercollegiate Review*, Winter-Spring 1972.
- [121] Pitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, (abridged), p. 18.

[122] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 631; emphasis added.

[123] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 641.

[124] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXXV, p. 143.

[125] Bahá'u'lláh, Gems of the Divine Mysteries, p. 55.

[126] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 631

[127] Pitirim Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, (abridged), p. 631

[128] 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, p. 247.

[129] Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, XXXVIII, p. 87.

[130] Bahá'u'lláh Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CIX, p. 214.

Select Bibliography

‘‘Abdu’l-Bahá

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London. Bahá’í Publishing Trust. London, 1987.

“Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: ‘I Was a Hidden Treasure’.” <http://Bahá'í-library.com/provisionals/hidden.treasure.html>. Translated and Introduced by Moojan Momen. This translation is published here [on the net] with the permission of the translator.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy. Compiled by Elizabeth Fraser Chamberlain, Boston, MA: Tudor Press, 1918. http://Bahá'í-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_divine_philosophy.html

Foundations of World Unity. n.p., Immerse. Bernal Schoole, 1997

Paris Talks. London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971.

Promulgation of Universal Peace. Second Edition. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982

The Secret of Divine Civilization. Trans. Marzeih Gail. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1957.

Selections From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá . Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978

Some Answered Questions. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981.

Tablet of the Universe; emphasis added. Original Tablet in Makatib-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá , vol. 1, pp 13-32. Anonymous translation. http://Bahá'í-library.com/?file=abdulbaha_lawh_aflakiyyih.html

Bahá'u'lláh Epistle to the Son of the Wolf. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,
1979.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh . Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976.

Kitab-i-Aqdas. n.p., Immerse. Bernal Schooley, 1997

Kitab-i-Iqan. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1950.

Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh . n.p., Immerse. Bernal Schooley, 1997

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh . Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978

The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975

Collingwood, R.G. *The Idea of History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Conrad, Sebastian. What Is Global History? Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

Day, Mark. The Philosophy of History. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008.

Dray, William H. *Philosophy of History*. Inglewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964.

Effendi, Shoghi. The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974.

1971. The Advent of Divine Justice. Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,

1965 The Citadel of Faith. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust,

Messages to the Baha'i World, 1950- 1957, Ocean.

The Decisive Hour, Ocean.

The Promised Day is Come. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980.

The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community. Ocean.

Geyl, Pieter, Debates With Historians. The Hague: Fontana Library, 1962.

Gomez-Ibarra, Juan, J. A Scientific Model of History. New York: Writer's Advantage, 2013.

Gilderhus, Mark, T. History and Historians. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003.

Iggers, Georg. H. Historiography in the Twentieth Century. Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1997.

Kluge, Ian. "The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings" in Lights of Irfan 4, 2003. Also at <https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/>

"Reason and the Bahá'í Writings." in Lights of Irfan 14, 2013.
Also at <https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/>

Lemon, M.C. Philosophy of History. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. The Postmodern Condition. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979.

MacNeil, J.R. and The Human Web. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003.

MacNeil, William H.

Montague, Ashley. Toynbee and History. Boston: Porter Sargent Publisher, 1956.

Popper, Karl. The Open Society and its Enemies, I – II. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

The Poverty of Historicism. Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2002.

Sorokin, Pitirim, A. The Basic Trends of Our Time. New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1964.

The Crisis of Our Age. Chatham, N.Y.: Oneworld Publications, 1992.

The Reconstruction of Humanity. Boston: Beacon Press, 1948.

Social and Cultural Dynamic, I – IV. New York: Bedminster Press, 1962.

Social and Cultural Dynamics. Abridged and Revised by Pitirim Sorokin. Boston: Porter Sargent Publisher, 1957.

Spengler, Oswald. The Decline of the West, I – II. Translated by Charles, Francis Atkinson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926.

The Decline of the West, I – II. Abridged edition by Helmut Werner. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Toynbee, Arnold, J. A Study of History, istoryH

Volumes 1 – XII. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

A Study of History, One volume abridgement by Arnold J Toynbee and Jane Caplan. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1995.

Wilkins, Burleigh Taylor. Has History Any Meaning? New York: Cornell University Press, 1978.

ueCopyright © Ian Kluge. All rights reserved.