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Juan R.I. Cole. *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. 400 pp. $32.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-231-11081-5; $83.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-11080-8.

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This book is primarily about "the responses of Baha'u'llah and his early followers to modernity" (p. 14) and the contacts and interactions between the Baha'is and figures who are better known in Middle Eastern political history. 'Abduh, Afghani, the Young Ottomans and Young Turks, Qajar diplomats and court officials, and ministers of the Sultan pass review. Cole then uses the bright fragments of microhistory to give a picture from the social periphery of the period in which modernity was to have a forceful impact on the Middle East. The thread which ties the history together, and relates it to the project of modernism, is that of the potential and dangers of reason as an organizing social principle.

This book will be of interest to two distinct audiences. For those interested in the history of ideas in the modern Middle East, and particularly in Iran, the book offers much useful information and an illuminating perspective on the reception of modernity. Cole, for instance, notes that "if one moves away from a concentration upon governmental and intellectual elites and looks at the margins of Middle Eastern society the region appears as a cauldron of dynamic change, and the values of democracy and civil society have meant a great deal more to more ordinary people and intellectuals than is usually recognized" (p. 190). For the history of ideas in general, Baha'u'llah's critique of what Cole calls the Janus-face of modernity (p. 191) is still salient. The state remains as much of a threat as a bastion of freedom, ethnic nationalisms are still virulent, and the inhumane liberalism of the right (what Cole calls "procedural liberalism") is today a scarcely questioned orthodoxy. The book passes back and forth from the history of ideas then and there to contemporary issues in modernity and post-modernity.

In the field of Baha'i studies, the book will undoubtedly be a starting-point for a thorough-going revision of much which we have thought we knew about Baha'u'llah and his political thought. Cole shows that the proposals for social and political reform made by Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha have parallels and antecedents in the Middle East, but also that Baha'i teachings have had direct and traceable effects in the history of ideas in the region, in fields ranging from constitutionalism and democratization to the education of women and pan-Islamism. Cole also provides many translations of previously untranslated passages from Baha'u'llah's works. Chapter Two deals with the relationship between Baha'u'llah and the Young Ottomans, Chapter Three with the role of the Baha'i leaders in spreading reform ideas in Iran, Chapters Four and Five with two aspects of Baha'u'llah's critique of modernism, and Chapter Six with Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha's writings regarding gender, and with the role of women in the formation of the community.

As the first full-length work of academic history dealing with the life of Baha'u'llah, it is likely to be the seminal work in the field for some time to come. That is all the more reason to say at some length what the book is not.

In the first place, it is not a thorough analytic history of the period or of the life of Baha'u'llah, of the sort which Amanat has provided for the Babi period in *Resurrection and Renewal*. Cole's work is much shorter and covers a broader historical scope, including both Ottoman and Qajar reforms and touching on other areas. He works thematically rather than chronologically. His outline of the life of Baha'u'llah and some other leading figures of the time has some gaps which the reader must fill in from background knowledge (good references are provided). And he is as much concerned with presenting an interpretation of modernity and postmodernity as with telling Baha'u'llah's story. As history then, it does not have the comprehensiveness or thoroughness of Amanat's book, the only other book in the field with which it could fairly be compared.

Second, although the aim is to explore the relationship between Baha'u'llah's social teachings and his religious ones (p. 51), the book is written from the viewpoint

of a historian rather than of a theologian. He does make some specific and perceptive connections, such as that between Baha'u'llah's feminization of the Godhead and the contingency of gender (Chapter Six) or the Iranian "covenant of Ardashir" tradition and Baha'u'llah's plea for equal citizenship for all subjects (pp. 33-34). Much more could be done: Baha'u'llah's teachings concerning the nature of the human person are surely relevant to his advocacy of popular democracy, and a case could be made to connect Baha'u'llah's cosmogony to his acceptance of continual change. The scientific historical approach needs to be correlated with an equally systematic spiritual biography and study of Baha'u'llah's religious ideas. And both approaches require more detailed textual studies to establish best texts, date them accurately, and improve on existing translations. This is an important book, but it draws our attention to the amount of unfinished business in the field.

I will attempt to review the separate chapters, but it must be said that this is a dense work, both with argumentation and historical information. Such a review can give only a weak idea of how much can be learnt from the book.

The introduction and Chapter One deal in broad theoretical terms with the nature of modernity, and particularly religious liberty and the separation of church and state in modernity. Some interpretations of the history of modernity in these chapters seem to be biased by the author's American background, in a way which is close to staking an American colonial claim on modernity itself. Terms such as the "separation" of church and state or "divine right" are used in the sense which they have acquired in the imagined history of the American nation. Something important is then lost in relation to both Baha'u'llah's views and the meaning of modernity outside of America. American constitutional disestablishment, for instance, is linked to the removal of "the tyranny of religion over minds" (p. 2). A Dutch or English reader might consider that the secularization of science, culture, and the economic order in those countries, and the development of pluralistic societies, have proceeded without the benefit of either revolution or disestablishment. Cole equates establishment of religion with "the enforcement of a monopolistic state religion" (p. 37), something which may have been true of Spain after the expulsion of the Jews or of post-revolutionary Iran, but not of many other states with an established religion. Religious establishment, the suppression of religious pluralism, and theocratic theories of government should be dealt with as three distinct matters. The distinction becomes important in Baha'i studies of a latter period because Baha'u'llah's great-grandson and head of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi, advocated both the separation of church and state and the establishment of the Baha'i Faith and formation of a Baha'i state, positions which would seem mutually contradictory in Cole's framework.[1]

When Cole says that "The American and French revolutions, templates for the great political upheavals of modern times, both involved a repudiation of the idea of a state-imposed religion" (p. 3), he is drawing on the mythology of America rather than the history of modernity. In the case of the American revolution, as in the puritan exodus of the 1630s, it was anti-prelatical and anti-catholic sentiment, rather than the rejection of establishment, which was important. Many Puritans and patriots, in the two periods, hoped to see a new Protestant establishment which would be free of the episcopal and thus crypto-catholic taint of Anglicanism. The American revolution left established churches in New England and quasi-establishments in most other regions: rapid disestablishment occurred only in those states where the previous established church had been Anglican. Leading clergy from the patriot side were then involved in the formation of the Episcopal Church and aimed at the establishment of a national ecumenical protestant church, which was actually attempted in the South Carolina constitution of 1778. Virginia, which Cole cites as an example of rapid disestablishment linked to the revolution (p. 17), is by no means typical. New Hampshire disestablished its church only in 1819, and Massachusetts not until 1833. Likewise the French revolution led to a closer relation between church and state, in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790 and state payments of clerical salaries from 1801. The 1848 revolution in France only confirmed this position, so Cole's comment is perhaps a Republic or two too early. In the same period, Pius IX was seriously put forward as the president of the proposed federation of Italian States. Clearly the relationships between disestablishment, revolution and the modernization of the state are more complex than Cole has supposed.

These are not the only instances in which history is conflated in these chapters to provide idealized models of modernity for rhetorical purposes. The beginning of toleration for Roman Catholics and dissenters in England is said to date from "the aftermath of the 1688 Glorious Revolution (with the decree of 1689)" (p. 19), as if *cuius regio, eius religio* had actually been applied until that date. But in 1685 the Anglican Privy Council and the overwhelmingly Protestant ruling classes and parliament had welcomed the accession of James, a Roman Catholic, who in

turn advocated liberty of conscience for both Catholics and non-conformists. James then proposed to formalize the *de facto* toleration by abolishing those laws which in theory prevented Catholics from worshipping, and to abolish the Test Acts which prevented catholics or non-conformists from holding public office. He refused to approve a parliamentary move to enforce laws against dissenters. Such toleration proved too much, too soon, for his subjects. William on the other hand had promised to prevent the repeal of the Test Acts, and the invitation to depose James which was extended to William–and his eventual triumph–were both due in large part to popular anti-papal bigotry and were accompanied by anti-catholic rioting. The "decree of 1689" to which Cole refers is presumably either the Declaration of Rights or the Act of Indulgence of that year, neither of which abolished the restrictions on Catholics or non-conformists. It is clear that the revolution was an important political event, but was it a step forward or a set-back in the quite non-revolutionary English progress towards toleration and religious pluralism?

In a later period, Leo XIII is presented as a representative of "older conceptions of societal order rooted in the medieval period," as an "archconservative pope" who "strove all his life to prevent Roman Catholic political collaboration with liberals, to see that the whole range of modern ideas was condemned" (p. 17). This sounds as if it was intended to apply to Leo's predecessor, Pius IX of the *Syllabus Errorum*. Leo XIII after all was the Pope of *Rerum Novarum* and the theory of solidarity, a Catholic social theory intended to supplant socialism and which did encourage movements of social catholicism. This is the Pope who opened the Vatican archives to researchers of all schools and led the church to engage with many of those modern ideas which had simply been pronounced anathema by Pius IX. He never used the personal infallibility which had been attributed to the papacy. He also favoured monarchy above democracy, believed in biblical inerrancy, and condemned "Americanism" in exaggerated terms. The relative liberality of his early pontificate encouraged the articulation of catholic modernism, which his successor Pius X was to condemn so roundly. If he wished to disengage liberal Roman Catholics from political liberalism, he also sought to disengage conservative French Catholics from the monarchist movement. For his time, and certainly in comparison with his predecessor and successor, Leo XIII hardly deserves the label archconservative.

Do such details matter? In some respects they do not. The outright condemnation of modern ideas which Cole attributes to the papacy of Leo XIII had already been achieved under Pius IX, and Pius X was to succeed in breaking the alliance of liberals and Catholic modernists. If the first republic was not aggressively secular, the third certainly was. The United Kingdom did eventually abolish Catholic disabilities, whether one thinks that the effects of William's intervention were positive or negative. The broad lines are not altered, but the reader should be warned that the telling of micro-history may suffer when it is part of a theory of history which spans centuries and compares civilizations within the space of a few pages.

Cole is on much firmer ground when he is dealing with modern middle-eastern history and the second part of his subject, the Baha'i Faith. He shows that Baha'u'llah "opposed the theocratic currents in Islam and the general Shi'ite denial of ideal legitimacy to civil governments not ruled by the divinely appointed imam" (p. 32). Cole is not the first to note Baha'u'llah's originality in the Islamic context. The historian Mangol Bayat said that Baha'u'llah:

> ... embraced what no Muslim sect, no Muslim school of thought ever succeeded in or dared to try: the doctrinal acceptance of the de facto secularization of politics which had occurred in the Muslim world centuries earlier. (*Mysticism and Dissent*, p. 130.)

However, Cole's discussion here and in his earlier 1992 article, "Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic thought in the 19th Century" (*IJMES*, 24 1-26) is the first detailed explanation of the subject. This chapter also includes an extensive discussion of 'Abdu'l-Baha's *A Traveller's Narrative* (1888) in relation to Western and particularly Lockean thought. This is illuminating and, so far as I know, original contribution to the literature.

If we are to understand Baha'u'llah's position in these years, more could have been made of Baha'u'llah's need to rein in the theocratic assumptions of his own followers, which is only briefly mentioned (p. 32). Baha'u'llah does not simply stand in a prophetic role *vis-a-vis* the wider society, with his ideas concerning the legitimation of the state and its reform. Rather, Baha'u'llah stands between a government with a justified fear of millennialist movements because they delegitimize the state and a diverse Babi-Baha'i community which included a strong element of theocratic millennialism and rejection of the state and particularly of Qajar rule. To avoid a repetition of the Babi uprisings and subsequent persecutions, he had to placate the one while educating the other. This explains Baha'u'llah's cautious approach to announcing his own "call." It may also explain why he was able to speak more clearly from 1866, when his own followers had definitely been separated from the Azali movement

which included many of the more militant and theocratic of the Babi's.

Chapter Two compares and contrasts Baha'u'llah's political thought with that of the Young Ottomans. In a nutshell, "For the Young Ottomans constitutionalism resolved the problem of legitimating Muslim governance in the absence of the Prophet. For Baha'u'llah parliamentary rule was the sign and instrument of a new prophetic advent" (p. 62). The chapter includes a nuanced reading of Baha'u'llah's attitude to liberty, a long overdue response to Goldziher's assertion that the Baha'i writings are critical of modern liberty.

In this chapter, as in the previous one, Cole repeatedly says that there is a substantial change in Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha's political ideas (see e.g., pp. 36, 46-7, 52, 60-61, 76), but for this reader, trained in theology rather than history, he does not make this good. One wonders whether this was a conclusion to which he was led by the evidence, or a premise built into the historian's approach. Any person's ideas may change, and looking for this change often proves to be a productive strategy. But as a glance around academia shows, other individuals form their basic ideas early and thereafter do no more than elaborate and systematize. Change cannot be assumed *a priori*. Baha'u'llah certainly systematized his political teachings towards the end of his life, both by asking 'Abdu'l-Baha to write and by composing systematic expositions himself. However, the same can be said of all of Baha'u'llah's thought, not just in the political field: what had emerged *ad hoc* in letters to individuals or in response to events was set down in the later period in systematic works composed for publication. There is a rhetorical shift, which Cole notes (p. 47), but this is explicable by greater maturity, the change in audience, the expectation of formal publication, and contact with the political terminologies of reform in the Ottoman empire. It is also true that his own and 'Abdu'l-Baha's attitude to some specific Persian political reforms changed, but as Cole shows this was because the constitutional reform movement changed and could no longer fulfil Baha'u'llah's hopes of constitutional popular government, the elevation of the role of women, and the separation of church and state. If we leave aside change which merely reflects such external circumstances, what is the basis of the claim that Baha'u'llah's own political views changed substantially? On page 76 Cole says:

Baha'u'llah gradually moved away from the Hobbesian position, expressed in the tablet to Nasiru'd-Din Shah of Spring 1868, that kings were the shadows of God on earth and ruled by divine right. Although this view fit[ted] with his turn away from Babi theocratic ideals toward a rapprochement with the state, in an unnuanced form it was incompatible with his conviction that government should be consultative and that it was necessary to oppose the state when it acted arbitrarily. By the second half of 1868 or the first half of 1869, he had ... moved to a profound appreciation for British constitutional monarchy, parliamentary rule and consultative government, urging sovereigns to relinquish actual rule in favor of cabinet ministers and the elected representatives of the people ... By 1873, in his *Most Holy Book*, he had gone even further and begun speaking of popular sovereignty.

This summary of Baha'u'llah's later thought is indubitably accurate. The time which can be allowed for this supposed change may be rather less than Cole has given, since Ekbal has quite decisively shown that much of the *Most Holy Book* (the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*) was composed soon after Baha'u'llah's arrival in 'Akka in September 1868,[2] and the present writer has suggested that some parts may have been composed in Edirne,[3] that is, at the same period as the Tablet to the Shah and the letter to Queen Victoria with which Cole contrasts it (p. 65).

The question is whether Baha'u'llah's earlier thought was essentially different. As for "Babi theocratic ideals," it remains an open question whether what the Bab himself envisioned was a theocratic form of government or merely a pious and observant monarchy. It is in any case clear that there was a wide diversity of views within the Babi community. Converts from the junior 'ulama tended to be the most militant and the least ready to concede the legitimacy of the civil state, while the bazaris were most ready to accommodate the state. Amanat, who considers that the Bab himself recognized a distinction between political and spiritual authorities, concludes that "most Babis shared the observance of this duality of religious and political spheres."[4] There is at any rate nothing to suggest that Baha'u'llah ever took a militant or theocratic position. Cole himself says that Baha'u'llah "probably never embraced a theocratic vision of Babism with the same fervour that some other Babis did" (p. 46). Such an extreme development in his ideas can therefore be provisionally set aside.

What then of the divine right of kings? If by divine right we mean that kings are elected by God and should exercise absolute power, this position cannot be found in the Tablet to Nasiru'd-Din Shah. Baha'u'llah does use the title "Shadow of God,"[5] but this is incidental to the argument. His purpose is not to show that the Shah is divinely appointed, but to call that Shah, in exercising the

power which he *de facto* had, to do so with justice. At another place he says that God "hath committed the kingdom of creation, both land and sea, into the hand of kings, and they are the manifestations of the Divine Power according to the degrees of their rank,"[6] but as Cole himself notes the term "kings" is in Baha'u'llah's writing often a shorthand for worldly government in general. It is not specifically the head of government who symbolizes the sovereignty of God, but government *per se* of whatever form or level: hence the reference to degrees of rank. On one hand, the art of government is given divine approval, but on the other hand all levels of government are called on to manifest the virtues which that station implies. Moreover, the Kerman manuscript of this passage[7] reads instead: "if they happen [to be] in the shadow of God, they are accounted of God; and if not, then verily thy Lord is knowing and informed." This could hardly be taken as advocacy of a "divine right" position.

"Divine Right" also entails a degree of political quietism where the government is not seen to be governing justly, on the grounds that we should not oppose what God permits, whereas Baha'u'llah's attribute theology implies a reformist and activist stance (but not militancy) since the progressive and fullest possible realization of the attribute of sovereignty or "kingship" is a goal of creation. And in Hobbes' thought, divine right is linked to acceptance of the right of sovereigns to wage war against one another, whereas Baha'u'llah would subject the governments themselves to a higher law precisely to prevent international warfare. In short, the differences between Hobbes' and Baha'u'llah's political models would seem more striking than the similarities.

In the tablet to the Shah, Baha'u'llah renounces any claim to establish a global government[8] and recognizes the right of the Shah to govern Iran, but this again is the separation of church and state, and not advocacy of royal absolutism. From this tablet it is not possible to deduce anything more specific about Baha'u'llah's thought at this time concerning forms of government. This might be because it would have been impolitic to go into details in a letter addressed to the Shah, because he simply had not worked out any opinion regarding forms of government, or perhaps because Baha'u'llah is concerned here rather with the ethics of government than its form. He calls on the Shah, who was in fact the court of last appeal, to redress the wrongs suffered by the Baha'is: this does not imply that he did not think the Shah ought in principle to delegate judicial and other powers.

Another early work which might lead the reader to suppose a substantial change in Baha'u'llah's political thought is the Tablet to the Kings, of late 1867. This work also receives a thoughtful and generally illuminating treatment in Chapter Three. In this tablet Baha'u'llah warns Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Aziz against the corruption of his ministers and says "Take heed that thou resign not the reins of the affairs of thy state into the hands of others" and tells him that "None can discharge thy functions better than thine own self."[9] This sounds as if the Tanzimat form of cabinet government is being rejected in favour of royal absolutism. However, Cole explains elsewhere that from the late 1860s the Young Ottomans, whose success in spreading their ideas had otherwise been quite limited, "attracted the support of some very high-ranking officials, who *for their own reasons wanted to reduce the sultan's power*" (p. 70, emphasis added). So perhaps the question is not whether the sultan should employ consultative methods and delegate power, but who could be trusted.[10] Baha'u'llah also tells the Sultan in that work, "Gather around thee those ministers from whom thou canst perceive the fragrance of faith and of justice, and take thou counsel with them." Cole shows that "counsel" (*shura*) by this time implies delegated power and consultative government (pp. 55-56). He even concludes that this tablet "suggests that [Baha'u'llah] had a much more democratic outlook than the … Tanzimat reformers" (p. 56). If this was so in 1867, how does Cole conclude that there is a major shift in Baha'u'llah's thought, from a Hobbesian position in 1868 to a fully democratic position in 1873?

On another question, Cole says "That major Ottoman intellectuals were vigorously debating the prospects for a permanent peace while Baha'u'llah was exiled in Edirne [December 1863-August 1868] provides a potentially important context for his own evolution from Babi militancy toward commitment to world unity." But Cole himself shows that two of the preconditions for international peace, the abolition of *jihad* and of the ritual uncleanliness of peoples of other religions, were part of Baha'u'llah's first public announcement of his programme, in 1863 (p. 149). Moreover, he cites an autobiographic passage which shows that the roots of these positions can be traced in Baha'u'llah's childhood, and another which says that the encounter with the holy which Baha'u'llah understood as the beginning of divine revelation (and which Cole dates in June 1862) came to him in response to his own prayers "for that which was the cause of love, fellowship, and unity among all who are on earth" (p. 115). Cole's dating of the experience referred to in this passage presumably rests on the traditional dating of the *Book of Certitude* in 1862 (p. 170: this date

is probably one or two years too late). But the experience might well have occurred before Baha'u'llah's exile to Iraq. Cole himself presents evidence that Baha'u'llah had already conveyed his prophetic status to at least two believers in 1858 (p. 169) which, if we take his autobiographic account at face value, implies a "commitment to world unity" at an even earlier date. Where then is the evidence of an earlier period in which Baha'u'llah shared the ideas of the militant Babis or had not evolved a vision of world unity? The fact that the issue was being debated at the time Baha'u'llah was living in Edirne may well have provided the occasion for him to address the subject, but does not prove a causative relationship.

Another important instance of supposed change in Baha'u'llah's ideas comes in Chapter Six, where Cole says that "Baha'u'llah did not, in the early 1870s, have a vision of women as equal with men socially" (p. 172) but that "later in the Akka period [he] appears to have moved toward a more egalitarian vision of gender relations" (p. 175). This is based on the inheritance laws and references to the members of the Houses of Justice as *rijal* (males) in the Kitab-i-Aqdas, as evidence of social inequality in Baha'u'llah's teachings in the 1870s, versus a number of passages according full social equality, and even superiority, to women. The latter texts "probably come from the 1870s and 1880s" (p. 178) according to Cole, but he does not present any dates or evidence for dating for any of the eight passages which he cites. If they did come from the 1870s, the interval for the progression he supposes would be short indeed. What then of the "earlier" period? The passage from the *Most Holy Book* which refers to *rijal*, which Cole dates around 1873, might as we have seen be dated several years earlier. If so, this would seem to allow time for the kind of progression which is suggested. But Cole also cites passages from *Questions and Answers*, the *Ishraqat* (Splendours) and the *Kalimat-i-Firdawsiyyah* (Words of Paradise) in which Baha'u'llah uses the same term for the members of the Houses of Justice. These are later works: the *Ishraqat* can be plausibly dated in August 1885, which would make it contemporary with those texts which show a "more egalitarian vision of gender relations." Moreover, Cole himself shows that the term *rijal*, in Baha'u'llah's writings, is sometimes used to refer specifically to women, where faithful and courageous female disciples are accorded "honorary male status" (p. 176). Are we to suppose that this was not the case in the *Most Holy Book*, and if so, on what evidence?

As regards the inheritance laws, Cole has followed earlier writers in supposing that these favour the male heirs (p. 172), which is true if the deceased is a man. But in his *Questions and Answers* Baha'u'llah has stipulated that if the deceased is a woman the "wife's" share is allotted to the husband (Q55), and the sons' share to the daughters, if there are any (Q37). This is a bilineal pattern of inheritance, in which the male heirs and especially the eldest son have a symbolic and to some extent economic primacy when their father dies, and the daughters have the same first claim when their mother dies. The question which Cole has tried to resolve by placing Baha'u'llah's ideas in chronological order is therefore simply resolved, using concepts which Cole himself presents. In discussing early twentieth-century feminism in the United States, Cole identifies three core elements: opposition to sexual hierarchy, denial of biological determinism, and "recognition that women perceive themselves as a social grouping and not only a biological category" (p. 165). He has demonstrated that the first two are to be found in Baha'u'llah's teachings, and we have seen that the texts which he adduces to show that Baha'u'llah "did not … have a vision of women as equal with men socially" are considerably less strong than he supposes. The inheritance law and some similar texts which address and respect women as a distinct social group can be understood as reflecting the third of these elements of feminism, without which the programme of women's rights would amount to androgyny. These are complementary elements in a coherent and egalitarian vision of women's potential role in family and society, rather than successive stages in Baha'u'llah's intellectual progress.

Another minor chronological problem is the rejection of the biological basis of racism and ethnic nationalism, ideas which Cole says Baha'u'llah gradually developed during the 1860s (p. 146). But the text he quotes, illustrating Baha'u'llah's rejection of ethnic or national chauvinism (p. 147), is from 1858.

Pending further evidence, it must be concluded that Cole's claim to have discovered substantial change is more of a postulate than a conclusion. The effect of this postulate is to exaggerate the extent of interaction between Baha'u'llah's thought and contemporary streams of thought, and to reduce the need to probe for the connections between apparently contrasting statements from Baha'u'llah. It is also evident from this quick glance at chronological problems that we do not yet have a consistent intellectual biography of Baha'u'llah.

Chapter Three places Baha'u'llah's political thought in the context of the absolutism which characterized Qajar political theory of the 1880s, and the Iranian reform movement. He shows that Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha's letters and some widely distributed books served to communicate reformist ideas already current among

the Ottoman reformers to the more isolated land of Iran (p. 77). Cole concludes "the Baha'i prophet predicted and explicitly advocated representative government on the British model ... whereas the National League petitioners eschew European laws and institutions, wishing only to implement a rule of law according to the Islamic code ... if the supporters of such reformist petitions were progressive, then clearly Baha'u'llah was even more so" (p. 101). Baha'u'llah, he says, should be included among the intellectual forebears of the Iranian Constitutional revolution (p. 108). This is an important evaluation, especially if we consider that Goldziher treated the Baha'i Faith as a conservative political force.

The book would be memorable for this chapter alone, especially as little of this material was covered in his earlier *IJMES* paper, but I would like to take issue with one important detail. The chapter deals extensively with 'Abdu'l-Baha's *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (*Risaliy-i-Madaniyyih*), which Cole says was the second reformist treatise to be published and circulated in Iran (p. 89). As part of this discussion, Cole says that "'Abdu'l-Baha urges a separation of powers, including an executive, a legislature, and a judiciary ... the regime is in charge of the executive, but the learned and scientists should be in charge of the legislature" (p. 84). According to Cole, this legislature is to consist of selected experts. If this were true it would hardly be compatible with 'Abdu'l-Baha's advocacy of an elected parliamentary legislature whose members must periodically face the electorate (*The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 24, a passage which Cole himself quotes on pp. 83-4). Nor would it be clear why 'Abdu'l-Baha passes from mentioning this body of scholars to the necessary reforms of the judiciary. Cole seems to have been misled here by Gail's translation, which reads "The state is, moreover, based upon two potent forces, the legislative and the executive. The focal centre of the executive power is the government, while that of the legislative is the learned ..." (ibid, p. 37). But this is a poor translation. What 'Abdu'l-Baha says is that the sphere of governance is maintained by two mighty forces, the power of explanation (*tashri'yat*, the explanation of the *shariah*, although in a later period the word would come to mean legislation) and the power of implementation (*tanfidhiyat*). The centre of the latter is the government, while those learned ones who are prudent are the point of reference (*marja'*) for the latter (My translation, *Risaliy-i-Madaniyyih*, p. 44). He is talking therefore about the distinction between religious institutions and the mechanisms of government, not about the separation of powers within the government.

A great deal has been lost in the translation. In the first place, these two forces or "powers" (*qoveh*) are not the institutionalized "powers" of the American constitution, but something more like dynamic cosmic principles which underlie the nature of society. In this scheme, the legislature, executive and civil judiciary would all be expressions of the "power of implementation" and therefore center on government in the broader sense. Second, the term *marja'* clearly connotes the Usuli doctrine of the *Marja' at-Taqlid* (the Point of Imitation), according to which every believer is required to seek out one *mujtahid* and follow his rulings on matters such as the correct performance of religious obligations. What is happening here is that 'Abdu'l-Baha is taking over the terminology and some of the arguments which were used by the Usuli school to support the position of senior clerics as "points of imitation" for their flocks, and is subverting it. He does this first by arguing for a collective and consultative "marja"' on the grounds that no adequately educated individuals are available, a suggestion which would have fallen on stony ground by the senior Usuli 'ulama. Second, he suggests that the qualifications for membership should include knowledge of the scriptures of other faiths, of the requisites of progress and civilization, of the laws and societies of other nations, history, and "all the useful branches of learning." In short, he has disqualified the Usuli clergy, which is droll indeed.

The *mujtahids* who served as points of imitation also maintained courts which operated in parallel with the civil courts and could at times effectively invalidate their powers, but could also contradict one another. This is why 'Abdu'l-Baha goes from discussing a collective institution of scholars to law reform. His collective *marja'* is also to reform the administration of the *religious* law. If one thought of this body of scholars as a civil legislature, this recommendation would contradict Baha'u'llah's and 'Abdu'l-Baha's resolute rejection of government interference in matters of religion. All these contradictions are resolved if one understands that the purpose of this body is not to legislate as part of the apparatus of government but rather to supplant the senior Shi'ih clergy in providing institutionalized social and religious leadership.

It is difficult to see why Cole should have missed this. He has shown in this book that Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha both advocated elected popular government and the separation of church and state. Cole himself has translated 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Treatise on Leadership* which provides the best source to confirm the reading of the *Risaliy-i-Madaniyyih* given above.[11] Moreover, in other cases he has amended Gail's translations.[12] The fact that he has in this instance not revised Gail's translation in the line which would seem to be indicated

by his own research is a small indication of how much work is involved if we are to review and rethink virtually everything which we have thought we knew about Baha'u'llah's social teachings and their impact on modernization in the Middle East. The presence of such minor inconsistencies cannot detract from the invaluable conceptual shift which has been made.

The Baha'i reform programme was not limited to institutional and constitutional reform. Cole gives equal attention to advocacy for the poor, of universal and modern education, and of consultative bodies (Houses of Justice) to organize the affairs of the Baha'i community. He says that Baha'u'llah gave a sanction based on both reason and his own revelation to the use of consultation in both the Baha'i community and in governance. Consultation, and the establishment of consultative bodies, is thus a common theme in both spheres, and Cole shows that similar or identical terms for consultation are used in relation to parliaments and the Baha'i administrative institutions. He might have gone on to say that the very term "House of Justice" which Baha'u'llah chose was already in use to refer to both a parliament and a department of justice.[13]

The chapter contains a valuable critique of the current standard Baha'i translation of a phrase in Baha'u'llah's *Ishraqat* (Splendours) which reads "All matters of State (*umur-i-siyasiyyih*) should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book." If this were an accurate translation it would contradict Baha'u'llah's clear teaching that God "hath committed the world and the cities thereof to the care of the kings of the earth, and made them the emblems of His own power, by virtue of the sovereignty He hath chosen to bestow upon them. He hath refused to reserve for Himself any share whatever of this world's dominion."[14] Cole claims with some plausibility that *siyasiyyih* was not used to refer to the state or government politics in the ninteenth century, but rather leadership in general or setting punishments. Baha'u'llah was later to explain "According to the fundamental laws … in the Kitab-i-Aqdas and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees of the House of Justice,"[15] a self-interpretation which Cole might have called on to strengthen his case.

Chapter Four, 'Disciplining the state," draws attention to similarities between Baha'u'llah's ideas regarding peace and disarmament and "European peace thought," from Saint-Pierre and Rousseau to Saint-Simon. As he says, the similarities might be "largely the result of utopian realist reformers responding in similar ways to similar challenges" (p. 130), but he also shows plausible channels for a direct influence from these thinkers to Middle Eastern intellectuals such as Münif Pasha, at-Tahtawi and Mirza Malkum Khan.

Among the more illuminating sections of this chapter is that relating Baha'u'llah's anti-imperialist attitudes in the Tablet of Maqsud (1881) to the British invasion of Egypt in 1882 to suppress the 'Urabi constitutional revolution (pp. 131-135). The explanations of Baha'u'llah's rejection of colonial or quasi-colonial involvement by European powers, here and in the previous chapter, are important because the Baha'i literature has not covered this part of Baha'u'llah's teachings, while anti-Baha'i propaganda in the Middle East has very often claimed that the Baha'i Faith is nothing more than a tool in the hands of one or other European power. Baha'u'llah's critique of romantic nationalism, the first part of his critique of modernity to be dealt with here, can easily be portrayed by nationalists in the Middle East as unpatriotic. But it should be clear that the same critique applies equally to the European nationalisms which underpinned colonial expansion. In letters from the early 1880s which Cole translates (pp. 134), Baha'u'llah condemns the expansionism of the colonial powers, whom he terms "unbelievers" motivated by "greed and avarice." But he is also clear that the weakness of "the divine party" (i.e., Islamic societies) "is their own fault." Such sentiments explain the presence of Baha'i's such as Shaykhu'r-Rais among the early pan-Islamists (p. 103). Baha'u'llah's solution differs from pan-Islamism in including the West in: he hopes not only for an islamic renaissance but also to establish institutions of global collective security in which occident and orient would participate as equals.

Baha'u'llah's critique of the dark side of modernity–nationalism, mass warfare, colonialism, and racism–together with his constructive alternatives lead Cole to suggest that Baha'u'llah could be seen as an advocate of a precocious postmodernity. Western nationalism, the classical islamic justification of *jihad* against non-believers, and disabilities imposed on 'non-native' citizens in both east and west, have a common basis in constructed identities of the Self and the Other. Baha'u'llah's critique of modernity begins at this fundamental level.

Chapter Five deals with aspects of Baha'u'llah's universalism, notably his critique of the use of differences of ethnicity, religion and language as bases for exclusion in ethnic nationalism, and his advocacy of equal citizenship for religious minorities. Both are related in the first place to religious innovation (Baha'u'llah's abolition of

the ritual impurity of nonbelievers) rather than simply being taken over from the developing western practice. Cole also draws an interesting link between Baha'u'llah's standpoint epistemology, analogous to Wittgenstein's thought, and his universalism (p. 151). He devotes some time to Baha'u'llah's project of a world auxiliary language and script, an idea first broached by Baha'u'llah to Kemal Pasha in 1863, although script reform was already being debated in Ottoman circles.

Chapter Six, "Women are as Men," is unique in the secondary literature, so far as I know, in treating Baha'u'llah's critique of gender differentiation and patriarchy as a key element in his thought and an important factor in the growth of the religion. It contains some fascinating portraits of prominent Baha'i women, and of Baha'u'llah's dialogue with them. There was no place within Baha'u'llah's universalist frame of reference for the Islamic traditionalist critique that identified greater freedoms and public responsibilities for women with colonial influences aimed at disrupting the Islamic social order and male honour. But in his mystical poetry Baha'u'llah goes beyond merely removing social disabilities for women to provide a positive theological basis for a re-valuation of the feminine. In these poems, Baha'u'llah feminizes God as a beautiful, erotic, but also powerful and terrible figure, "the conflagration at the midst of every fire, the wisdom underlying every law, the energy that causes the sun to revolve–at the appearance of whom Moses was struck unconscious" (p. 168). He even envisions the possibility that a woman may in the future be selected by God to found a prophetic religion (p. 177).

Some of these poems date from the 1850s, further undermining Cole's assertion that Baha'u'llah's egalitarian vision of gender relations dates from the late Akka period. From this, and the fact that Baha'u'llah's advocacy of the education of girls before 1873 (p. 171) predates the non-Baha'i advocacy of this position which Cole demonstrates (pp. 164, 174, 181) by at least six years, one has to wonder whether Cole has demonstrated that the Baha'i leaders were "open to the influence of reformist thought" in the Ottoman empire on this question. Neither does it follow that the influence was in the opposite direction. Here and in relation to the other themes dealt with in the book, it would be equally plausible to suppose that Baha'u'llah's radical social ideas were implications which he extrapolated autonomously from his early experience of the divine, an experience which could not be contained within the categories of traditional Islam.

Cole's discussion of the Baha'i inheritance laws in this chapter has already been mentioned. His apology for their supposed inequity is not only unnecessary, and it misses an important clue to the extent and nature of Baha'u'llah's overturning of gender role patterns. The inheritance law hints at a bilineal conception of familial relations which would balance the androgenous implications of Baha'u'llah's statement that "the maidservants of God are accounted as men" (p. 176).

This review has necessarily dealt with the broad lines of the book, and has critiqued only details. That hardly gives a fair impression of the whole. I would like to close with one example of the countless illuminating historical details which are the book's greatest strength. In Chapter Six, Cole mentions *en passant* that 'Abdu'l-Baha attended Muhammad 'Abduh's study classes in Beirut in the 1880s (p. 181). 'Abduh was one of the unnamed co-authors of Qaim Amin's feminist work of around 1900. And arguments put forward by such reformers in relation to the Qu'ran are later cited by 'Abdu'l-Baha to argue that the *Most Holy Book*'s permission to men to marry two wives in fact implies monogamy (p. 171). In this case, Cole does not draw attention to the connection, but for the attentive reader looking for cross-connections, *Modernity and the Millennium* is a treasure-trove of such gems.

Notes

[1]. *Baha'i Administration*, p. 147; *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 66; versus *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 15; *God Passes By*, p. 364; *Messages to the Baha'i World*, p. 155; *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 7.

[2]. Kamran Ekbal, "Tarikh-i-nazul wa negaresh-i Kitab-i-Aqdas," *Pazhuheshnameh*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1997.

[3]. *Baha'i Studies Review*, Vol. 6 1996, p. 94.

[4]. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, pp. 407, 203.

[5]. As translated in *The Proclamation of Baha'u'llah*, p. 58.

[6]. As translated in Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, p. 113.

[7]. See Browne, *op cit.*, p. 108 n.1. Such a phrase might be inserted by a copyist with no love of the Qajars, but it seems more likely that it was omitted by 'Abdu'l-Baha in citing this work in *A Traveller's Narrative* because the latter was intended for general publication, and such a subversive sentiment might have brought the Baha'is into danger. It is also possible that there are two authentic originals: the one being the form which Baha'u'llah sent to the Shah and another the form which he permitted to be distributed within the community.

[8]. As translated in Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, p. 396. A parallel but clearer passage is quoted by Cole

at page 35.

[9]. *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 233, 237.

[10]. It is interesting to note that Midhat Pasha, one of the reform-minded officials around the sultan, was one of the group who deposed the sultan in 1876.

[11]. The original of the Treatise on Leadership, and Cole's commentary and translation, are available at http://h-net2.msu.edu/bahai (Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts, vol. 2, no. 2 (May, 1998)). Note particularly the paragraph in section 14 which describes the government executive asking the religious specialist to provide an interpretation of the meaning of divine law. This is a close parallel for the passage in *The Secret of Divine Civilization* discussed here.

[12]. See e.g., pp. 83-84.

[13]. For instance, 'adalat-khana (House of Justice) was the name of the Ministry of Justice under Nasir al-Din Shah, and the same name was used in the constitutional movement in reference to something resembling a "parliament." (See Yarshater, in Bosworth, *Qajar Iran*, p. 5; Algar, *Religion and State in Iran*, p. 247).

[14]. *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, CXXIX, p. 304. Similar passages are found in many of Baha'u'llah's works.

[15]. Lawh-i-dunya, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 92-93.

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