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Philosophy

Philosophy (Ar. and Pers. falsafah, from Gr. philosophia, "love of wisdom"; hikmat,

lit. "wisdom.") is the investigation of the underlying principles of reality and knowledge by rational means. Philosophy is distinguished from religion by its reliance on rational investigation rather than revelation. Traditionally, the natural sciences were considered part of philosophy, but modern thought now confines philosophy to those subjects that cannot be investigated by empirical experiment.

The history of philosophy is complex, and it is not possible to explain here even the various conceptions of the meaning and content of philosophy. Moreover, little research has been done into the philosophical aspects and antecedants of Bahá'í thought, and almost nothing has been done to integrate the ideas of the Bahá'í writings with modern philosophy. Therefore, this article will mainly discuss philosophy as part of the historical background of Bahá'í thought and the references to philosophy in the Bahá'í writings.

Islamic philosophy as background to Bahá'í thought

History of Islamic philosophy. Philosophy reached the Islamic world in the eighth century through the translation of a large number of Greek philosophic, scientific, and medical works. The Greek philosophical corpus in Arabic eventually included most of the works of Aristotle, extracts or summaries of the works of Plato, and various treatises and commentaries of later Hellenistic

philosophers, physicians, and scientists. By the ninth century there was an indigenous school of Islamic philosophy, the most important representatives of which were al-Kindi (9th cent.), al-Farabi (d. 950), and Ibn-Sina (980–1037), known in the West as Avicenna. These early Islamic philosophers expounded a system in which Aristotle's logic, physics, psychology, and ontology were combined with a neoplatonic metaphysics of emanation. Though later philosophers made many modifications, this system remains the basis of the Islamic tradition of philosophy up to the present. Thus, the reader should be aware that `philosophy' in Islam refers primarily to the Greek tradition of philosophy, although some strains of Islamic mystical theology came to be included in the philosophical curriculum. Other kinds of Islamic thought, notably dogmatic theology, might also be included as `Islamic philosophy', but following tradition they are not discussed here.

Philosophy, however, never completely overcame opposition from Islamic theologians and jurists who held that certain doctrines of philosophical metaphysics were contrary to Islam. As a result, many of the distinctive features of Islamic philosophy resulted from the philosophers' attempts to reconcile Greek philosophy with revealed religion and specifically Islam. Al-Farabi, the first great Islamic philosopher, taught that the doctrines of prophetic religion—particularly concepts such as heaven and hell that were most disputed between philosophers and theologians—were expressions of philosophical truths in language suitable for the masses of people incapable of grasping literal philosophic truth. Since both philosophers of the Platonic tradition and Muslim scholars considered religions to be primarily legal systems, religion thus became a branch of political philosophy. Philosophy and religion expressed the same truths on different levels. Al-Farabi's approach was carried on by Spanish Arab philosophers such as Ibn-Rushd (the Latin Averroes, 1126–1198) and greatly influenced both Jewish and Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages. In Islam, however, this approach to reconciling religion and philosophy died out after Ibn-Rushd.

In the eastern lands of Islam Ibn-Sina was more influential. In contrast to al-Farabi, who like Plato made political philosophy central to his system, Ibn-Sina mainly confined himself to abstract issues and began to explore the philosophical implications of mysticism. As-Suhrawardi (1154–91) systematically integrated mysticism and philosophy, producing a system reinterpreting Ibn-Sina's system on the basis of the concept of divine light.

The great mystical theologian Ibn-`Arabi (1165–1240) produced a wonderfully complex system of mystical theology that came to be called "the Unity of Being" (wahdat al-wujud). In his system all the creatures of the universe are the self-manifestations of God. His works encompassed all the lore of Islamic thought and mysticism and burst on the Islamic world like a bombshell. Even among thinkers bitterly opposed to him, his system was immensely influential.

Islamic philosophy reached its greatest heights in seventeenth century Iran in the so-called "School of Isfahan," whose greatest representative was Mulla Sadra. In Sadra's system the rationalism of Ibn-Sina and the mysticism of as-Suhrawardi and Ibn-`Arabi were combined. Although philosophy was still a matter of suspicion to most Islamic clerics, a continuous tradition of philosophy has survived carried on by Shi`i clergy from Mulla Sadra and the School of Isfahan down to the present.

The Shaykhis were the most recent distinctive school to arise in Islamic philosophy. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, a Shi`i Arab from eastern Arabia, propounded an elaborate system in which an extreme reverence for the imams was combined with a philosophical system owing much to Mulla Sadra. His most distinctive contribution was the elaboration of an older idea in which a world of immaterial images intermediate between the physical world and the world of pure spirit served as the locale for heaven, hell, and the miraculous events of the last judgment. Like many Islamic philosophers before him, Shaykh Ahmad was bitterly attacked by orthodox clergy. After the death of his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti, a large number of his followers became Babis. The remaining Shaykhis broke into several factions and emphasized the Shi`i orthodoxy of their views, modifying or concealing their most distinctive doctrines.

The philosophical tradition deriving from Ibn-Sina and Mulla Sadra has continued in the theological seminaries of Iran up to the present. Although it has never ceased to be viewed with suspicion by some of the clergy, in recent decades it has attracted considerable interest and respect in the West. A number of prominent figures in the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran were philosophers of this tradition, including Khomeini himself.

Doctrines of Islamic philosophy. Though naturally there is immense variation in the views and approaches of Islamic

philosophers over the last twelve centuries, some useful generalizations can be made. Islamic philosophy is based for the most part on the works of Aristotle, which Islamic philosophers understood as a systematic treatmentment of philosophy and science. Where appropriate works of Aristotle were not available, other classical works filled the gap, notably the substitution of Platonic works of political philosophy for the untranslated Politics of Aristotle and the addition of a late textbook of Neoplatonic metaphysics, misattributed in translation under the title of The Theology of Aristotle. After al-Farabi's abortive attempt to organize philosophy on the basis of Platonic political philosophy, almost every Islamic philosoper organized his works on the basis of some variation of a systematic division of the sciences worked out by Ibn-Sina:

Theoretical

Logic

Mathematics

Physics (natural science)

Metaphysics

First philosophy (ontology)

Theology

Practical

Ethics

Economics (household management)

Politics

While logic, the sciences, and even ethics eventually were accepted as useful tools even in Islamic jurisprudence, metaphysical doctrines came into direct conflict with Islamic dogmatic theology. While there are innumerable variations, Islamic philosophers generally shared a view of the universe something like the following:

God is that one being whose existence is necessary in itself. God in His essence is absolutely one and simple. Since an absolutely simple cause cannot be the direct cause of the complexity of the world, God in His simplicity cannot be the direct cause of all the particulars of the world, so that the traditional Judeo-Christian-Islamic account of God creating the world by simple fiat cannot be accepted. Instead, God creates directly one other being—an immaterial

intellect or mind variously known as the primal intellect, the primal will, the first angel, and the proximate light. This immaterial intellect creates another, which in turn creates another of still lower rank. The Islamic philosophers accepted the Ptolemaic astronomy, in which the earth was at the center of a set of concentric spheres, each associated with a planet and each moved by an immaterial intellect. It is the very complex interrelationships among the planets and their motions that account for the complexities of the sublunar world in which we live. The world itself is eternal, without beginning or end in time.

This metaphysical system came into conflict with Islamic theology and its representatives on several grounds. First was the question of authority. The philosophers claimed to derive doctrines about God, the universe, and the soul from pure reason. Islamic philosophers worked prophecy into their systems and were for the most part sincere Muslims, but it was clear that prophecy was subordinate to philosophy. Second, there were several fundamental philosophical doctrines that directly conflicted with the usual interpretation of Islam: God did not create the universe from nothing at a particular moment of time. It was difficult to explain how God could know particulars or how His providence could care for the individual person. The night-journey of Muhammad, heaven and hell, and the last judgment could not be taken literally. Philosophers were accused of denying the immortality of the individual soul.

Earlier Islamic philosophers had attempted to defuse these criticisms, explaining prophecy and its symbolic elements by subsuming prophecy under political philosophy and explaining the contradictions between philosophy and religion in terms of the rhetorical difficulties of conveying philosophical truths to ordinary people. Later Islamic philosophy drew on mysticism and theories about the imagination to solve such difficulties. As it had in later Greek philosophy, philosophy became an ethical and mystical pursuit for the individual, not simply a subject of intellectual investigation. Thus, philosophical investigation was to some extent protected by the prestige of mysticism.

In addition, new attempts were made explain religion in terms of philosophy. The most interesting was the doctrine of the World of Image. In the material world an image is normally a form subsisting in matter. The divine world of the intellects had no images, only pure intellect. The later philosophers,

following Ibn-`Arabi—posited a world in which images could exist without matter. This explained a whole range of phenomena ranging from the images in mirrors, imagination, and dreams to the visions of mystics, heaven and hell, and the last judgment. The Shaykhis developed this idea to its highest degree, arguing that men lived both in this world and several levels of the world of image. The material body, for example, dies in this world but the image body in the world of image is resurrected as promised in the Qur'an.

The Bab and philosophy

The Bab in the Bayan prohibited the study of philosophy (qawa'id-i hikmiya), along with the study of logic, religious law and legal theory, philology, and grammar, except insofar as these disciplines might be necessary for reading his works. He did allow the study of dogmatic theology ('ilm-i kalam). The volume of his writings and the fact that he Himself was devoid of these sciences made their study unnecessary (Persian Bayan 4:10). Though the Bab condemned the study of abstract sciences, many of his most influential followers were drawn from the Shaykhis and may be presumed to have had philosophical training and interests. However, in the few disturbed years before the suppression of the Babis, it is not likely that any of them had much time for philosophical reflection. The Bab's writings show some trace of Shaykhi philosophy and certainly presuppose issues dealt with in Shaykhi and Islamic philosophy, but they do not deal directly with philosophical issues. The relationship of the thought of the Bab and his followers to Islamic philosophy needs much more study.

Bahaullah and philosophy

Though Bahaullah condemned "such sciences as begin in mere words and end in mere words," he did not renew the Bab's explicit condemnation of philosophy. He is not known to have made any particular study of philosophy, but his writings show an easy familiarity with the concepts and main issues of Islamic philosophy. Though none of his writings can be said to be philosophical in a technical sense, he often uses philosophical terminology and sometimes treats specifically philosophical questions. An example is the Tablet of Wisdom (or "of philosophy":`Lawh-i Hikmat'), written in reply to questions about the eternity of the universe submitted by the prominent Bahá'í philosopher Aqa Muhammad Qa'ini, Nabil-i Akbar. In this tablet Bahaullah answers this classical philosophical question, though in a way that indicates that much of the dispute about it derives from the limitations of men's minds. He goes on to summarize the history of the ancient philosophers,

citing the common Islamic belief that the Greek philosophers were in contact with the prophets of Israel as evidence that the deistic philosophers drew their fundamental inspiration from prophetic religion. `Abd al-Baha's Secret of Divine Civilization, written about the same time, also gives this account of the history of philosophy.

It should be noted that philosophers were one of the groups addressed in the Suriy-i Muluk.

`Abd al-Baha and philosophy

`Abd al-Baha's writings also show familiarity with Islamic philosophy, in addition to those ideas of European philosophy and science that were becoming known in the Middle East. His earliest major work, the commentary on the famous Islamic tradition "I was a hidden treasure," is a philosophical and mystical refutation of Ibn-`Arabi's doctrine of the unity of being. The Secret of Divine Civilization touches many of the themes relating to philosophy that characterize `Abd al-Baha's later references to the subject: philosophy as a sign of civilization, that the fundamentals of philosophy derive from the prophets, the praise of the great ancient philosophers, and the comparison of the early believers in each religion to philosophers. These themes are expanded in `Abd al-Baha's talks in Europe and America, where he also criticizes modern materialistic philosophy, by which he means a naive faith in the universal applicability of the methods of physical science. This he distinguishes from the deistic philosophy of the ancients and of more reflective moderns.

In such works as Some Answered Questions, `Abd al-Baha frequently uses the concepts and arguments of Islamic philosophy when he discusses scientific, methaphysical, and theological topics. Often he cites the views of the ancient philosophers in confirmation of his own views. Among the philosophical subjects specifically addressed by `Abd al-Baha in his writings and talks are proofs for the existence of God, personal eschatology, epistemology, free will, the nature of religion and evil, and substantial motion. Insofar as they assume a philosophy, the writings of Bahaullah and `Abd al-Baha employ the late Avicennan philosophy of illumination current in nineteenth century Iran. Whether this philosophy is integrally connected with the Bahá'í teachings or whether it is a rhetorical device sometimes useful for conveying them is a matter of current Bahá'í theological debate.

Shoghi Effendi and philosophy

Shoghi Effendi, who was educated in Western schools and had studied political economy and philosophy in college, showed little direct interest in philosophy in his writings. Though he

permitted the study of philosophy, he generally encouraged Bahá'ís to pursue more practical interests during his time. He makes little reference to contemporary philosophical schools other than to reiterate `Abd al-Baha's criticism of "materialistic philosophers" and to comment that this sort of philosophy was an intellectual fad that would one day pass. His most specific comment on philosophy is his sharp criticism of the contemporary schools of Hegelian political philosophy, particularly Communism, nationalism, and fascism.

Current Bahá'í law allowing the study of philosophy is based on several interpretations of Shoghi Effendi in which he distinguished between "fruitless excursions into metaphysical hairsplitting" and "a sound branch of learning like philosophy" (Shoghi Effendi, Unfolding 445).

Philosophical writings by Bahá'ís

Among the numerous clerics who became Bahá'ís during the lifetimes of the Bab and Bahaullah were a number of men trained in philosophy. In addition to the many former Shaykhis who may be presumed to have a greater or lesser training in philosophy, we may include Wahid, Sayyid Yahya Darabi, the Babi leader of Yazd and Nayriz, whose father was a well-known philosopher. A number of prominent Bahá'ís of the time of Bahaullah were also trained as philosophers, the most notable being Aqa Muhammad Qa'ini, known as Nabil-i Akbar, and Mirza Abu al-Fadl Gulpaygani. Though both these men wrote on Bahá'í subjects, not surprisingly they dealt mostly with theological subjects and the defense of their new religion.

It is interesting that the two greatest modern Iranian Bahá'í scholars, Fadil Mazandarani and `Abd al-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, were both former `ulama trained in philosophy. Though both wrote mainly on historical and theological topics, Mazandarani's great compilation of Bahá'í writings, Amr va-Khalq, shows his knowledge of philosophical issues.

Three other recent Bahá'í authors have written specifically on philosophy. `Azizu'llah Sulaymani, better known for his Bahá'í biographical dictionary, prepared a textbook of traditional Islamic philosophy for the use of Bahá'í students. This work, Rashahat-i Hikmat, is intended to familiarize the students with traditional philosophy for use in understanding Bahá'í scripture and for teaching their faith to those trained in this philosophy. It makes no attempt to

integrate modern Western philosophy or science. Dr. `Ali-Murad Davudi was chairman of the philosophy department at Tehran University until his disappearance shortly after the Islamic Revolution. He wrote a number of works on the history of Greek and Islamic philosophy, in addition to articles on Bahá'í philosophical and theological themes. Ruhi Afnan, a cousin of Shoghi Effendi expelled as a covenant-breaker, wrote several works on the history of philosophy and its interrelationship with religion. These include an ambitious attempt to correlate Babi and Bahá'í thought with the rationalist philosophies of Descartes and Spinoza.

Only recently have Western Bahá'ís begun to write on philosophical themes. Some examples are listed among the sources mentioned below.

The Greek philosophers and the Jews

Bahaullah and `Abd al-Baha praise the "deistic" (ilahi, muta'allih) philosophers of the Greeks. In a famous tablet to the Swiss scientist A. H. Forel, `Abd al-Baha writes:

As to deistic philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, they are indeed worthy of esteem and of the highest praise, for they have rendered distinguished services to mankind. (Bahá'í World 15:37.)

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.), for example, is mentioned a number of times, usually favorably. Aristotle's works had been the primary influence on Islamic philosophy. Islamic philosophers defended Aristotle and the other pagan philosophers as sages of antiquity who through reason and mystical insight or through contact with the Hebrew prophets had attained knowledge of the unity of God. Various wise sayings were attributed to him. Bahaullah's reference to him in the Tablet of Wisdom (para. 47/Bahaullah, Tablets, 147) and many of `Abd al-Baha's references to him reflect this view of Aristotle. `Abd al-Baha thus contrasts him with the modern materialist philosophers and scientists (`Abd al-Baha, Promulgation 327, 356-57/`Abd al-Baha, Khitabat 2:299, Bahá'í World 15:37) and compares the continued fame of his learning with the oblivion of the empires of his day (`Abd al-Baha, Promulgation 348/`Abd al-Baha, Khitabat 2:268). On the other hand, his learning was limited compared to that of the Prophets and of God (`Abd al-Baha, Paris 19, `Abd

al-Baha, Some

5:para. 6/p. 15). `Abd al-Baha
attributes a type of pantheism to him (`Abd al-Baha, Some 82: para. 2/p. 290).

There has been considerable confusion about
Bahaullah's account of the Greek philosophers, as elaborated by `Abd
al-Baha. In his Tablet of Wisdom,
Bahaullah had praised Hippocrates, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Apollonius of
Tyana, and Hermes Trismegistus. Empedocles, he said, had been a contemporary of
David and Pythagoras a
contemporary of Solomon. Thus, "the
essence and fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets"
(Bahaullah, Tablets, 9, para. 26, pp.
145). Socrates is praised for having
taught monotheism, an offence for which the ignorant put him to death.

With the circulation of Bahá'í writings in
the West further questions arose. Western Bahá'ís questioned why the
chronology implicit in the Tablet of
Wisdom differed from the Western histories. Forel had evidently written to
question `Abd al-Baha's criticism of
"materialist" philosophers. Other
questions might have been asked had the Western Bahá'ís of `Abd al-Baha's
time
known more of classical history: why was Empedocles placed before
Pythagoras? Why did Bahaullah seemingly
accept the historicity of Hermes Trismegistus, given that Western scholars had
known for three hundred years that the works attributed to him were
spurious? Explaining that Bahaullah's
"Tablet of Wisdom was written in accordance with certain histories of the
East," `Abd al-Baha states that histories from the period before Alexander the
Great had many discrepancies and that such discrepancies were to be found even
in the various versions of the Bible (Research Department, p. 2). To Forel he
explained that there had been
two schools of ancient philosophers, one deistic and one materialistic. His
condemnation of philosophers had applied
only to the materialists (Bahá'í World

15:40). The explanation for Socrates'
monotheism is that he studied in the Holy Land, for the Greeks were polytheists
and so Socrates' monotheism must have had another source. Hippocrates had also
lived in Syria, in the
city of Tyre (`Abd al-Baha, Some
14–15, 25.55; `Abd al-Baha, Secret
77; `Abd al-Baha, Promulgation
362–63, 406).

The difficulty with `Abd al-Baha's account

is that it is not in accordance with what is known about the lives of Greek philosophers. Empedocles and Pythagoras were not contemporaries of David and Solomon. There is no evidence that Socrates went to Syria. Socrates did not teach monotheism. So why did `Abd al-Baha say and write these things? There are two kinds of answers: theological and historical.

The theological answer is simpler. In the time of `Abd al-Baha, Western science, and increasingly Western philosophy, were thoroughly positivistic, sometimes in a very simplistic way. `Abd al-Baha, as had many religious thinkers before him, cited the religiously-oriented Greek philosophers as evidence that reason did not necessarily imply irreligion. Pythagoras and Plato are thus old allies of monotheistic religion. Such statements are additional examples of Bahaullah's and `Abd al-Baha's habit of using their thorough command of high Islamic culture to explicate Bahá'í teachings. But what were the materials that they drew on?

The key to understanding the historical origins of `Abd al-Baha's account is found in his statement that "the Tablet of Wisdom was written in accordance with certain histories of the East." The pre-modern Islamic world had a very imperfect knowledge of the history of Greece in general and of Greek philosophy in particular. `Abd al-Baha's account can be explained by his reliance on the Islamic accounts of the Greek philosophers. The details of his account can be explained in three stages:

1.
The two schools of Greek philosophy. On this point `Abd al-Baha is on solid ground. The later Greek historians of philosophy were fond of arranging philosophers in "schools" or "successions." Diogenes Leartius, the author of the most comprehensive surviving classical history of Greek philosophy, divides the philosophers into the Ionians and the Italians. The Ionians were the pre-Socratic physicists, or as it might be translated, "materialists." This succession included the atomists and those pre-Socratics who attempted to find a physical first principle of being. The Italians were the Pythagoreans and Empedocleans, whose interests were more theological and religious (Diogenes Laertius 1.13–14). The same notion is found in pseudo-Plutarch (Aetius), De placita philosophorum (1.3). Here we find Pythagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle listed among the Italians. This work was translated into Arabic, and this chapter was incorporated into various well known Arabic histories of

philosophy (e.g., Shahrazuri [13th cent.], Nuzhat al-Arwah, ed. Ahmed [Haidarabad: Da'iratu'l-Ma'arifi'l-Osmania, 1396/1976], 1:20). The Italian school acquired added importance when it was identified by the Illuminationist school of Islamic philosophers with the "divine sages" of the Greeks. The Ionians physicists were mostly forgotten by the Muslims. Thus to later Iranian intellectuals familiar with philosophy, the Greek philosophers of importance were the "divine" or "deistic" philosophers of the Italian school: Pythagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. This was a tradition that both Bahaullah and `Abd al-Baha know and cite.

2.

"Those properly called wise." Medieval Muslim scholars attempting to understand the history of Greek thought were confronted by a variety of fragmentary accounts, none of which was sufficiently detailed to serve as the basis of a coherent and comprehensive history. As a result a variety of independent short accounts were transmitted, most of which eventually dropped out of circulation. The most persistent such tradition, found in works written from the tenth century on, was a list of "those properly called wise": Luqman, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Accounts influenced by it can be recognized by the error of placing Empedocles before Pythagoras. According to this account, Luqman, a sage mentioned in the Qur'an and not otherwise known, lived in Syria at the time of David and was the first to be called "wise" (or "a sage" or philosopher, hakim). Empedocles came to Syria and studied with Luqman. Pythagoras went to Egypt,where he studied with the disciples of Solomon. Socrates was a follower of Pythagoras, who was put to death for refuting polytheism with rational arguments. Finally, there was Plato, who was Socrates' student. This tradition would have been known to any well-educated nineteenth century Iranian.

This account can be traced back as far as the tenth century philosopher al-'Amiri and probably derives in whole or part from some Christian source. It was common for early Christian theologians to trace the origins of Greek philosophy to Jewish sources. They found it a useful strategy for undermining their most formidable pagan opponents, the Neoplatonic philosophers. Needless to say, there is no evidence of intellectual contact between the Greeks and Jews before the conquests of Alexander and little evidence of significant intellectual contact until even later. The identification of the Jews as the original source of philosophy was useful for medieval Muslims as well, since the Islamic version of the theory of

progressive revelation did not provide an obvious explanation for pagan philosophy. That this particular account is the origin of Bahaullah's and `Abd al-Baha's versions of the history of Greek philosophy is obvious from a variety of large and small features.

3. Oral simplification and quoting from memory. There is one major remaining incongruity: `Abd al-Baha's statement that Socrates studied in Syria. No such statement is known either in Greek or Islamic sources—or for that matter, in Bahaullah's writings. `Abd al-Baha writes the following:

> It is recorded in eastern histories that Socrates journeyed to Palestine and Syria and there, from men learned in the things of God, acquired certain spiritual truths; that when he returned to Greece, he promulgated two beliefs: one, the unity of God, and the other, the immortality of the soul after its separation from the body; that these concepts, so foreign to their thought, raised a great commotion among the Greeks, until in the end they gave him poison and killed him. . . .Eastern histories also state that Hippocrates sojourned for a long time in the town of Tyre, and this is a city in Syria. (`Abd al-Baha, Selections 25, p. 55)

This passage attributes two innovations to Socrates: the unity of God and the immortality of the soul. In the Islamic versions of the tradition we have been discussing, these doctrinal innovations are attributed to Empedocles, not Socrates. Hippocrates is not said to have lived in Tyre; Pythagoras was. In each of these cases a less familiar name in the Islamic tradition—Empedocles and Pythagoras—has been replaced by a more familiar name—Socrates and Hippocrates. In the absence of a textual source embodying the confusion, the probable explanation is simply that `Abd al-Baha read the story in some history and later retold it several times, and that either he or his secretary confused Socrates with Empedocles.

As for the larger question of whether the early Greek philosophers could have been influenced by Judaism, the answer is no. There is no surviving reference in Greek to the Jews dating earlier than the conquests of Alexander, which took place in Aristotle's lifetime. It is also quite certain that no such references were known in the first century C.E., since had they existed Jewish apologists such as Philo and Josephus would certainly have eagerly cited them, as would slightly later Christian writers. The reason why there was no such contact is simple enough; the Greeks and Jews had no common language. The Jews of that time used Aramaic as a lingua franca; the Greeks used Greek. There would have been nowhere they would

have met with a common
language. Plausible arguments can be
made for a Zoroastrian influence, or even an Egyptian influence, on early Greek philosophy, but not for a Jewish influence.

Sources:
The principle Bahá'í scriptures dealing with philosophical subjects are the Tablet of Wisdom (Bahaullah, Tablets,
9:137–52), `Abd al-Baha, Some
(especially parts 4 and 5), `Abd al-Baha, Promulgation

(20–22, 87–91, 253–55, 326–27, 355–61), and Tablet to Dr. Forel
(Bahá'í World Faith 336–48). Bahá'í writers on philosophy have include
`A. M. Davudi, Insan dar A'yin-i Bahá'í and Uluhiyat va Mazhariyat;
William Hatcher, Logic and Logos; Julio
Savi, The Eternal Quest for God; John
Hatcher, The Purpose of Physical Reality;

B. Hoff Conow, The Bahá'í Teachings; Udo Schaefer, The Imperishable Dominion; M. Momen,
"Relativism: a Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics," in SBBR 5:185–217; Robert Parry,
"Philosophical Theology in Bahá'í Scholarship," BSB Oct. 1992, 6/4–7/2:
66–91. Ruhi Afnan, the
Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and the Bab: Book 1: Descartes' Theory of Knowledge (New York:
Philosophical Library, 1970); idem, Bahá'u'lláh
and the Bab Confront Modern Thinkers: Book 2: Spinoza: Concerning God (New York: Philosophical Library, 1977). The
text of the tradition of "the five properly called wise" is found, with thorough commentary, in Everett K. Rowson, A
Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and its Fate (American Oriental Series 70;
New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1988), 70–89, 203–63. I have discussed various aspects of this
tradition and related material in two books: The Leaven of the Ancients:
Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks,
esp. ch. 4–8, and The Wisdom of the
Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism, esp. ch. 2. On
Socrates in Islamic sources, see Ilai Alon, Socrates
in Mediaeval Arabic Literature (Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science,
Texts and Studies X; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991). On texts relating to Socrates in the Bahá'í writings, see Research
Department, Bahá'í World Center, Memorandum to Universal House of Justice, 22 October 1995, which was kindly shared with me by Robert Johnston. On the history of Greek philosophy in the
Tablet of Wisdom, see Juan R. I. Cole, "Problems of chronology." Introductions to Islamic philosophy include
Majid Fakhry, A History of Islamic

Philosophy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., History of Islamic Philosophy, and M. M. Sharif, A History of Muslim Philosophy, though none are totally
satisfactory.

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