

THE JOURNAL OF BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

La Revue des études bahá'ies/La Revista de estudios bahá'ís

Volume 26, number 4

Winter 2016



A Publication of the Association for Bahá'í Studies—North America

THE JOURNAL OF BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

LA REVUE DES ÉTUDES BAHÁ'ÍES/LA REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS BAHÁ'ÍS

Volume 26 Number 4 Winter 2016

Publications Mail
Registration No. 09448

EDITOR John S. Hatcher

POETRY EDITOR Peter E. Murphy

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT Nilufar Gordon

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE Roshan Danesh, Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, Mehran Kiai,
Pierre-Yves Mocquais, Mary Sobhani, Bahhaj Tahezadeh

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies (USPS #013-468) is published by the Association for Bahá'í Studies—North America. Periodicals postage paid at Champlain, NY, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Address changes should be sent to IMS of NY, 100 Walnut St. #3, P.O. Box 1518, Champlain, NY, USA 12919-1518. For details call IMS at 1(800) 428-3003.

Articles in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* are available on EBSCO Publishing's aggregated database. This journal is abstracted in *Science of Religion Abstracts*, *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, *Index Islamicus*, and *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*, and catalogued at the Institut de L'Information Scientifique et Technique.

Annual subscription fees (in Canadian funds):

Individual subscriptions: Canada \$50; United States: \$70; International: \$80.

Institutional subscriptions: \$90.

Single copies: \$20/issue.

Details available at <<http://bahai-studies.ca/subscription/>>

Correspondence regarding subscriptions should be addressed to Association for Bahá'í Studies, 34 Copernicus Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7K4 Canada. E-mail: <[abs-na \[at\] bahai-studies.ca](mailto:abs-na@bahai-studies.ca)>. Tel.: 613-233-1903. Address editorial correspondence to <[editor \[at\] bahai-studies.ca](mailto:editor@bahai-studies.ca)>.

Printed in Canada on recycled paper.

ISSN 0838-0430

© Association for Bahá'í Studies 2016. All rights reserved.

French translation: Louise Mailhot and Juliette Goudreau

Spanish translation: Nuriyeh McLaren

Many articles published in the Journal of Bahá'í Studies allude to the institutions and central figures of the Bahá'í Faith; as an aid for those unfamiliar with the Bahá'í Faith, we include here a succinct summary excerpted from <http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/bahaullah-covenant/>. The reader may also find it helpful to visit the official web site for the worldwide Bahá'í community (www.bahai.org) available in several languages. For article submission guidelines, please visit <http://bahai-studies.ca/the-journal-of-bahai-studies-submission-guidelines/>.

ABOUT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The Bahá'í Faith, its followers believe, is “divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men.” The mission of the Bahá'í Faith is “to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, “abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith” (Shoghi Effendi).

The Bahá'í Faith began with the mission entrusted by God to two Divine Messengers—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Today, the distinctive unity of the Faith They founded stems from explicit instructions given by Bahá'u'lláh that have assured the continuity of guidance following His passing. This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá'u'lláh to His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. A Bahá'í accepts the divine authority of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and of these appointed successors.

The Báb (1819-1850) is the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith. In the middle of the 19th century, He announced that He was the bearer of a message destined to transform humanity's spiritual life. His mission was to prepare the way for the coming of a second Messenger from God, greater than Himself, who would usher in an age of peace and justice.

Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892)—the “Glory of God”—is the Promised One foretold by the Báb and all of the Divine Messengers of the past. Bahá'u'lláh delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. Thousands of verses, letters and books flowed from His pen. In His Writings, He outlined a framework for the development of a global civilization which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. For this, He endured 40 years of imprisonment, torture and exile.

In His will, Bahá'u'lláh appointed His oldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), as the authorized interpreter of His teachings and Head of the Faith. Throughout the East and West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became known as an ambassador of peace, an exemplary human being, and the leading exponent of a new Faith.

Appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), spent 36 years systematically nurturing the development, deepening the understanding, and strengthening the unity of the Bahá'í community, as it increasingly grew to reflect the diversity of the entire human race.

The development of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide is today guided by the Universal House of Justice (established in 1963). In His book of laws, Bahá'u'lláh instructed the Universal House of Justice to exert a positive influence on the welfare of humankind, promote education, peace and global prosperity, and safeguard human honor and the position of religion.

THE JOURNAL OF BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

LA REVUE DES ÉTUDES BAHÁ'ÍES/LA REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS BAHÁ'ÍS

Volume 26 Number 4 Winter 2016

Contents

- 3 JOHN S. HATCHER From the Editor's Desk
- 9 FARZAM ARBAB The Intellectual Life of the Bahá'í Community
The 34th Hasan M. Balyuzi Memorial Lecture
- 23 PAUL LAMPLE In Pursuit of Harmony between Science and Religion
- 59 SONA FARID-ARBAB Advancing in Bahá'í-inspired Education
- 75 RHETT DIESSNER The Beauty of the Human Psyche: The Patterns
of the Virtues
- 95 ANNE GORDON PERRY Anne Gould Hauberg and Mark Tobey:
Lives Lived for Art, Cultivated by Spirit

Poems

- 22 EMARI DIGIORGIO Elegy for the Old Thinking
- 74 CAITLIN JOHNSON CASTELAZ Good News
- 105 JACK MCLEAN An Afternoon with Roger

Illustrations

- 94 Anne Gould Hauberg (1943)
- 103 Mark Tobey (1944) and Anne Gould Hauberg (1960)
- 104 Mark Tobey's studio (1976)

107 *Biographical Notes*

Cover: LEONARD ERICKS Transition (40"x30" oil on canvas)

From the Editor's Desk

JOHN S. HATCHER

A VISION OF THE FUTURE

First, let me welcome those of you who have downloaded the *Journal* for free from the Association for Bahá'í Studies website. This milestone decision by the Executive Committee required a great deal of reflection on what is the most essential purpose of ABS in service to the Bahá'í community, to society at large, and to scholars from every field. Now there is no membership fee, no charge for reading and sharing the *Journal*, and, we feel, no limitations to the far-reaching influence of the discourses carried out in the articles published therein. So now that all have free access to the *Journal's* issues online, please share them with those whom you feel might be inspired and enlightened by the content.

My exhortation is particularly appropriate to this present issue, which I believe contains some of the most forthright and informative discussions about where we are in the global progress of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as how we can assist the world's citizens to respond to the rapidly escalating crises and tests we face as a planetary community.

Shoghi Effendi observes in the very first sentence of *The Promised Day is*

Come that a “tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course, catastrophic in its immediate effects, *unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequences*, is at present sweeping the face of the earth” (3; emphasis added). However, the principal theme and focus of the Bahá'í Faith is a vision of the future that, in spite of the present turmoil and consternation we witness and experience, is completely positive and encouraging.

Doubtless the “glorious consequences” of this promise might seem quite remote and hardly consoling in the midst of our present circumstances, as the initial stages of this tempest already feel all too overwhelming at times. Indeed, the rapid onset of the dismantling of whatever stability we might have thought we had achieved should make us strive to understand what this “glorious” outcome will be, and, of more immediate concern, what we might do to hasten and facilitate its arrival.

For Bahá'ís who are presently involved in the activities prescribed in the plans created for this very purpose by the Universal House of Justice, the roiling tempest becomes incrementally less distracting the more we focus our attention and energies on the framework and strategies for constructing vibrant and spiritually oriented communities from the ground up. These communities—purposely spread throughout the world—will in time become the global civilization that will embrace, nurture, and guide by example the collection of nation

states throughout the world. Currently, many countries are, instead, ostensibly intent on becoming increasingly more insular, less collaborative, and therefore less capable of responding effectively to the plethora of global challenges that presently confront humankind: global warming, racism, religious conflict, ideologically driven clashes of opinion and armed forces, the ever more overt and egregious demeaning of women, the exponentially widening gulf in the distribution of wealth and human resources between the few and the many, and so on.

The articles in this issue are dedicated, whether directly or indirectly, to this theme—the Bahá'í vision of a future that is by no means a vain or idealistic hope, but a concrete reality whose foundation is being constructed presently through innovative educational programs and a variety of social activities devised precisely to demonstrate in action the efficacy of the future society Bahá'u'lláh describes as a Golden Age in which humankind lives collaboratively in a single, unified commonwealth. Those who abide in this future polity—described in detail in the Bahá'í texts—will, among other things, speak a common language, write in a common script, utilize a single currency and system of weights and measures, and, most importantly, share a common belief in the essentially spiritual nature and purpose of human existence.

The two articles that open this issue focus on one of the most critical and yet widely misunderstood tenets of

the Bahá'í teachings that is a requisite for fostering the advent of this glorious future—the unity of science and religion. The first, by Farzam Arbab, who served as a member of the Universal House of Justice, is titled “The Intellectual Life of the Bahá'í Community” and is an edited transcript of the lecture he delivered at the 40th annual conference of the Association of Bahá'í Studies, held in Montreal in August 2016.

The animating goal of Arbab's discussion is the frank examination of the deficiencies in the way human thinking approaches the study of reality—especially social reality—and of what Bahá'í students and thinkers can do to respond to conflicting views by fostering several salutary methods, which he spells out in lucid terms. He points out, for example, that we need not abandon or disdain all that has been accomplished by past achievements of human learning in order to understand and apply what the Bahá'í Writings teach regarding the integration of and reciprocity between materialist theories and spiritual enlightenment.

He states that “[b]ringing spiritual and material forces to bear coherently on the life of humanity requires an intellectuality that is not easy to come by.” He explains: “We cannot, for example, subscribe to a view that the basic structures of today's society are essentially sound, that the problem is that their control has fallen into the hands of the wrong people, and that only if spiritualized people—the

kind we are trying to become—were in charge, peace and prosperity would emerge.”

Arbab also observes, profoundly, that “we cannot stand to the side and say, ‘Everything will be made new,’” though he does note that in time, strictly materialist views of reality “will fall into disrepute as breakthroughs in the understanding of the interactions between the subjective and the objective will occur,” particularly in the attempts to explain human consciousness.

He then establishes what he feels are three conditions that must accompany the attempts of future Bahá’í learning and scholarship to demonstrate conclusively the underlying unity of science and religion—conditions that are already extant, but sorely in need of recognition. The first condition he cites as necessary to the flourishing of intellectual life is the courage to question the present orthodoxy and to suggest viable alternatives. The second condition he proposes is the rejection of elitism and the embracing of a path of service “upon which multitudes are invited to walk.”

He concludes with a discussion of the third condition, a process of inquiry that, he asserts, “is needed to understand the nature of harmony between science and religion and the ways in which they complement each other in the civilization-building process.” This understanding can be accomplished, he observes, by a move among Bahá’ís to regard science not as “scientism” or as mere technology, but as “the nature

of scientific knowledge in all its power, science as the ‘first emanation from God toward man’” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 49).

To a certain extent, the second article in this issue, a rendering of the talk given on 20 May 2016 by member of the Universal House of Justice Paul Lample at the Bahá’í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois, focuses on this same subject, but it also explores the broader implications of the advancement of the Bahá’í community in its noble efforts to respond to the specific challenges it presently confronts as a global religion attempting to establish the strong, rational, and innovative underpinnings of a future society that can endure and prosper, even as increasingly dysfunctional and ineffectual systems rapidly decline.

Lample’s thoughtful and accessible discussion has been a source of encouragement for countless souls. This paper approaches education and enlightenment from the broader perspective of how our understanding of reality cannot be fragmented into a strictly materialist approach or a strictly spiritual or metaphysical perspective. Put simply, if reality is an integrated organic creation, then any useful study, understanding, or application of enlightenment gained from it must itself be integrative in its approach. And if the two dimensions of reality presently available for our consideration are but aspects of a single construct, then neither approach has value if dissevered from the other. Indeed, there is a reciprocity between

the material and spiritual study in public discourse that is most obviously appropriate to an understanding of our own nature. This reciprocal relationship is most obvious in the association between our spiritual essence or soul and our human temple, even as our knowledge of spiritual concepts is incomplete until demonstrated in personal comportment and social reformation, the practice of which further informs our understanding.

More specifically, the article discusses the imperative from the Bahá'í texts regarding how science must become freed from materialism even as religion must become freed from superstition. After examining the current conflict and the urgent need to resolve this false dichotomy, Lample considers how Bahá'ís might “understand and increasingly contribute to the effectuation of this principle through action and involvement in contemporary discourse.”

He begins by analyzing the irrationality of present-day global systems, whether in terms of the distribution of human resources, the construction of systems for human health and welfare, or the protection of the environment. He then proceeds to explain how the source of these dysfunctional structures—as well as every other human conflict, injustice, and deficiency—can be traced back to the lack of harmony between science and religion. Lample then gives a more detailed diagnosis of the forces afflicting humanity, one of the most grievous being religious fanaticism, which he describes as the

degeneration of religion into superstition, and the unwarranted division of the world and its peoples into the simplistic categories of good and evil.

Part and parcel of this irrational bifurcation is the simultaneous clash between fanatical and materialistic worldviews. But as the article goes on to note, the truth about reality and our need to comprehend it is not found in some middle ground, but rather in the realization that the advancement of human understanding results from a religious view based on rational exploration of the metaphysical dimension and a study of the material dimension as it is informed by, related to, and an expression of metaphysical reality.

Lample then presents the reader with an expansive examination of a strictly materialist interpretation of reality and the effects and influence that such a philosophical orientation has upon society. He next explores strides and attitudes in science that transcend reductionist materialist views of reality and the human reality in particular (the conscious mind), following this with an equally rich investigation of the influence of religion on the evolving schools of thought in anthropological and sociological studies.

He concludes with an elegant treatment of “true religion” and the “practice of true religion,” in which he discusses precisely what the Bahá'í plans are designed to do by way of community building throughout the world.

The third article, by Sona Farid-Arbab, also derives from a plenary talk from the very successful 2016

ABS conference. Related to the same theme of the relationship between religion and enlightenment as borne out in practical strategies, this article focuses on the accomplishments of the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program as an example of how the Bahá'í community can reimagine and implement innovative approaches to education in general.

The article considers both the vision in the Bahá'í texts about education in the future and what is presently being accomplished. After briefly rehearsing the obvious failure of most contemporary educational systems to assist students in becoming well-rounded, thoughtful, and productive members of society, the article looks at a Bahá'í response to this dire need.

The author describes the most basic form of this response as it is currently being translated into efforts carried out by groups of Bahá'ís and other like-minded individuals inspired by the vision and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith to create an integrative and holistic approach to education to combat the serial application of educational fads that most public schooling has become: "behaviorism a few decades ago, a combination of computationalism of the cognitive movement and culturalism interspersed by emphasis on behavioral objectives sometime later, more recently a curious mixture of constructivism and outcome-based curricula, and then whatever may be coming next."

Farid-Arbab then discusses the Bahá'í vision of bringing forth a "new

race of men," successive generations of individuals progressively more informed about the essential human reality and purpose and energized by the prospect of channeling that understanding into fostering an "ever-advancing civilization." She, too, asserts that such an endeavor need not—indeed should not—abandon all that has been done in the study of education or its application to the Bahá'í concept of desired outcomes, although our goal is to "enable each generation of youth to contribute more decisively than the previous one to the construction of a new culture and a new civilization."

The fourth article, "The Beauty of the Human Psyche" by Rhett Diessner, is, not coincidentally, a wonderful demonstration of the sort of study and application explicitly called for in the first three articles. Exploring some of the various notions of the essential human reality (the psyche or soul), Diessner lays out in very approachable and useful terms the fundamental parameters one can derive about this ephemeral reality from the authoritative Bahá'í texts.

He traces the origin of the soul—both as an emanation from God and as the entity endowed with the specialized capacity to willfully manifest all the divine attributes—and then follows the transmission of the virtues to the brain, where abstraction is transformed into manifest reality—that is, knowledge into action and, with unremitting effort, patterns of action into the spiritual transformation of the individual.

Beyond this general observation, Diessner also discusses how this spiritual process appears to take place in neuronal patterns in the physical apparatus of the brain as this most complex and refined all-material creation becomes trained by the soul itself.

The final article, by longtime contributor Anne Gordon Perry, is a succinct but valuable description of the relationship between Seattle Bahá'í art patron Anne Gould Hauberg (1917–2016) and the internationally celebrated Seattle-based painter Mark Tobey (1890–1976). During the course of this piece, Perry reveals their shared interest in both art and faith and the inextricable relationship between these two aspects of their lives. Spanning decades, their friendship was characterized by Hauberg's provision of patronage for Tobey, who created works of art for her and taught her about the Bahá'í Faith, a resource that guided her for the rest of her life.

Finally, we have interspersed some very fine poems throughout the volume: Jack McLean's elegiac "Afternoon with Roger," a tribute to late Bahá'í poet Roger White; Emari DiGiorgio's deeply evocative "Elegy for the Old Thinking"; and Caitlin Johnson Castelaz's wonderfully metaphysical piece "Good News."

WORKS CITED

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Promulgation of Universal Peace*. 2nd ed., Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- Shoghi Effendi. *The Promised Day is Come*. Rev. ed., Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980.

*The 34th Hasan M. Balyuzi
Memorial Lecture*

The Intellectual Life of the Bahá'í Community

FARZAM ARBAB

It is a great honor for me to be presenting the Balyuzi Lecture at this year's ABS Conference.¹ The presence of Douglas Martin in this gathering is a source of immense joy. I hope I am not mistaken in thinking that, on such an occasion, I might take advantage of the kind and forgiving mood of the audience and allow myself the luxury of disorder. What you are about to hear is not a well-organized lecture but a series of scattered thoughts—my own musings on the nature and challenges of the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community.

To begin, I should say that a part of me tends to dismiss my concern with the intellectual life of the community as unnecessary. “Why belabor an obvious and straightforward matter?” insists a voice within me. It is in the very nature of the Bahá'í community for its members to pursue education.

¹ This article is an edited transcript of the Hasan M. Balyuzi Lecture presented at the 40th annual conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies held in Montreal, Quebec, in August 2016.

Look at our history. Well established Bahá'í communities tend to enjoy a notably high level of educational achievement. Bahá'í families give the highest priority to the education of their children, and as the community grows in size, Bahá'ís will move to the forefront of every imaginable field of human endeavor. The clarity of mind they have acquired from a profound knowledge of the Writings, their own upright characters, and their love for truth will enable them to gain unprecedented insights into reality. Gradually, more and more talented Bahá'ís in each field will begin to collaborate with one other and together will advance the frontiers of knowledge in their areas of expertise.

I should hasten to say that actually I have no problem with this narrative. I am certain that the process as described has been unfolding for some time and will continue to gain momentum. But the question I feel impelled to pose is: Shouldn't there be more to the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community than what this simple narrative depicts? Are we not supposed to do something more?

On the long road from obscurity to the establishment of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, we have reached the point at which the Bahá'í Faith is being accepted as a world religion alongside other major religions. What is more, in country after country, a growing number of people have formed a high opinion of us as good people with admirable ideals, and—much to the credit of the approach we are taking

to community building—they are even beginning to appreciate our contributions to the life of society. This is a truly great accomplishment, one of which we should all be proud. Looking at the small and rather obscure community that we were not long ago and then at what we are today, we cannot but bow our heads in gratitude before Bahá'u'lláh and praise His handiwork.

But we know that this is not the end. The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is not intended to culminate in some kind of friendly competition with other religious movements and reach a prestigious place alongside them. And as far as our intellectual accomplishments are concerned, we cannot ignore the fact that if we were to follow the ways of the world we would be far behind everyone else for the longest time. We will certainly be justified in celebrating the accomplishment of any Bahá'í who reaches prominence in a given field, but we will have to remember that for each such individual, many religious communities, as well as agnostics and atheists, will have hundreds, if not thousands, of people at the same or higher level of prominence. So it really does not make sense for us to engage in a game of numbers and prestige; we need to look deeper into the dynamics of the Bahá'í community's intellectual pursuits. For me, the real issues have to do with the content of our thoughts, the nature of our questions, and the validity and relevance of our answers to the profound challenges facing humanity as it emerges from adolescence. Prominent or not, what

do those of us engaged in intellectual pursuits have to say that deserves to be heard? Clearly we have a great deal to say when we present the Faith to various audiences, but what I am asking is not about our presentations of the Faith and its ideals; my concern is with our contributions to the advancement of knowledge in the many fields of human endeavor and, finally, to the advancement of civilization itself.

I would like to suggest that such a fundamental question can only receive reasonable answers when examined in light of the mission of the Faith and the nature of the transformation that humanity is to undergo as envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. Statements in the Writings vividly describing the magnitude of this change cannot be set aside, no matter how uncomfortable they might make those who occupy the intellectual circles with which we associate—and sometimes, perhaps, ourselves. No doubt, we need to be wise in the way we discuss with others the kind of change we predict both for the individual and for society as humanity passes from childhood to maturity, but we cannot be forgetful of what our Writings have to say about the transformation that is bound to occur when we are reflecting on ourselves, on our own pursuits, and on the characteristics of our own communities. The direction of our thoughts has to be set by an ever-growing appreciation of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous vision of human civilization and a clear understanding of the forces operating in the present deficient and moribund

order. There is no need to quote extensively from the many passages relevant to this theme—not to this audience, for you know them well. “The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order,” Bahá’u’lláh states in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. “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” (¶ 181). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that we “must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moral standards, new capacities. New bounties, perfect bestowals, are awaiting and already descending” upon us. “The gifts and blessings of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity” (*Foundations* 9).

And as to the present world, Shoghi Effendi has written:

A world, dimmed by the steadily dying-out light of religion, heaving with the explosive forces of a blind and triumphant nationalism; scorched with the fires of pitiless persecution, whether racial or religious; deluded by the false theories and doctrines that threaten to supplant the worship of God and the sanctification of His laws; enervated by a rampant and brutal materialism; disintegrating through the corrosive influence of moral and spiritual decadence;

and enmeshed in the coils of economic anarchy and strife—such is the spectacle presented to men’s eyes, as a result of the sweeping changes which this revolutionizing Force, as yet in the initial stage of its operation, is now producing in the life of the entire planet. (*Advent* 47)

It seems to me that one of the first sets of questions we need to ask when we contemplate the future evolution of the intellectual life of the Bahá’í community is this: Bahá’u’lláh refers to the present order as “lamentably defective” (*Tablets* 11:26)—how defective do we think “lamentably defective” actually is? Which constituents of the present order are defective, and which ones are not? Which parts are we to keep, and which are we to reject completely? How deep into the foundations of the present order do we have to go to find the real causes of its defective ways? I would like to explore a little this last question.

That there is much wrong with this world is something acknowledged by a vast number of people today. It is not difficult to reach agreement, particularly in progressive circles, on a list of problems that humanity has to face and overcome if a better world is to emerge: large numbers of people have no access to education; unemployment is rampant; dictatorships oppress people, and so on. Therefore, education for all, employment for all, freedom to live in a democratic culture for all are the kinds of objectives to be pursued.

So long is the list of all the ills of present-day society, and so visible are they near the surface, that we certainly are justified to reach the conclusion that a sizeable portion of the growing intellectual resources of the Bahá'í community should be directed toward seeking effective remedies for them. In other words, it seems reasonable to think that we should engage with other like-minded people in endeavors that seek solutions to the problems of humanity and, in the process, pursue knowledge and develop and exercise our intellectual capacity. We would, of course, go further than many progressive movements, in both thought and action, and assert that solutions cannot be found merely on the plane of the material; the human heart has to change. Any effort to overcome the huge problems facing humanity will have to rely on spiritual as well as material forces. We know that, as the Universal House of Justice has stated, "Behind so much of the turbulence and commotion of contemporary life are the fits and starts of a humanity struggling to come of age. Widely accepted practices and conventions, cherished attitudes and habits, are one by one being rendered obsolete, as the imperatives of maturity begin to assert themselves" (letter dated 2 March 2013).

What we need to accept, then, is the necessity to dedicate a great deal of our intellectual resources to look into these practices and conventions, attitudes and habits, and help replace them with spiritually sound

equivalents. Such an intention, if it is to be more than the expression of pious belief, creates formidable challenges for the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community. Bringing spiritual and material forces to bear coherently on the life of humanity requires an intellectuality that is not easy to come by. Much needs to be done to develop it through the exertions of the Bahá'í community and other like-minded people. This is certainly something we can and should do.

Yet this aspect of the development of our intellectual capacity addresses only the readily identifiable problems in the defective character of the present order. As Bahá'ís we know well that we have to go deeper. We cannot, for example, subscribe to a view that the basic structures of today's society are essentially sound, that the problem is that their control has fallen into the hands of the wrong people, and that only if spiritualized people—the kind we are trying to become—were in charge, peace and prosperity would emerge. Clearly, as we look to the Writings, we see that this cannot be the case; the challenges facing humanity as it moves from collective childhood to collective maturity cannot be explained away so easily. The moment we remember that the principle of the oneness of humankind implies organic change in the structure of society, we are obliged to go deeper and face the challenge of identifying defective structures and figuring out what has to take their place. We cannot just look at structures close to the surface;

we must examine *all* the structures holding together the present order. We cannot simply implement arrangements that enable universal education; the entire worldwide system of education has to be transformed. It is not enough to create more jobs or fund credit in order to provide employment for all; there has to be a restructuring of economic life according to a delicate interplay between the principle of the oneness of humanity and the exigencies of justice. We cannot simply adapt democratic culture as it is defined today; we have to foster a culture that deals with such concepts as freedom, authority, and governance in a way that is different from any that humanity has tried so far.

It is clear that when we move from engaging in social action to thinking about the structure of society, the demands on the intellectual life of our community grow enormously. Establishing some kind of educational program for a given population in some part of the world, offering quality health care to another, or helping improve the agricultural practices of a group of farmers certainly constitute fields of action in which we develop and exercise the kind of intellectuality we are seeking. But it is far more demanding intellectually to identify in what ways the underlying structures of society need to be fundamentally revolutionized. To that end, the intellectual life of our community has to develop in such a way that a reasonable number of us are able to identify the structural defects of the present order

and participate in those discourses of society that permit deep deliberation on alternatives. I hope it is clear that what I am proposing here is serious and meticulous work. It is not an endorsement of the habit of repeating, "The problem is structural" whenever we face one of the many ills afflicting humankind and then continuing doing business as usual. That things will be better when the structure of society has changed for the better is an obvious truth, as is the statement that things will be better when people are more spiritual. The question is: What should the structures of a future society be like, and how do we build them?

Let me mention here that the Bahá'í community has taken decisive steps toward the development of the kind of intellectual capacity I am trying to describe—for example, through the programs of the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity. The enthusiasm with which the community has responded to these programs is heartwarming indeed. Although these are only initial advances, by helping a growing number of young Bahá'ís engaged in university studies reflect deeply on the nature of their studies, they are without a doubt contributing to the intellectual life of the community and shaping its future. So my remarks on the intellectual challenges before us are made here in a spirit of optimism and hopefulness—in fact, with a good deal of heartfelt joy. But what I hope you will agree with me on at this point is that concern with the development of the intellectual

life of the Bahá'í community is not unreasonable. The simple narrative I presented at the beginning describes only the obvious. Much has to be said and done if a community that claims to be establishing the pattern of the future society is to fulfill its mission. Hoping that you share with me this sense of optimistic concern, I would like to go ahead and present to you further challenges still.

What if we go deeper than the question of the structures of society and ask ourselves questions about the knowledge systems that have given shape to the present order? Is it possible that the intellectual foundations of the present civilization—the ideas, the assumptions, the methods, and the assertions that underpin individual and collective thought—are entirely sound and yet, somehow, give rise to such a defective order? Could it just be that the wrong people have taken hold of sound knowledge and are applying it to create inadequate structures, processes, and behaviors? Should we not also look for fundamental defects in the knowledge system that defines today's world? If civilization is the fruit of a tree and we accept that the fruit is so different from what it should be, doesn't it make sense for us to look at the roots of the tree and find out if something is wrong there as well?

I realize that the kind of questions I am now asking can be somewhat dangerous. Over the decades I have heard extreme answers to these questions, the kinds of emotional responses that amount to saying, "All of it should be

thrown away"—or the opposite: "It is anti-intellectual to pose such questions." But the questions I am asking are not meant to elicit an emotional response; they are an appeal for careful and rational analysis, in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, of today's reality and the historical forces at work. All that is being suggested is that such a careful examination should go beyond behavior and sociopolitical structure and should also include the intellectual foundations of the present order—at least the intellectual foundations of social, economic, and political thought, and, let me be so bold as to say, the intellectual foundations of culture. I believe this is something that has to be done, and if it is done with scientific and philosophical rigor, by minds shaped by an intellectuality endowed with spiritual perception, the intellectual foundation for a new civilization will gradually emerge. This new foundation will not be built out of thin air. The intellectual accomplishments of humanity during its long journey through childhood will not be ignored. The child learns a great deal that is essential for the life of the adult. When we leave childhood behind, we do not throw away our ability to read and write, our mastery of arithmetic and basic geometry, or the moral code we have been taught. Yet it is difficult to see how we can ever be responsible adults if we insist on carrying with us our fascination with the fairy tales that stimulated our imagination and brought us so much joy when we were children. "The playthings of

childhood and infancy," 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, "no longer satisfy or interest the adult mind" (*Promulgation* 439).

It is evident that a decision to acquire the capacity to engage in a rigorous examination of the intellectual foundations of our civilization places formidable demands on how the intellectual life of the community needs to develop. Sifting through the habits of thought, the principles, the methods, and the conceptions that underlie civilization today and deciding which can be retained and expanded upon and which need to be cast away is not a trivial pursuit. Which of our societies' cherished conceptions of human psyche, which elements of today's elaborate theories of social progress, which methods of education, which conceptions of work, wealth, love, justice, freedom and authority are the playthings of childhood and infancy? And what is to replace them? One thing is for sure: we cannot stand to the side and say, "Everything will be made new" and then take pride in moving to the forefront of processes belonging to a world that we believe is collapsing. I have no answers to the kind of questions I am now asking; I am only expressing my hope that if we create the right kind of conditions, we will be able to identify and rigorously describe some of the elements, both old and new, of the intellectual foundation of a new civilization. What I would like to do, then, is to mention a few of the conditions we should seek to establish. But before that, allow me to state some of my own prejudices.

Returning to my previous analogy, I think the advances humanity has made—and is making at a remarkable pace—in the natural sciences are far more like reading and writing skills than like the fantasies of childhood. We may say, of course, that today's science is still in its infancy. We may be confident that it will advance a great deal, that new discoveries will revolutionize many fields of scientific inquiry, and that existing insights will be refined again and again. We can also readily accept that minds illumined by the light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings—working within systems of research uncorrupted by competitiveness and desire for personal prestige and in the context of a culture that venerates knowledge rather than treating it like a commodity—will open new horizons toward which science can move, strengthening its contribution to the advancement of spiritual and material civilization. But it is my conviction that this thing we call science will not be thrown away and replaced by something else called "Bahá'í science." Grand theories like Newtonian mechanics, quantum mechanics, relativity, and evolution are here to stay. They are valid within the parameters of the physical phenomena that they were constructed to explain. And it is this science that will advance and lead to extraordinary new discoveries and elegant theories to explain them. However, what I believe will happen is that physicalism—the effort to explain everything, including life, consciousness, reason, and morality, using the content

and methods set forth by these grand theories—will fall into disrepute as breakthroughs in the understanding of the interactions between the subjective and the objective will occur.

When I move away from the modern natural sciences into other components of the intellectual basis of, say, Western civilization—the civilization that appears to have had the most vitality in modern times—I cannot help but become more skeptical. I still hold in great regard the social sciences and philosophy that uphold this civilization, but I see too many of the fantasies of childhood in them. Something much better has to emerge, albeit well informed by some of the greatest philosophical thinking of the past, something new upon which social, political, and economic thought appropriate for the age of the maturity of the human race can be built. The light of the Enlightenment appears too dim to me when I compare it with the light shining from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

If I have managed to convince you, even momentarily, that the development of the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community is an enormously challenging task, it may be helpful to say a few words about some of the conditions that enable us to meet this challenge. I will mention three without any claim that they are the most important.

The first condition, I believe, is courage. Those who began the thought processes that led to the Enlightenment were courageous people. They lived and worked within a religious

orthodoxy that had a total grip on the intellectual life of the West. They had the courage to question that orthodoxy and propose alternatives. And they were able to present enough evidence and to argue with sufficient clarity to change the tide of history. Is there not another orthodoxy today, we may ask, with a similar grip on the human mind that, for lack of a better word, we usually call materialism? Does it not have its priests—some of whom actually pretend to be religious? Does it not have immense power? Does it not have access to enormous economic resources—all to advance its views of human nature and society? It will also take courage to question the assumptions and the theories of this orthodoxy, not just by labeling as materialistic whatever one doesn't like, but by engaging in painstaking, spiritually illumined scientific and philosophical inquiry.

Mustering up courage, of course, has to be accompanied by the elaboration of a sound methodology. One of the features of the present orthodoxy and the power structures on which it relies is that they incorporate criticism into their schemes. Yet too often it is the kind of criticism that achieves little. Criticism for the sake of criticism is wasteful, to say the least; by politely, or impolitely, listening to the voices of opposition and accommodating them superficially, power perpetuates itself. Western democracy has understood well the role of criticism as an escape valve. Meanwhile, power and money keep accumulating in the hands of the few, who relentlessly pursue

their aims. It is necessary to change our very conception of criticism, by which I don't mean just to make sure it is constructive. It seems to me that if we develop and learn the process of Bahá'í consultation as a form of collective investigation of reality, we will achieve much higher aims than if we just voice criticism of the world as it is.

A second condition that is conducive to the flourishing of the kind of intellectual life being proposed has to do with the fact that our community can't afford to be elitist. I am using the word in a special sense that I will explain. Breakthroughs clearly need brilliant minds, so the culture we are developing does and should recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of the individual. Talent should be acknowledged and nurtured. But a culture that respects knowledge, in which the voices of the knowledgeable are heard, and where great ideas and great works of art are admired, is not necessarily elitist. To be an elitist implies a sense of entitlement, aloofness, or superiority. It is privilege demanding more privilege. Let me assure you that not for a moment do I believe that the Bahá'í community has been, is, or ever will be elitist. The Bahá'í teachings in general, and the Administrative Order in particular, protect it from such a future. What I think we should do is to recognize the features of a culture that is not elitist but that nurtures talent and encourages intellectual and artistic accomplishment, and then promote that culture against the forces of an elitist society. In such a

culture, knowledge is not the property of a few; it is accessible to all, with the result that large sections of humanity are not left in ignorance and the oppression that results from depriving people of knowledge is never allowed to establish itself. And what are some of the mechanisms through which such a culture is strengthened? A look at the institute process, which has been playing such a crucial role in our community-building efforts in recent times, may lead to valuable insights into this question.

A community with the kind of culture we are envisioning needs a worldwide, intellectually and spiritually sound conversation at its grassroots. In a world so fragmented by historical forces, the Bahá'í community has to nurture the habit of speaking in a language that transcends parochial patterns of thought so that words begin to acquire the same meaning for people coming from totally different backgrounds. The conversation, it seems reasonable to say, has to be about the application of the Bahá'í teachings to individual and collective life. Much of it has to be about practical matters raised to proper spiritual heights and analyzed in light of spiritual truths. It has to be profound but not so pointlessly difficult as to scare away most people. It has to allow everyone to enter the conversation at the most accessible levels and then build capacity for increasingly more complex thought—no one is to be left out. The institute process that has been unfolding in the Bahá'í community now

for about two decades, although still in its initial stages, is clearly making significant contributions to the establishment of such a worldwide conversation. It is organized around a path of service upon which multitudes are invited to walk—a path on which people learn together how to fulfill their twofold moral purpose of attending to their own spiritual and intellectual development and contributing to the transformation of society. Learning accumulates through a combination of study of the text and systematized experience. This is an important habit of mind that could help shape an intellectuality free from certain false dichotomies, such as the one between the spiritual and the material or the one between knowledge that wells up in the human heart as it connects to the ocean of Revelation and knowledge that is acquired through experience. It is a habit of mind that acknowledges the importance of evidence and uses it to separate knowledge from fancy.

I do not intend here to analyze the present form of the institute process and its future possibilities; I am only mentioning it in order to illustrate the nature of a conversation at the grassroots of the Bahá'í world community that can cultivate an intellectuality capable of addressing the challenges mentioned earlier. At this general level, intellectual powers are not focused on specific areas of scholarship. As the sea swells up, as individuals develop the capabilities of advanced fields of human knowledge, individual waves, and collection of waves, some

powerful enough to break through formidable intellectual barriers, are bound to rise. Furthermore, because the relationship created among those who walk the path of service is one of accompanying each other—not competing with each other, not managing each other, not manipulating each other, and not gaining power over each other—it becomes easier to avoid the dangers of elitism.

The third condition I would like to discuss has to do with harmony between science and religion. It seems to me that an essential condition for the kind of intellectual life we are imagining for the Bahá'í community is a rigorous understanding of the relation between science and religion—at least as far as their function as sources of knowledge for the advancement of civilization is concerned. This is a vast subject that is not possible to treat briefly so I would like to point out only one or two ideas relevant to the theme of this talk.

In recent years, and in the context of the rise of a new civilization, in the Bahá'í community science and religion increasingly have been identified as two complementary, overlapping systems of knowledge and practice. Now a firm materialist would reject the description outright because it is against his “religion” to consider religious belief a form of knowledge. But I also realize that the idea of religion as a system of knowledge and practice makes some religious people, including some Bahá'ís, a little uncomfortable. This is unfortunate because the discomfort

arises from a misunderstanding of the intention of the phrase. I assure you that when I think of my Faith, the first thing that comes to my mind is not a system of knowledge and practice. I think of the dazzling light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation; I think of the Greatness of this Day, the power of the Covenant, the joy of turning to the Most Great Beauty. But when it comes to our efforts to advance civilization, I am reminded that according to Shoghi Effendi, the Cause is scientific in its method, and that a spiritual and material civilization has to be built with knowledge from both religion and science. In this context, examining the two as complementary systems of knowledge and practice proves quite useful.

Just giving names to things, of course, does not take us very far. A rigorous process of inquiry is needed to understand the nature of harmony between science and religion and the ways in which they complement each other in the civilization-building process. I would like to suggest that the more attention we give to such an inquiry, and the sooner we begin doing so, the greater the progress we will achieve in the development of the intellectual life of our community. Allow me to say a few words, then, about one of the implications of the statement that science and religion constitute complementary systems of knowledge.

This innocent-sounding statement rules out certain other possible relations between science and religion. It

rejects the position that religious belief is largely speculative knowledge about reality, a stop-gap measure we employ while we wait for real scientific knowledge to appear as science finds definitive answers to the questions that give rise to the religious impulse in the human being in the first place. It is a fact of history that the positivist project—a project that attempted to banish religious belief as a feature of an underdeveloped humanity and replace it with sound scientific knowledge based on experience—has failed. Interestingly, its bravest and probably most exacting manifestation (logical positivism) imploded, and not only because of the advances in the philosophy of science resulting from analysis of real historical evidence.

The statement also closes the door to expressions, sincere and enticing as they may be, that real science will be the result of correct and imaginative readings of the Scriptures. This apparent expression of faith, it seems to me, arises from a confusion in the usage of the word *religion*, which sometimes refers to what God has revealed and sometimes to the beliefs and practices of a specific religious community. In the Bahá'í community, we try to ensure that the latter—our system of knowledge and practice—corresponds as closely as possible to the revealed Word. The assurance that it will be so is a unique feature of the Bahá'í Faith, a feature Bahá'u'lláh Himself incorporated into His Teachings through the establishment of the Covenant. Because God is all-knowing and all

knowledge emanates from Him, it seems legitimate to believe that the Revelation contains scientific knowledge, but it would be unwarranted to infer from it that real science will be discovered by our reading of the Text. Science is a faculty of the human soul. The powers of perception and reasoning are thus gifts from God that allow humanity to construct the extremely powerful system of knowledge and practice we also call “science.” Trying to conflate scientific knowledge with religious knowledge takes us back to the time of Galileo. Trying to conflate spiritual and moral knowledge with something that the methods of science would be capable of producing is equally fruitless, as the efforts of the positivists have already proven. And yet how tempting it is to resort to such reductionism ourselves! Elements of knowledge elaborated in science and elements of knowledge elaborated in the process of religious study and practice should be used together in specific efforts. Such a clarity, it seems to me, is an indispensable characteristic of the intellectual life we are trying to develop.

Never in my life have I doubted that the most sacred and urgent task before the Bahá'í community is the teaching of the Faith. Humanity needs to see the light of Bahá'u'lláh. At the same time, albeit with less feeling of urgency, I have felt that the growing Bahá'í community needs to increase its understanding of science. Not scientism. Not those popular versions of science that cannot distinguish it

from magic. Not the mere knowledge of technology. What the Bahá'í community needs to grasp is the nature of scientific knowledge in all its power, science as the “first emanation from God toward man” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 49) illuminating human understanding and enabling it to penetrate the mysteries of the universe and life on this earthly plane; science as complementing religious faith and knowledge so filled with spiritual insights that can help humanity raise this world of dust to the heaven of glory.

Friends, I have shared with you some of the thoughts on the intellectual life of the community that have occupied my mind over the years. As I mentioned at the beginning, this has not been a systematic treatment of the subject. I hope I have shown how challenging the road ahead of us is, both for those who are engaged in scholarly work and those who bear the responsibility of promoting the intellectual life of the community. I hope I conveyed my optimism about the prospect of meaningful intellectual progress. This optimism is not the result of wishful thinking. For the longest time, I have hoped for the rise of a distinctive intellectuality that would integrate the spiritual and the material, the practical and the theoretical—an intellectuality that would have roots in the civilization-building efforts of the Bahá'í community. Today, tens of thousands of people, particularly youth, are fully engaged in such efforts, and to a person like me who is very familiar with

their work, it seems clear that the light of the desired intellectual life of the community has dawned.

WORKS CITED

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Foundations of World Unity*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979.
- . *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. Edited by Howard Macnutt. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993.
- . *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Edited by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. Translated by Habib Taherzadeh et al. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988.
- Shoghi Effendi. *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990.
- The Universal House of Justice. Letter to the Bahá'í Community in Iran. 2 March 2013.

Elegy for the Old Thinking

EMARI DIGIORGIO

When the theoretical physicist explains
that he's found the same self-correcting codes
in nature that run a browser,

I imagine the forsythia at my window
administers a program for when to bloom
or drop its leaves. Gravity's the odd man out,

which is to say that the apple will fall to ground
as long as moon orbits earth. I tell my baby
that the stars in the sky are not just lights

but places to go. The theoretical physicist says
he was only trying to solve some problems
that no one thought there were answers for.

He says learning supersymmetry is a bit
like having babies: you focus on the benefits,
not the pain. I think about the loss

of my childless life, and then, all of the times
I thought I was essential before.
Maybe that's the real loss. Outside my window,

the branches and roots cancel out each other,
so all I see are electric yellow blossoms
framed in green frond. When you ask a physicist

a question he'll give you a number and the range
of uncertainty. If you ask me how old
my daughter is, I'll say 12 weeks, two days,

but if I count back to conception, she's a full year,
maybe 384 days, a range of uncertainty implied
by my use of maybe. Somehow—perhaps

it's the same invisible pattern of zeros and ones
pulsing in leaf vein—even when I sleep,
my ears tune to hear her call, and since she's

so small, I know that when she cries,
it's out of need. When she's older, it still
will be need, though I'll miss holding her length

in the cradle of my arms, how my heartbeat
is enough to sooth her to sleep. Make me the tree
or the apple, let her be gravity or light.

In Pursuit of Harmony between Science and Religion

PAUL LAMPLE

Abstract

The disintegration of the old world order is accelerating, driven by religious fanaticism, irreligion, and an inability to achieve sufficient consensus of thought and action to systematically address the ills afflicting humanity. The capacity to unite in the investigation of truth for the advancement of civilization requires the harmony of science and religion, in which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains, science is freed from materialism and religion from superstition. This paper looks at how Bahá'ís might understand and increasingly contribute to the effectuation of this principle through action and involvement in contemporary discourse.

Resumé

La désintégration de l'ancien ordre mondial s'accélère, sous l'impulsion du fanatisme religieux, de l'irreligion et d'une incapacité à établir un consensus de pensée et d'action suffisant pour enrayer de façon systématique les maux dont souffre l'humanité. Pour pouvoir s'unir dans une quête de vérité qui favorisera le progrès de la civilisation, il faut que la science et la religion soient en harmonie, ce qui – comme l'explique 'Abdu'l-Bahá – signifie que la science doit être exempte de matérialisme et la religion, de superstitions. L'auteur examine comment les bahá'ís pourraient

approfondir ce principe et contribuer à sa réalisation par des actions et une prise de parole dans le discours contemporain.

Resumen

La desintegración del viejo orden mundial se está acelerando, fomentado por el fanatismo religioso, la irreligión, y una incapacidad de lograr suficiente consenso de pensamiento y acción para sistemáticamente atender los males afligiendo a la humanidad. La capacidad de unirse en la investigación de la verdad para el avance de la civilización requiere de la armonía entre la ciencia y la religión, en la cual, como 'Abdu'l-Bahá explica, la ciencia es liberada del materialismo y la religión de la superstición. Este ensayo reflexiona sobre cómo los bahá'ís pueden entender y contribuir cada vez más a la efectuation de este principio a través de la acción y la participación en el discurso contemporáneo.

When we look at the world around us, especially as reflected in news reports and social media, we increasingly see evidence everywhere that the understandings and structures of human society are frayed and unable to adequately address the pressing problems of humanity. Terrorism and fanaticism, oppression and war, prejudice and demagoguery, the aggregation of the vindication of extreme wealth and superficial response to poverty, the glorification of opinion over fact, the conflation of morality with personal preference, the advancement of a materialistic worldview, and the reduction of what it means to be human, assault our consciousness and our perception of reality every day. The evil

tendencies of corruption, moral laxity, and ingrained prejudice mentioned by Shoghi Effendi so long ago have vastly expanded their reach and impact. The hope for a world of peace and progress that shone briefly but brightly as the previous century drew to a close has been overtaken by a fog of disorientation and despair, rendering humanity unable or unwilling to agree on the nature of its problems and how to resolve them. As the Universal House of Justice explained, “in different nations in different ways, the social consensus around ideals that have traditionally united and bound together a people is increasingly worn and spent,” recalling “the unequivocal verdict from the Supreme Pen: ‘They hasten forward to Hell Fire, and mistake it for light’” (Ridván Message 2015).

The world we inhabit is the social reality that reflects our understanding and action; as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “[t]he reality of man is his thought” (*Paris Talks* 17). A sound social reality requires a sound grasp of reality, an outlook that should be facilitated by the knowledge systems of science and religion (Lample). Consider the nature of food systems as one example of the extreme irrationality that permeates the structure of global society. One might imagine a reasonable aim for such systems would be to provide all the world’s people with a sufficient and healthy diet produced by sustainable methods and efficient delivery systems in harmony with the ecosystem. What we witness, instead, is a bizarre arrangement centered on

control and extraction of wealth for a few at the expense of the masses; the prostitution of science in service to food engineering, which makes harmful products addictive and ushers in a self-inflicted health crisis; the perpetuation of hunger among more than ten percent of the world’s population, including some one hundred million children; and systems of production and distribution at war with the environment (Hanley).

Thus, human beings live in a social reality of their own creation, derived from a limited consciousness of reality, and the world we see around us is the result. If we want a different world, we must think and act differently. Distracted and nearsighted, humanity has unwittingly loosed the reins of reason and right conduct, allowing the steed of social order to deviate increasingly from the path of civilization. The consequence is an acceleration of the disintegration of the social order; facilitating the rolling out of a new order in its stead requires a tightening of the grip on these reins based on Bahá’u’lláh’s conception of the harmony of science and religion.

The relationship between science, or reason, and religion is widely and often hotly debated, and the elusive harmony on which civilization depends will not be suddenly manifested (Arbab). The purpose of this article is to explore how the harmony of science and religion might be realized. It is derived from aspects of a talk given in May 2016 in Wilmette, Illinois, and elaborates upon points that

were necessarily touched upon indirectly and very generally at that time. The thoughts presented here are, of course, the personal perspectives of one individual.

DIAGNOSIS OF THE FORCES AFFLICTING HUMANITY

In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh offers an analysis of the forces afflicting society as it struggles to deal with the transition toward a stable global order. At the heart of this turmoil, He explains, is the decline of religion. Religion, He writes, “is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world,” and He warns that “[s]hould the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine” (*Tablets* 125). As the light of true religion dims—that is, religious thought and practice consistent with the original teachings set forth by the Manifestation of God—two virulent forces intensify. One is religious fanaticism, which Bahá'u'lláh likens to “a world-devouring fire, whose violence none can quench” (*Gleanings* 288). The second is the “corrosion of ungodliness” that is “eating into the vitals of human society” (200). In both instances, Bahá'u'lláh explains that the antidote to these destructive forces is true religion, and He calls upon the leaders of the world to safeguard religion and rehabilitate society:

The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure. Our hope is that the world's religious leaders and the rulers thereof will unitedly arise for the reformation of this age and the rehabilitation of its fortunes. (*Gleanings* 215–16)

In His analysis these concepts, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “The greatest cause of human alienation has been religion because each party has considered the belief of the other as anathema and deprived of the mercy of God.” The purpose of religion is to contribute to the advancement of civilization and the wellbeing of humanity. Over the centuries, however, the practice of religion departs from the essential truths of its sacred scriptures. Eventually, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “each system of religious belief has boasted of its own superiority and excellence, abasing and scorning the validity of all others.” Leaders of religion, He adds, come

to consider “the world of humanity as two trees: one divine and merciful, the other satanic; they themselves the branches, leaves and fruit of the divine tree and all others who differ from them in belief the product of the tree which is satanic. Therefore, sedition and warfare, bloodshed and strife have been continuous among them” (*Promulgation* 230).

When the teachings of religion are distorted in this way, religions depart from what is true, what is good, and what is right, to become the imposition of ideology and the exercise of power over others. They degenerate into superstition and lose the meaning originally conveyed by their Founders, the Manifestations of God. And when religious leaders associate superstitious concepts with religion, it is no wonder that rational and scientific minds consider religion to be superstition. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá observes:

True religion is the source of love and agreement amongst men, the cause of the development of praiseworthy qualities, but the people are holding to the counterfeit and imitation, negligent of the reality which unifies, so they are bereft and deprived of the radiance of religion. . . . That which was meant to be conducive to life has become the cause of death; that which should have been an evidence of knowledge is now a proof of ignorance; that which was a factor in the sublimity of human nature has proved to be

its degradation. Therefore, the realm of the religionist has gradually narrowed and darkened, and the sphere of the materialist has widened and advanced; for the religionist has held to imitation and counterfeit, neglecting and discarding holiness and the sacred reality of religion. (*Promulgation* 179)

In the clash between religious fanaticism and a materialistic worldview that rejects religion, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá unhesitatingly sides with materialists. He observes that if religion “is made the cause of darkness through human misunderstanding and ignorance, it would be better to do without it” (*Promulgation* 287). But of course, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also finds a mere materialistic perspective of reality to be inadequate and the source of deep problems in itself, and calls upon us to rekindle the light of religion. He explains: “All the Prophets have come to promote divine bestowals, to found the spiritual civilization and teach the principles of morality. Therefore, we must strive with all our powers so that spiritual influences may gain the victory” (12). It is the harmony of science and religion that must guide human progress:

Religion and science are the two wings upon which man’s intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress. It is not possible to fly with one wing alone! Should a

man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism. (*Paris Talks* 143)

At the heart of forces driving the disequilibrium of the world, then, is a discordant relationship between science and religion, where science is too often constrained or interpreted by materialism, and religion is pervaded by superstition. Bahá'u'lláh calls for the harmony of science and religion so that human beings can grasp reality as accurately as possible and act effectively to change society for the better. And Shoghi Effendi anticipates a future in which “science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop” (*World Order* 204). The quest to gradually understand and act in a manner that upholds the relationship between science and religion is essential for transforming social reality. It requires a progressive effort to expose and disassociate science from its materialistic interpretation and religion from its superstitious entanglements.

A MATERIALISTIC PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

One of the most significant obstacles to an appreciation of the harmony

between science and religion is the way in which, in the modern world, scientific thought has become undifferentiated from the reductionistic, materialistic philosophical perspective that interprets its findings. Propelled especially by scientific advances and the explanatory power of evolutionary theory, materialistic philosophy proposes that everything about the existence of the universe can be reduced to matter and be known in terms of physics and chemistry, and, perhaps, biology. This does not mean that science simply confines itself to questions of the material realm, or that scientific findings might well be interpreted in a manner consistent with a religious conception of reality without resorting to awkward impositions of religion on science—such as the theory of intelligent design. Rather, science and its materialistic philosophical interpretation have become inseparable, predetermining ideologically that no reality exists outside the material, and that all phenomena, including consciousness and mental capacity, can be reduced to material interactions. As set forth in one text on science and religion:

Materialism is a philosophical system that regards matter as the only reality in the world. It attempts to explain every event in the universe as resulting from the conditions and activity of matter, and thus denies the existence of God and the immaterial soul. . . .

Materialism is a set of related theories that holds that all entities

and processes are composed of—and so are reducible to—matter, material forces, or physical processes. All events and facts are explainable, actually or in principle, in terms of body, material objects, or changes or movements. In general, the metaphysical theory of materialism entails the denial of the reality of spiritual beings, consciousness, and mental or psychic states or processes, as ontologically distinct from or independent of material changes or processes. (Campbell and Looy 139)

A materialistic philosophical interpretation of the findings of science pertaining to cosmology and evolution has fueled the neo-atheist movement to attack religion in a host of books and public debates. From this perspective, science, conceived to be inseparable from materialistic interpretations, is set in opposition to a conception of religion imbued with superstitious and anti-scientific notions. This stance, in turn, is contested by a range of other views, some thoughtful and some dogmatic, on the relationship between science and religion. What is perhaps more significant than these points of debate, however, is the extent to which, for many, religious ideas are simply irrelevant to an understanding of the world, which is to be understood solely in terms of basic physical laws and forces. Such a reductionist materialistic perspective, rather than simply being adopted as a methodological

tool for investigating physical reality through scientific inquiry, is assumed from the outset to be the only way to view reality as a whole.

Among some contemporary conclusions drawn from a materialist perspective on reality are the following:

- That human beings are insignificant, a mere speck in an arbitrary part of universe.
- That science is the only way to know; what it cannot know is not real.
- That human life is an accident of evolution and that if the process were to be repeated indefinitely, intelligent human life would not appear; the concept of a multiverse is used to try to rationalize how this accident of consciousness appeared once among countless universes.
- That human beings are no more than animals.
- That there is no possibility of life after death, since the person ends when the body ends.
- That if you are intelligent, you cannot be religious.
- That belief in God is a dangerous delusion, an intractable form of superstition that has caused inestimable harm, and that humanity must dispense with religion.
- That humans are chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet.
- That consciousness is not real; it is an artifact or illusion of the brain.

- That there is no purpose or meaning to the universe and that people are therefore obliged to make up their own meanings.

While the majority of the world's people do not hold such views, they are presumed to be obvious to many, and are propagated as a clear-eyed embrace of the reality of the universe. Yet the potential implications of such conclusions for social reality are inadequately considered. If what happens from the perspective of physics is only the result of forces associated with matter or space-time, and from the perspective of biology what is desirable is only that which survives and reproduces, then it is not merely God that is a delusion, but also social reality—which becomes disassociated from truth and meaning. Are life and civilization effectively nothing more than the way we amuse ourselves while our genes reproduce? Are we trapped in an endless struggle for existence and dominance? And is there no cause for concern if we make a mess of it and precipitate our own extinction—for the universe goes on?

In the past, when materialistic perspectives and their implications were weighed by philosophers, thinkers such as Nietzsche and Camus recognized the stark crisis that befell a humanity deprived of the shared purpose upon which the very delicate fabric of society depends. Today, the radical implications inherent in such a posture appear to be unappreciated or naively embraced as opportunity.

Biologist Edward O. Wilson concludes that in a universe bereft of meaning, human beings should simply create their own. He calls for an embrace of science and the humanities that will lead to a new Enlightenment and cooperation among a humanity that embraces its material reality and, somehow, successfully navigates its future place on the planet (*Meaning of Human Existence*). But there is no reason to expect or even hope for such an outcome. If social ideas are merely “memes” that compete in a Darwinian manner for acceptance and survival among human cultures, there is nothing but sophistry in advocating the superiority of rational materialism over, say, religious fanaticism, while plenty of evidence suggests that fanatics will reproduce and win out. The battle of ideologies throughout the twentieth century and into the start of the twenty-first is sufficient evidence. And, indeed, from such a perspective there is no justifiable way to say that one outcome matters more than any other. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá notes: “Progress and barbarism go hand in hand, unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance” (*Selections* 284).

It is evident that even science can become the victim of forces unleashed by a material worldview, serving as a tool wielded by those who hold wealth and power. Thus, to cite only a few examples, science is used to cover up the ill effects of sugar for the sugar industry and of smoking for the tobacco industry, to make unspeakable weapons of mass destruction for the

military-industrial complex, to produce medical breakthroughs that are reserved for the wealthiest on the planet, while ignoring the well-being of the masses, and is subject to the influence of social ills such as racial prejudice or the inequality of women and men.¹ Political forces, no less than fundamentalist religion, can be mobilized to obscure or deny sound scientific findings in the pursuit of sectarian interests. The harm inflicted by religious fanaticism can be opposed without advocating its replacement by an atheistic materialism that is no shield against an equal measure of abuse perpetuated in its name.

Along with loss of meaning and distortion of truth, a materialistic perspective on human nature undermines the basis for human morality. It is not that atheists cannot be moral. The more foundational question is why should an atheist—or anyone—be moral. And what is morality

1 Some might say that this characterization is not 'science' but the manipulation or hijacking of science by a few corrupt interests. Any fair-minded assessment, however, would readily demonstrate the distinction between an ideal conception of science and its obvious challenges in practice, especially the influence of money. My intent here is not to call science into question, but to expose the often unspoken assumption and simplistic generalization that science is good and religion is bad. As we stand on the threshold of engineering the human genome, for example, surely the use to which science is influenced by a materialistic, or any other, worldview is profoundly relevant.

anyway? The conviction that human beings must hold themselves accountable to particular values, principles or imperatives has been overtaken by a moral relativism that reduces morality to individual choices. Morality bends to personal preference, rather than personal behavior bending to morality. Although some argue that one is free to choose so long as another is not hurt, this limitation proves illusory in the face of evolving arguments that constantly challenge whether previously held beliefs are truly harmful to others. The consequent erosion of moral standards within a society proceeds gradually as clear and mutually agreed upon standards of an earlier period are called into question or set aside. This decline is evident, for example, in the change from the promotion of sexual abstinence before marriage to a belief that such restraint for young people is impossible, unnatural, or unwise; also in the change from the recognition of the importance of monogamy for the stability of the family—even if only held as an ideal—to arguments that monogamy is impossible. Even a practice widely held to be damaging such as pornography begins to find arguments in its favor, as in some examples from sex-positive feminism, among others. As philosopher Thomas Nagel observes, reducing humanity to a mere evolutionary byproduct undermines the basis for morality:

The evolutionary story leaves the authority of reason in a much weaker position. This is even more

clearly true of our moral and other normative capacities—on which we often rely to correct our instincts. . . . [A]n evolutionary self-understanding would almost certainly require us to give up moral realism—the natural conviction that our moral judgments are true or false independent of our beliefs. Evolutionary naturalism implies that we shouldn't take any of our convictions seriously, including the scientific world picture on which evolutionary naturalism depends. (*Mind and Cosmos* 26–27)

At the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's critique of materialistic philosophy is precisely the way in which such reductionism uproots the essential definition of what it means to be human, for it imprisons humanity in an eternal struggle for existence—the survival of the fittest, the theory that lies at the heart of the evolutionary process governing biological creation. “This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountain-head of all calamities and is the supreme affliction,” He states (*Selections* 302). In His talks in the West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá observed that the people were “submerged and drowning in a sea of materialism” (*Promulgation* 16). Although material civilization advanced, spiritual civilization was left behind. He was astonished that individuals of great learning considered themselves to be no more than animals and disregarded human intelligence and distinction (17). It is in the human

being, not any other part of the earthly biosphere, that the universe exhibits consciousness of itself. The consequence of conceiving human beings to be merely animals and turning away from the uniquely human capacities, 'Abdu'l-Bahá concluded, is failure to attend to those things that would lift humanity beyond its imperfections such as jealousy, revenge, ferocity, hypocrisy, greed, injustice, tyranny, war, prejudice, self-interest and the struggle for power. In assessing the impact of such a perspective in the social realm, Shoghi Effendi warned against

crass materialism, which lays excessive and ever-increasing emphasis on material well-being forgetful of those things of the spirit on which alone a sure and stable foundation can be laid for human society. It is this same cancerous materialism, born originally in Europe, carried to excess in the North American continent, contaminating the Asiatic peoples and nations, spreading its ominous tentacles to the borders of Africa, and now invading its very heart, which Bahá'u'lláh in unequivocal and emphatic language denounced in His Writings, comparing it to a devouring flame and regarding it as the chief factor in precipitating the dire ordeals and world-shaking crises that must necessarily involve the burning of cities and the spread of terror and consternation in the hearts of men. (*Citadel* 125)

BEYOND A REDUCTIONISTIC
PERSPECTIVE ON SCIENCE

There are philosophical alternatives to reductionism that do not compromise science and reason, which allows for broader possibilities in the investigation of reality. In *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly Wrong*, Thomas Nagel asserts that “it is prima facie highly implausible that life as we know it is the result of a sequence of physical accidents together with the mechanism of natural selection” (5). In his view, materialism simply does not adequately explain the nature of consciousness, which is all too obviously part of the universe. He finds the reductive materialism underlying neo-Darwinian explanations of life and mind to be “antecedently unbelievable—a triumph of ideological theory over common sense” (122). Nagel asserts that its failure to adequately explain consciousness is a major obstacle to the materialist’s objective to provide a comprehensive physical description of the universe. The existence of consciousness, he states, implies that “the natural order is far less austere than it would be if physics and chemistry accounted for everything” (32). He argues:

The conflict between scientific naturalism and various forms of antireductionism is a staple of recent philosophy. On one side there is the hope that everything can be accounted for at the most basic

level by the physical sciences, extended to include biology. On the other side there are doubts about whether the reality of such features of our world as consciousness, intentionality, meaning, purpose, thought and value can be accommodated in a universe consisting of the most basic level only of physical facts—facts however sophisticated, of the kind revealed by the physical sciences. (*Mind and Cosmos* 12)

Nagel acknowledges that there must be a worldview which provides an explanation for the workings of the universe through biology, chemistry, and physics and their hierarchical relation, but he seeks a worldview whose acceptance or rejection would have no effect on the practice of these fields individually, such as we find in reductionism (*Mind and Cosmos* 3–4). While he frankly recognizes that a call to move beyond a purely material worldview opens possibilities for theistic explanations, he stops short of such a conclusion, looking instead for the territory between these perspectives. The purpose of his book, Nagel argues, is not to offer solutions, but rather to recognize the problem, since clinging to reductionistic material explanations, often out a fear of a revitalization of religious perspectives, is an obstacle to a more robust understanding of reality. He states: “The priority given to evolutionary naturalism in the face of its implausible conclusions about other subjects is

due, I think, to the secular consensus that this is the only form of external understanding of ourselves that provides an alternative to theism—which is to be rejected as a mere projection of our internal self-conception onto the universe, without evidence” (28). Rather than chance, creationism, or directionless physical law, Nagel instead leans toward a “natural teleology” or a “teleological bias,” a view that, in addition to physical laws of nature, there are other laws of nature that would account for consciousness and reason. Although consciousness and reason are irreducible parts of the natural order, they are not, in his view, due to an outside purposeful influence (90). He explains:

Since any adequate form of self-understanding would be an alternative to materialism, it would have to include mentalistic and rational elements of some kind. . . . A satisfying explanation would show that the realization of these possibilities was not vanishingly improbable but a significant likelihood given the laws of nature and the composition of the universe. It would reveal mind and reason as basic aspects of a nonmaterialistic natural order. (*Mind and Cosmos* 31–32)

Another challenge to the limiting perspective of reductionistic materialism comes from philosopher John Searle, who also finds a strictly materialistic understanding of consciousness to

be wanting. After reviewing a number of forms of materialism, he observes that each of them tries to exclude mental phenomena by demoting them to the physical or material realm. He writes: “Materialism seems obviously false: it ends up denying the existence of consciousness and thus denying the existence of the phenomenon that gives rise to the question in the first place” (47). And he concludes:

Materialists, after a lot of beating around the bush, do typically end up by denying the existence of consciousness, even though most of them are too embarrassed to come right out and say: “Consciousness does not exist. No human or animal has ever been conscious.” Instead, they redefine “consciousness” so that it no longer refers to inner, qualitative, subjective mental states but rather to some third-person phenomena, phenomena that are neither inner, qualitative, nor subjective in the senses I have explained. Consciousness is reduced to the behavior of the body, to computational states of the brain, information processing, or functional states of a physical system. Daniel Dennett is typical of materialists in this regard. Does consciousness exist for Dennett? He would never deny it. And what is it? Well, it is a certain bunch of computer programs implemented in the brain.

Such answers, I am afraid, will not do. Consciousness is an inner, subjective, first-person, qualitative phenomenon. Any account of consciousness that leaves out these features is not an account of consciousness but of something else. (Searle 50)

Despite the limitations he finds in a reductionistic materialism, however, Searle also strongly rejects any form of dualism of mind and body (47); he seeks an explanation within the bounds of nature—a “biological naturalism”—that can account for both.² He believes that consciousness, with all its subjectivity, is caused by processes within the brain and that conscious states are high-level features of the brain. Consciousness cannot be reduced to the brain’s lowest functions; it is not an illusion or mere artifact of electrical or chemical processes. On the contrary, such a materialistic approach is itself an obstacle to a better

² Note that Nagel and Searle see the term “biological naturalism” differently. It is not possible here to reconcile the use of the terms reductionism, materialism, naturalism, and so on by the authors cited here. Each, however, offers a contrast between a restrictive and a more expansive philosophical perspective on reality. These are presented here in terms of the distinction between an atheistic, reductionistic, materialistic perspective that denies any reality beyond the material, and an agnostic, “soft” naturalism, open to broader possibilities.

understanding of reality. According to Searle:

Once we see that consciousness is a biological phenomenon like any other, then we can see that, of course, in some sense it is completely “material.” It is part of our biology. On the other hand, consciousness is not reducible to any process that consists of physical phenomena describable exclusively in third-person physical terms. Therefore, it looks like we have to reject materialism. The solution is not to deny any of the obvious facts, but to shift the categories around so we recognize that consciousness is at one and the same time completely material and irreducibly mental. And that means we should simply abandon the traditional categories of “material” and “mental” as they have been used in the Cartesian tradition. (69)

Interestingly, unlike Nagel, who reserves for others the possibility of a theistic approach for the explanation of mind and consciousness, Searle does not. But he does not argue against such a possibility so much as set it aside as irrelevant. Nobody bothers with such arguments, he explains, “and it is considered in slightly bad taste to even raise the question of God’s existence” (35). He continues:

What has happened? . . . I believe that something much more radical than a decline in religious faith

has taken place. For us, the educated members of society, the world has become demystified. Or rather, to put the point more precisely, we no longer take the mysteries we see in the world as expressions of supernatural meaning. . . . The result of this demystification is that we have gone beyond atheism to a point where the issue no longer matters in the way it did to earlier generations. For us, if it should turn out that God exists, that would have to be a fact of nature like any other. To the four basic forces in the universe—gravity, electromagnetism, weak and strong nuclear forces—we would add a fifth, the divine force. Or more likely, we would see the other forces as forms of the divine force. But it would still be all physics, albeit divine physics. If the supernatural existed, it too would have to be natural. (35)

Of course, the approaches taken by Nagel and Searle to address the question of human consciousness are very different from the Bahá'í perspective. Yet, their views, and those of others like them, are a critical step in separating science from the limiting orthodoxy of materialistic philosophy. By rejecting materialism, an obstacle to the investigation of reality is removed that allows humanity to see how far such an exploration can advance. It creates new possibilities for understanding the harmony of science and religion.

One question that often arises is whether the truth of religious beliefs can be weighed in the light of science. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has insisted that it can and, indeed, it must if religion is not to succumb to superstition (*Promulgation* 374).³ However, this does not mean that religious beliefs must be weighed against materialistic philosophical interpretations of the findings of science. Here Searle's naturalism, as opposed to materialism, makes an important distinction. To the extent that science can explore reality, religion must be compatible with scientific findings. What we can know through science about that aspect of reality Bahá'ís consider to be spiritual reality would indeed, as Searle suggests, be "a fact of nature like any other."

Perhaps here it is important to note that 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not describe religion in terms of supernatural forces that are imperceptible and must, therefore, be accepted on the basis of blind faith. For Him, the "supernatural" begins where material reductionism ends: "All the powers and attributes of man are human and hereditary in origin—outcomes of nature's processes—except the intellect, which is supernatural" (*Foundations* 60). And in another instance:

3 Of course, to weigh religious beliefs in the light of science does not mean to weigh the Revelation itself. For more detailed comments see my book, *Revelation and Social Reality: Learning to Translate What Is Written into Reality*, chapters 2 and 4.

“We have already stated that science or the attribute of scientific penetration is supernatural and that all other blessings of God are within the boundary of nature” (*Promulgation* 50). For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the ideal and distinctive faculties of human beings—the virtues and the powers of the mind, including the capacity for scientific acquisition—are properties of which nature is bereft, indicating that there must be more to the universe than can be understood by reductionistic materialism (*Promulgation* 80–81).

Thus, there is an appreciable overlap between a naturalistic perspective that goes beyond materialism to encompass consciousness and what can be known about the universe, on one hand and, on the other, the concept of the “supernatural” aspects of reality, as proposed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Science, freed from a reductionistic lens, can go far in exploring the expression of such potentialities. Yet, for Bahá'ís, science and reason alone cannot fully exhaust such possibilities; this is where religion is needed, to address and cultivate certain capacities with which the human being is endowed. In this sense, Bahá'u'lláh observes, “Even the materialists have testified in their writings to the wisdom of these divinely-appointed Messengers, and have regarded the references made by the Prophets to Paradise, to hell fire, to future reward and punishment, to have been actuated by a desire to educate and uplift the souls

of men” (*Gleanings* 158). But these, the true teachings of religion, are not religious beliefs encumbered by superstition.

SOME INSIGHTS FROM NATURALISTIC INQUIRY INTO RELIGION

The question of reductionism involves the perspective from which reality is viewed. From the subjective, first person perspective, as well as the intersubjective, second person perspective in which different individuals recognize one another and consider each other's subjective views, human beings contribute to the creation of a social reality of institutional facts and culture. Through science and reason, they strive for objectivity—a third person perspective seeking to know the world as it is—and this tempers the extremes of subjectivity while strengthening intersubjective understanding. But such striving in itself does not justify materialistic reductionism, which relegates personal consciousness and the subjective self to irrelevance and, thereby, creates the illusion of complete objectivity. Rather, it is in appreciating the relationship among the objective, the subjective, and the intersubjective viewpoints, and the way that together they create a reliable perspective for the sound evolution of social reality, that the limitations of a reductionistic materialist approach become apparent. An understanding of reality must adequately encompass the objective, the subjective, and the intersubjective.

Such concepts are explored by Jürgen Habermas (*Between Naturalism and Religion*) and Nagel (*The View from Nowhere* and *Equality and Partiality*), among others.

Similar to the way in which Nagel and Searle sought an alternative to reductionism, so Habermas, on the basis of anthropological findings, identifies what he calls a “methodologically grounded dualism in the form of a ‘soft’ naturalism” (166). He observes that attempting to translate ideas that can or should be addressed in terms of the working of the mind in exclusively empirical language directed toward things and events results in a loss of meaning. It is not possible to subsume the subjective into the objective. The materialistic reduction of the internal subjective dimension of the human mind to principles of physics and chemistry is a chimera. Only from a first-person subjective standpoint, engaged with other similar actors in social reality, are choice and human freedom evident, within, of course, the fixed parameters of objective reality.

Habermas notes that neurobiology cannot locate a center in the brain that coordinates everything and with which the subjective “I” can be correlated; yet while that “I” can be considered a social construction, it is not an illusion. “Clearly,” he writes, “the observer perspective, to which the empiricist perspective limits us, must be combined with that of participants in communicative and social practices in order to give socialized subjects like us cognitive access to the world” (68). He

adds: “The reciprocally interchangeable roles of the first, second and third person also facilitate the individuating embedding of the single organism in the public ‘space of reasons,’ where socialized individuals take stances on validity claims and can act deliberately, and thus freely, as the responsible authors of their own actions” (180).

Such a relationship among the objective, subjective, and intersubjective, Habermas concludes, creates the possibility of considering the contribution of religion and religious individuals to matters affecting the common good, without contradicting a naturalistic perspective. He thus rejects the exclusive third person perspective of reductionism or scientism, “the opposite pole to this rational reconstruction of the contents of faith,” which finds religious convictions to be “false, illusory, or meaningless per se” (244).

In identifying limitations of materialism, the intent of these philosophers is not to force science into a theistic worldview alien to its nature. It is to replace an ideological and narrow atheistic reductionism with what might be considered to be an agnostic naturalism that is open to all aspects of what exists, including consciousness, and can account for a reality that is more complex than the material. It is impossible, in this brief space, to provide an extensive overview of naturalism and religion. Yet, a few insights drawn from different fields suggest how, freed from the shackles of a dogmatic materialism, scientific findings give rise to a very different perspective on religion.

An example of reductionistic *a priori* assumptions about religion may be found in Edward O. Wilson's *The Social Conquest of the Earth*. Wilson explores how human beings have, like only a small number of other species such as some ants and wasps, evolved to be a social—or more particularly, a eusocial—species, with characteristics such as multigenerational communities, division of labor, and altruism. The evolution of a eusocial species is not driven by the competitive fitness of individual organisms, but rather by the degree of internal cooperation within social groups, which enables them compete successfully against other groups. According to Wilson, the result of this evolutionary path that resulted in the dominance of the human species is that what have come to be called “virtues” are those characteristics that helped humanity to cooperate in groups; what have come to be called “vices” are those behaviors, seen to be egotistical and self-serving, that advance one person in an evolutionary competition over another, but which weaken groups, and thus weaken their evolutionary edge over other groups. Wilson examines the implications of evolution for human nature, including language, moral development, the arts, and so on, and finds, almost everywhere, value in the fruits of what survived from and contributed to humanity's evolutionary journey. He concludes that “in many cases, perhaps the great majority, the precepts shared by most societies today will stand the test of biology-based realism” (*Social Conquest* 254). Yet,

Wilson fails to consider the possible evolutionary advantage of religion and poses the matter only in the context of a conflict between science and religion. For him, religion is mere tribalism, an “unseen trap unavoidable during the biological age of our species” (267).

A much different perspective on religion emerges in the work of researchers across a variety of fields who have, through a range of different approaches, associated religion with the evolution of the human brain, recognized the contribution of religion to cultural change especially since settlement in agricultural villages began some 10-12,000 years ago, and even proposed that religion has contributed to shaping the environment which influenced further human evolution. While the explorations into the evolutionary roots of human psychology and cultural change have taken place largely in separate fields that did not interact regularly—except perhaps in some exchanges that reframed old nature verses nurture debates—the possibility of a more collaborative exchange has opened in recent years (Schaller et. al.).

In *God is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human*, Dominic Johnson draws upon a growing body of evidence from anthropology and experimental psychology to demonstrate that belief in supernatural reward and punishment is a ubiquitous phenomenon of human nature, even among atheists. This tendency of human beings to anticipate rewards and

punishments, especially supernatural punishments, is, he argues, an evolutionary adaption favored by natural selection. Fear of divine or supernatural punishment makes us question our selfish desires, deters self-interested action, and is a motivating factor for moral behavior and trustworthiness that allows for human cooperation. It was a factor in enabling human social organization to move beyond the level of small bands of closely related individuals, where everyone could know others' behavior directly. "The expectation of reward and punishment is not an invention of human culture; it seems to be a fundamental element of human psychology," Johnson notes. Humans "cannot help but search for meaning in the randomness of life" (3, 4). Johnson's approach is representative of a number of researchers who seek to understand human psychology from the study of human evolution. In this perspective, the workings of the human mind are the product of evolution, and the basis of religious conceptions is inherent in the workings of the mind.

A different attempt to understand humanity and the nature of religion comes from the study of cultural evolution. In *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*, Ara Norenzayan proposes that human society has evolved through competition between societies, and that the societies that proved to be most successful were those that learned to cooperate internally at an ever larger scale. For Norenzayan, religion has

been the key factor driving this cooperation. He observes that while history shows a range of religious ideas that are constantly "multiplying, growing, and mutating at a brisk pace," "most religious people living on the planet today are the cultural descendants of just a few outlier religious movements that won in the cultural marketplace" (2). Norenzayan sees his approach as an integration of a perspective that places the social functions of religion in a Darwinian framework, as well as a cognitive perspective, traced as far back as Hume, that considers religious belief to be an accidental side-effect of human cognition. Evidence from the evolutionary, cognitive, and social sciences, he indicates, shows that a powerful combination of genetic and cultural evolution has contributed to the origin of religion. "Seen in this light," he states, "it is not surprising that prosocial religions have been a major force shaping human history. When intergroup rivalries are strong, prosocial religious groups, with their Big Gods and loyalty practices that promote social solidarity, could have a competitive edge over rival groups. And when prosocial religions out-compete or absorb other rival groups, their beliefs and practices proliferate, explaining why most people today are descendants of such groups" (143).

Likewise, from a historical and anthropological perspective, Peter Turchin argues instead that the main driver of human social evolution is war as a destructive and creative force, rather than religion (21-22); however, Turchin

positively acknowledges the contribution of Norenzayan and this difference may, effectively, be one of emphasis. In an analogy to biological evolution in which natural selection involves both mutation and competitive selection, it is possible to envision religious ideas that contribute to greater unity, thereby demonstrating their viability in an environment where conflict and warfare between groups is common.

The role of religion in contributing to the evolution of society is also explored in the work of Francis Fukuyama. In *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*, he examines how religion influenced the shaping of the political order as it traversed the stages from small groups to the modern state, including the emergence of the state, the rule of law, and accountability. While noting that some contemporary voices claim that religion is primarily a source of violence, conflict, and social discord, Fukuyama states that religion has historically played the opposite role, serving as a source of cooperation and social cohesion that would not be possible if human beings were merely the rational, self-interested agents described by economists (37). Further, he adds:

Indeed, some evolutionary psychologists have argued that the survival benefits conferred by enhanced social cohesion is the reason that a propensity for religious belief seems to be hardwired into the human brain. Religion is not

the only way that ideas can reinforce group solidarity—today we have nationalism and secular ideologies like Marxism as well—but in early societies it played a critical role in making possible more complex forms of social organization. It is hard to see how human beings could have evolved beyond small band-level societies without it. (Fukuyama 38)

These few insights into the effort to explain the nature of religion suggest that, far from being easily dismissed by a materialistic ideological perspective, the impulse toward religion is hardwired by evolutionary forces into the very essence of a human being and has been a vital factor in the civilizing process of cultural change that lifted humanity from small bands of hunter-gatherers to the cusp of global order. Indeed, some of these authors take the case further, suggesting that it is evident that religion has contributed to those conditions of culture and environment in which natural selection operates to further shape human evolution and, thus, to reinforce those capacities that make human beings more religious. This type of social influence on evolutionary forces is similar to the manner in which humans developed a capacity to digest lactose after creating cultural settings that relied upon herding cattle (Norenzayan 154, Bellah 60, Fukuyama 37).

Thus, from a material and a social perspective, setting aside strictly spiritual or supernatural claims, the

constructive influence of religion and its association with capacities that are intimately intertwined with what it means to be human is demonstrated by science. What, then, does the future hold? For Norenzayan, the possibility that religion has served its purpose and can now be discarded can be entertained, even though he finds it far from clear whether secular society will win out (192). He writes:

Only recently, and only in some places, some societies have succeeded in sustaining large-scale cooperation with institutions such as courts, police, and mechanisms for enforcing contracts. In some parts of the world such as Northern Europe, especially Scandinavia, these institutions have precipitated religion's decline by usurping its community-building functions. These societies with atheist majorities—some of the most cooperative, peaceful, and prosperous in the world—climbed religion's ladder, and then kicked it away. (Norenzayan 8–9)

For Johnson, however, such a proposal raises doubt: "The New Atheists' mission of creating a godless world is an untested experiment that is likely to have negative as well as positive consequences. But we have little idea yet what any of them might be. Are we playing with fire?" (233).

One alternative to a reductionistic approach to religion, with its often pessimistic view of the place

of human beings in the universe, is religious naturalism. Some thinkers, while confining their vision to the natural world, discover in the findings of science possibilities for a spiritual or transcendent worldview, including hope for a global ethic that can guide humanity (Bellah, Kauffman, Abrams). Science and religion are, in this context, two cultural systems; values and possibilities for meaning appear as emergent properties of the universe and consciousness. One such argument is offered by Nancy Ellen Abrams in *A God That Could Be Real: Spirituality, Science, and the Future of Our Planet*, a study that illustrates how far a naturalistic perspective can extend. Abrams begins by reviewing various narratives of ancient cultures about the origin and nature of the universe and compares these with the contemporary narrative presented by science. In seeking how human beings should understand themselves in light of the facts about the history of the universe and the evolution of life, she proposes that the human inclination toward God is a product of our evolution that is necessary for survival and continued advancement. "God persists and always will because it's a fundamental characteristic of the connection between ourselves and the universe," she writes (19). Yet, Abrams is convinced that God as a being who is creator of the universe cannot exist. She proposes instead that we see God as a kind of emergent property of the complexity of human consciousness—a product of the human mind

and human society. Just as emergent properties such as temperature and pressure can be real, so can a God that emerged from humanity. By accepting the reality of the universe given to us by science, Abrams states that we can have a concept of God that is compatible with our capacity for knowledge, morality and virtue cultivated within us as a result of natural selection. Rather than various images of God that divide human beings and create suspicion about science, “We can reclaim the good that has been lost without compromising the good that has been found in this age of science,” she argues. “We can understand God in a way that serves us in the world we actually live in” (4). With such an approach, she indicates, “[w]e will see all humans, including ourselves, as flowers on the same great tree” (161).

From this naturalistic perspective, Abrams proposes a concept of God as a product of our own creation, as it would serve humanity and enable it to establish unity and cooperation on a global scale. The contribution required from a God of our own making—as set forth by an individual who rejects God as a real essence, the Creator of the universe—is nevertheless the kind of contribution Bahá'ís would readily appreciate based on the Bahá'í teachings. In countless passages, such as those that follow, Abrams indicates how a conception of God is essential for humanity in this day:

Without a story that makes sense of our many-leveled world by

showing us how we fit into it, millions of us can't tap into our smoldering potential because we remain confused about what to commit ourselves to or how. . . . We need a coherent big picture that is equally true for every human being and gives us a convincing and inspiring God that is consistent with everything we know and every truth we will learn. (147–48)

The spiritual challenge for us is to accept the scientific picture of the universe and with the real help of a real God figure out *how to act accordingly*—in every way, not just technologically but sociologically, psychologically, spiritually, educationally, politically, and every other way. It may not be obvious how to become this coherent, but for the first time it's possible, and focusing on it as a goal could re-energize our civilization. (150)

We need our god-capacity to generate the spiritual power—the motivation, trust, and faith in each other—to bring good about. How we conceive of God will have enormous impact on how we behave toward each other, how we justify our actions, what we believe is possible, and what we find sacred and are therefore willing to sacrifice to protect. (147)

The purpose of moving beyond a mere reductionistic perspective of

reality in which religion has no place, is not to superimpose preconceived religious ideas upon reality, but rather to set aside unjustified limitations on human thought in order to obtain a better picture of reality. Materialistic philosophy too often passes unquestioned, becoming indistinguishable from science itself, and then serves to filter ideas and ultimately to fit reality into an ideological framework. A rejection of reductionism is not a rejection of science. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicates that science is among the greatest expressions of the human mind: “All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight.” And, He continues, “[a] scientific man is a true index and representative of humanity, for through processes of inductive reasoning and research he is informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions and happenings. He studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization” (*Promulgation* 50). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is referring to science as we know it now, a science that naturally evolves over time on the basis of its own principles and methods. He is not referring to an imagined science of the future that will conform to religious preconceptions: “Whatever the intelligence of man cannot understand, religion ought not to accept. Religion and science walk hand in hand, and any religion contrary to science is not the truth” (*Paris Talks* 131).

Bahá’ís clearly reject the materialistic interpretations of the methods of science and scientific findings that assume *a priori* that religion, in itself, is false or even pathological and detrimental. But setting aside this extreme does not mean that science must be silent or has nothing to say about the truth claims of religion. From a Bahá’í perspective, science and reason are essential for weighing the religious understandings and interpretations of individuals—their religious beliefs. The question of the scientific exploration of the truth of religion was examined in an article by Johnson et al. After setting aside extreme presumptions and exploring various nuances—including the danger of a too-ready conciliation between science and religion—the authors observe that several scientists, religious scholars, philosophers, and theologians are contributing to new scholarly insights on the scientific inquiry into religion and religion’s role in human progress. In this light, they argue, the question of science’s role in weighing religious beliefs must be appreciated:

If science is going to investigate religious beliefs . . . then it is going to have to move beyond the ‘politeness’ of refusing to render judgments about the truth or falsity in some kinds of religious beliefs. However, the epistemic sword must cut all ways (Schloss 2009). Some beliefs are not adjudicable by science, not because of a commitment to remain neutral

but because science lacks the tools to make judgment. Others may be demonstrably false. But in the case of a belief that science can in principle illuminate as false, it may also be worthwhile to consider empirical or logical evidence for its truth. By some accounts, any alternative stance would not constitute a scientific approach. (225)

The authors conclude that “scientific neutrality regarding religious beliefs should, at least with particular kinds of beliefs, involve not so much refusing to render judgment as willingness to render it either way” and that certain beliefs “may be true in ways that science should be open to considering” (Johnson et al. 223). In particular, the authors point to the possible validity of religious understandings of human nature and the attributions of sacred significance to historical events, both of which could be empirically assessed. In this way, religion can be seen to legitimately contribute to the investigation of truth. The understanding of what constitutes the natural, they argue, is always tentative, ambiguous and malleable. While “novel proposals that seem to involve the supernatural, if evidentially supported, do not mandate the inclusion of the supernatural,” nevertheless, they “may expand construal of the natural” (225).

DEFINING TRUE RELIGION

Just as attaining the harmony of science and religion requires that science

and philosophy find a way, through their own devices, beyond reductionistic materialism and scientism, so too, religion is responsible for finding a way beyond superstition. Eliminating superstition from religion is ultimately a problem for each religious tradition. The perspective presented here—first for the definition of true religion and then its practice—is based upon the Bahá'í teachings.

There is a range of views concerning the assumptions surrounding the materialist perspective on science and the cultural debate surrounding science and religion. Of interest in such discussions is the question of what it is that actually constitutes religion. For many, religion is taken to be a belief in unseen things, a leap of faith to accept what is unknown or even incomprehensible. Indeed for some, belief in God is indistinguishable from belief in any “supernatural” forces such as ghosts, witches, or a vague sense of karma. Religion and superstition are too often indistinguishable—whether because those who hold reason dear find no cause to make a distinction, or whether those who champion religious ideas cannot separate the two.

Even in its most favorable sense, religion, viewed through a naturalistic lens, begins and ends with human beings. Robert Bellah employs what he calls a “Durkheimian definition” of religion as “a system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred that unite those who adhere to them in a moral community” (1), or, paraphrasing Clifford Geertz, “religion is a system of

symbols that, when enacted by human beings, establishes powerful, pervasive, and long-standing moods and motivations that make sense in terms of an idea of a general order of existence" (xiv). In these definitions, there is no mention of belief in supernatural beings or belief in God, for while such beliefs may well be present, according to Bellah they are not the defining aspect of religion (1).

Bahá'u'lláh has provided a definition of religion that stands at variance with what has been generally conceived. Among His many statements in this regard, the following closely related points shed particular light on what is necessary to distinguish true religion from its amalgamation with superstition, which ushers in fanaticism and ungodliness.

First, Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that the starting point for religion is God, through an act of revelation of divine teachings conveyed by a series of Manifestations, the Founders of the great religious systems. Religion is not initiated in the human impulse toward transcendence, even though such an impulse is indeed a fundamental aspect of human nature. Bahá'u'lláh states that since "there can be no tie of direct intercourse to bind the one true God with His creation," "He hath ordained that in every age and dispensation a pure and stainless Soul be made manifest" in every age to serve as a divinely guided intermediary (*Gleanings* 27:4). Religion, 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains, "is not a series of beliefs, a set of customs," but

"the teachings of the Lord God, teachings which constitute the very life of humankind, which urge high thoughts upon the mind, refine the character, and lay the groundwork for man's everlasting honor" (*Selections* 52–53).

Thus, the knowledge of God cannot be achieved through humanity's own unaided efforts, and every attempt to do so leads to superstitious ideas being inseparably intertwined with any fragments of truth uncovered. Indeed, whenever religious practice veers too far from this revelatory impulse, the tares of superstition, of idle fancies and vain imaginings take root in human hearts, while through the Manifestation of God and His teachings, the knowledge of God and of spiritual reality is readily accessible. Of course, a naturalistic approach could not extend to fully embrace Bahá'u'lláh's perspective. However, it could well begin its exploration of religions by considering the creative impulse provided by their Founders to transform the individual and society in the age in which They appeared, and the response of humanity to each of these interventions.

Second, Bahá'u'lláh indicates that the "religion of God is for love and unity" (*Tablets* 220); it is "the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquility amongst its peoples" (*Tablets* 63–64). In this regard, the Bahá'í teachings affirm the conception set forth by the scientists and philosophers mentioned earlier in their conclusion that, historically, religion has contributed to

human cooperation and progress at ever higher levels of social complexity. While, owing to circumstances, the unity of the entire human race could not be established in the past, religion contributed to unity at progressive stages of social development, “starting with the family” and calling “successively into being the tribe, the city-state, and the nation,” until this day, when global order and the unity of the human race is possible. “It is the creative energies which His Revelation has released,” Shoghi Effendi explains in relation to Bahá'u'lláh's call for a united and peaceful world order, “that have instilled into humanity the capacity to attain this final stage in its organic and collective evolution” (*Promised Day* 117–18).

As noted earlier, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that superstition prevailed as religious leaders divided humanity into two trees, one divine and the other satanic. Bahá'u'lláh, however, declares that humanity, as the creation of God, is one, undermining the justification for any division. “Regard ye not one another as strangers,” He states, “Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch” (*Gleanings* 112:1). As 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains:

He has declared that . . . all are the children of God, fruit upon the one tree of His love. . . . Therefore, we must love mankind as His creatures, realizing that all are growing upon the tree of His mercy, servants of His

omnipotent will and manifestations of His good pleasure.

Even though we find a defective branch or leaf upon this tree of humanity or an imperfect blossom, it, nevertheless, belongs to this tree and not to another. . . . There are souls in the human world who are ignorant; we must make them knowing. Some growing upon the tree are weak and ailing; we must assist them toward health and recovery. If they are as infants in development, we must minister to them until they attain maturity. We should never detest and shun them as objectionable and unworthy. (*Promulgation* 230–31)

As a source of unity and love, religion is not to be a source of conflict, especially contention between religious traditions. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh explains that religion is one. The Manifestations of God taught the same fundamental moral truths as well as provided certain social laws that varied according to the exigencies of the time and the limitations of the particular developmental stage of humanity. The perception that these various religions are irreconcilably different, the Bahá'í writings explain, is to some extent owing to these differing social teachings, but is mostly a result of the accumulation of centuries of man-made interpretations and interpolations within each tradition. For example, if, as is obvious, Christianity is not united as one, it is not

because of what Christ taught, but because of what human beings added or misinterpreted. Bahá'u'lláh enjoins His followers to share the precious gift of His teachings with others, but then to accept whatever the response might be, whether positive or negative, while continuing to demonstrate love and affection and to work in harmony with other faith traditions for the betterment of the world (*Tabernacle* 41).

Yet another point raised by Bahá'u'lláh that distinguishes true religion from superstition is that religion is concerned with that which is true and that which is right. The independent investigation of truth is enjoined upon all. Faith is not a matter of unthinking acceptance of unseen things and irrational ideas, or a body of immutable and untenable supernatural concepts. Rather, faith is conscious knowledge and its translation into practice through good deeds. Religious laws and exhortations are not a matter of blind obedience by weak individuals conforming to an arbitrary set of rules enforced by a controlling religious authority. Bahá'u'lláh indicates the law of God is not “a mere code of laws” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶ 5) but “the breath of life unto all created things,” “the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples” (¶ 2) that is intended to cultivate human potentialities and virtues. The aim of such laws—whose binding claims are consciously assessed, embraced, and applied by individual choice—is human freedom, in the same way that traffic

laws allow for the free and safe collective flow of vehicles. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is man's freedom, that through the ideal Power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature; for as long as man is captive to nature he is a ferocious animal, as the struggle for existence is one of the exigencies of the world of nature. This matter of the struggle for existence is the fountain-head of all calamities and is the supreme affliction. (*Selections* 302)

If religion is concerned with truth, then it must be in accord with science and reason. “Religion must be reasonable,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, and “if it does not square with reason, it is superstition and without foundation.” “If we insist that such and such a subject is not to be reasoned out and tested according to the established logical modes of the intellect,” He adds, “what is the use of the reason which God has given man?” (*Promulgation* 63).

Ultimately, the truth of religion is not just rational but empirical—it must be demonstrated through productive results in the world. As Jesus stated, “Ye shall know them by their fruits. . . . A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (*Matthew* 7:16, 18). This principle is also affirmed by Bahá'u'lláh: “[I]s not the object of every Revelation to effect a

transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions? For if the character of mankind be not changed, the futility of God's universal Manifestations would be apparent" (Kitáb-i-Íqán 240–41). If certain practices in the name of religion produce harmful results—war, hate, oppression, prejudice, injustice, and so on—then this is not the practice of true religion, whose results should be love, unity, education, cooperation, and personal and collective upliftment. This is a definitive test that separates true religion from superstition presented in the guise of religion. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

Universal benefits derive from the grace of the Divine religions, for they lead their true followers to sincerity of intent, to high purpose, to purity and spotless honor, to surpassing kindness and compassion, to the keeping of their covenants when they have covenanted, to concern for the rights of others, to liberality, to justice in every aspect of life, to humanity and philanthropy, to valor and to unflagging efforts in the service of mankind. It is religion, to sum up, which produces all human virtues, and it is these virtues which are the bright candles of civilization. If a man is not characterized by these excellent qualities, it is certain that he

has never attained to so much as a drop out of the fathomless river of the waters of life that flows through the teachings of the Holy Books. . . . (*Secret* 98)

Science is a powerful system of knowledge because ideas about reality can be tested against the facts of physical world, allowing humanity to gain a better understanding of reality and a mastery over aspects of physical reality. Thus, it is not a "belief" that a particular cure heals a disease; a treatment is a cure only if its result can be demonstrated as an empirical fact. If religion is to be treated according to its claim to be a valid system of thought and action that contributes to human well-being, it must meet an empirical test—and this standard is required not only by reason but by explicit religious texts.

When religion has been warped by superstition, and fails to bring forth good fruits, it must be reformed. History is filled with examples of religious reformers who have clarified the essential principles of their religion and have uplifted its practice. Each religious tradition has within it the fire of divine truth, and each can strive to find, in its own ways and within its body of beliefs, principles such as those discussed here that can rekindle and refine religious practice, purify it from superstition, and, thereby, cause it to be in harmony with science and reason. Ultimately, however, it may be found that it is God Who reforms religion by reigniting the divine flame;

the divine forces introduced at the start of any religion are manifested again in a process of progressive revelation that is the ultimate safeguard of true religion.

Finally, according to Bahá'u'lláh, true religion is intended to assist human beings to understand their true nature and purpose, and the larger meaningful story of which they are a part. He states that “man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. . . . The straight path is the one which guideth man to the dayspring of perception and to the dawning-place of true understanding and leadeth him to that which will redound to glory, honour and greatness” (*Tablets* 35).

Religion, for Bahá'u'lláh, serves a twofold moral purpose: to foster human capacity for personal development and to contribute to the betterment of society. The particular challenge of this age is to transform the spiritual principle of the oneness of humanity into a practical global social order that reflects the unity of the human race. He calls for humanity to overcome prejudices of all kinds and arrange its affairs for unity among nations and peoples, finally achieving the Great Peace anticipated by seers and poets since antiquity—a level of cooperation at the global scale to crown the prior levels of cooperation religion created in the past to advance the social order. He promises that “such means as lead to the elevation, the advancement, the education, the

protection and the regeneration of the peoples of the earth have been clearly set forth” in His Teachings (*Tablets* 130), thus anticipating Abrams call for “a real God” to help “figure out how to act . . . in every way” (150).

The meaning and purpose for humanity set forth by true religion as described by Bahá'u'lláh is coherent with the naturalistic premise that consciousness in the universe is not accidental but inevitable, based on the laws governing the universe from the moment of the Big Bang. And it provides a more robust perspective for all of us, whatever our personal beliefs, to investigate a meaning of life more worthy of human beings, individually and collectively, than the materialists' appeal to create one's own. Inasmuch as the latter can never escape the shadow of relativism, it can never take humanity beyond conflict and the contest for power—the animalistic struggle of the survival of the fittest.

This story of meaning and purpose told by true religion, according to the Bahá'í Teachings, is also coherent with the contemporary scientific understanding of the cosmos, of the appearance of humanity, and of the unfoldment of human culture, whereby the known universe has existed for nearly fourteen billion years, modern human beings around two hundred thousand years ago, and the beginning of agricultural society—and thus the roots of civilization—only some ten to twelve thousand years ago. This support for the prevailing scientific worldview is evident in a host of

passages, including the acknowledgement that creation is “not one or two hundred thousand, or even one or two million years old” but “very ancient” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 41:3); in the recognition that from “the mineral kingdom,” the human body “traversed the vegetable kingdom and its constituent substances” and from there “has risen by evolution into the kingdom of the animal and from thence attained the kingdom of man” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 307), where, although possessing “all the virtues of the lower kingdoms . . . is further endowed with the spiritual faculty, the heavenly gift of consciousness” (258); in the appearance of religious and moral guidance from age to age through progressive revelation, demonstrating that religious truth is relative and not absolute, and that even universal principles must be applied to changing contexts; in the understanding that society has evolved through a series of social stages that witnessed an expanding circle of cooperation and will continue “until it culminates in the unification of the whole world, the final object and the crowning glory of human evolution on this planet” (Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 117–18); in “the coming of age of the entire human race,” which will witness the “emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture” (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 163); and in the anticipation of a cycle of mature human development lasting at least five hundred thousand years (102).

LEARNING ABOUT THE PRACTICE OF TRUE RELIGION

For the Bahá'í community, the practice of true religion requires growing in capacity over time to translate Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings—His concept of religion—into systematic action as a remedy for the ills afflicting humanity. Bahá'ís are increasingly coming to understand their current efforts in this light. There is, of course, a personal dimension to transformation, involving a daily discipline of study, prayer, meditation, and reflection to improve moral behavior, but the focus here is on the collective.

The vision of how the Bahá'í community is to move gradually from its earliest stages to realize its society-building power, as well as the means for its initial systematic development, were set forth in the writings of Shoghi Effendi over the course of his ministry. Briefly, he described three ages: Heroic, Formative, and Golden (*Citadel* 4–5). The current one, the Formative Age, which began with the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, involves “the crystallization and shaping of the creative energies released” by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation (*God Passes By* xiii). It is the age in which the local, national and international institutions of the Faith are to “take shape, develop and become fully consolidated” (324). It involves the systematic spread and consolidation of the Faith, encompassing the many stages of the unfoldment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá's Divine Plan. It is the period that will witness

the establishment of the Great, or Lesser, Peace and the unity of mankind. It will also experience the emancipation of the Faith and the recognition of its status and an independent religion, setting the stage for the consummation of the Dispensation in the Golden Age, the spiritualization of the world, the realization of the Most Great Peace, and “the birth and efflorescence of a world civilization, the child of that Peace” (*Citadel* 6).

The efforts unfolding during the Formative Age can be understood against a backdrop of what Shoghi Effendi described as the processes of integration and disintegration, “with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other” (*Advent* 72–73), which are “associated respectively with the rising fortunes of God’s infant Faith and the sinking fortunes of the institutions of a declining civilization” (*Messages to the Bahá’í World* 102). A lamentably defective old world order has witnessed, since the dawn of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, “the ominous manifestations of acute political conflict, of social unrest, of racial animosity, of class antagonism, of immorality and of irreligion, proclaiming, in no uncertain terms, the corruption and obsolescence of the institutions of a bankrupt Order” (103). The progress of the Faith which marks the integrative process will advance, Shoghi Effendi explained, through three great phases: a steady flow of new believers, followed by the entry by troops of peoples of diverse nations and races into the Bahá’í community, and, ultimately,

a mass conversion of these same nations and races, “as a direct result of a chain of events” which will “suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh” (*Citadel* 117). The Bahá’í community is currently involved in learning and disseminating the capacity to deal systematically with the second of these, advancing the process of entry by troops.

The Golden Age of the Bahá’í Faith offers the promise of the full realization of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings for humanity. Yet, the Formative Age clearly implies the limited capacity of the Bahá’ís in the early part of the Dispensation and the critical challenge of learning to put the teachings into action with growing effectiveness over time. For example, at its start in 1921, the Bahá’í community was simply too small to have an impact on social order. Shoghi Effendi urged the believers to make efforts to spread the Faith, raise institutions, and transform themselves, in anticipation of the time when they would be called upon to work to eradicate evil tendencies such as political corruption, moral laxity, and extreme prejudice from the wider society. For, as he explained, the world order of Bahá’u’lláh, whose “first stirrings” would occur in the second Bahá’í century which ends in 2044 (*Messages to America* 96), “can never be reared unless and until the generality of the people to which they belong has

been already purged from the divers ills, whether social or political, that now so severely afflict it" (*Advent* 21).

In light of this panorama of the unfoldment of the Bahá'í Faith provided by Shoghi Effendi, the relevance of the activities in which Bahá'ís are currently engaged for a world that has lost its direction—and is witnessing daily the steady erosion of the consensus on which the social order depends—becomes starkly apparent. As the process of disintegration accelerates, the efforts of the Bahá'í community as it pursues an integrative process through the systematic execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan must likewise intensify. The Plan which embodies the Master's hopes, Shoghi Effendi wrote, "must be pursued, relentlessly pursued, whatever may befall them in the future, however distracting the crises that may agitate their country or the world," for "the synchronization of such world-shaking crises with the progressive unfoldment and fruition of their divinely appointed task is itself the work of Providence" (*Advent* 72).

To seize upon the opportunities presented to become protagonists of change, Bahá'ís must guard against being drawn to accept the debates, assumptions, social conventions, and contests provoked by the forces of disintegration. 'Abdu'l-Bahá foretold that the Bahá'ís would face severe mental tests, and it is the tension between what the mind perceives to be real—the idle fancies and vain imaginings of a disintegrating world order—and a new reality as presented by

Bahá'u'lláh, that creates such mental tests. As Shoghi Effendi warned, in a letter written on his behalf:

The friends must, at all times, bear in mind that they are, in a way, like soldiers under attack. The world is at present in an exceedingly dark condition spiritually; hatred and prejudice of every sort are literally tearing it to pieces. We, on the other hand, are the custodians of the opposite forces, the forces of love, of unity, of peace and integration, and we must continually be on our guard, whether as individuals or as an Assembly or Community, lest through us these destructive, negative forces enter into our midst. In other words, we must beware lest the darkness of society become reflected in our acts and attitudes, perhaps all unconsciously. Love for each other, the deep sense that we are a new organism, the dawn-breakers of a new World Order, must constantly animate our Bahá'í lives, and we must pray to be protected from the contamination of society which is so diseased with prejudice. (*Directives* 41)

The efforts of the Bahá'í world at its current stage of development, as it brings to fruition the stage of entry by troops and establishes a conscious capacity for learning how to put the teachings into action in country after country and cluster⁴ after cluster, are

4 A geographic unit defined for the

described in detail in the messages of the Universal House of Justice (especially since 1996) and in other materials, such as the analysis and summary of achievements prepared for each stage of the Divine Plan. A brief summary here must suffice.

COMMUNITY BUILDING AND GROWTH

Since the Five Year Plan that began in 2001, the Bahá'í world has concerned itself with two essential movements that have driven the process of expansion and consolidation: the movement of individuals through the sequence of courses of the training institute, and the movement of clusters to ever greater degrees of complexity in community building. In the most recent Plan, community building has been described in terms of progress along a path distinguished by a number of milestones. Currently, the most advanced clusters have reached the capacity to raise one hundred, or perhaps several hundreds of capable individuals to create a pattern of community life that can engage a thousand or more. Yet progress is marked not just through quantitative change, but also a number of distinctive qualitative achievements derived by the strengthening of the capabilities of individuals, communities, and institutions. These include: attracting people to engage in Bahá'í community life

purpose of community-building that encompasses a number of cities, towns or villages.

through a range of elevated conversations that meaningfully present the Teachings in both direct and indirect manner; the multiplication and support by more and more individuals of efficacious core activities—study circles, devotional meetings, children's classes, and junior youth groups—that serve as social spaces for the participation of the growing number of attracted souls; the ability to engage in a learning mode within clusters from which purposeful action is pursued; continual enhancement of the spiritual life of Bahá'í communities; greater involvement in the life of society; and growing recognition among government agencies and leaders of thought about the efficacy of Bahá'í efforts for the betterment of society. The aims of the current Plan include the effort to move no less than 5,000 clusters to an intensive program of growth where scores engage hundreds, along with advancing several hundred of these clusters to further frontiers of development.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As part of a Bahá'í life, and in accordance with the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a large number of individual believers draws insights from Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and contributes in diverse ways, through voluntary efforts or occupations, to the social and economic progress of their localities and nations. Beyond this, as the community building process has accelerated, involvement in Bahá'í and

Bahá'í-inspired activities for social and economic development has grown systematically in size and influence. In its *Riḍván* 2010 message, the Universal House of Justice called on the worldwide Bahá'í community to reflect on the contributions that its growing, vibrant communities will make “to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly.” “Most appropriately conceived in terms of a spectrum,” it stated, “social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by individuals or small groups of friends to programs of social and economic development with a high level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í-inspired organizations.” The number of grassroots activities, many of fixed duration, have now passed ten thousand annually. Sustained projects, many educational in nature, number more than one thousand. Meanwhile more complex agencies, including a number of Bahá'í-inspired development organizations, are now more than one hundred. Learning how to expand the scope of certain programs of proven effectiveness within and across countries has also rapidly accelerated. For example, the junior youth program, initiated more than a decade ago, now includes more than 17,000 groups and over 155,000 participants worldwide. The community schools program, established more recently, involving the establishment of community-based primary schools, has expanded in Africa, Latin America, Asia,

and the Pacific. Currently, twenty-six Bahá'í-inspired agencies are working with 427 schools, over 1325 teachers and 27,850 students in 175 clusters in 20 countries. Details of these and other endeavors may be found in various reports and documents prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre.

INVOLVEMENT IN THE DISCOURSES OF SOCIETY

Yet another area of endeavor of the Bahá'í community is a greater involvement in the discourses of society. This area of work has a long history—as evident in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own interactions with groups and prominent individuals—and has become more systematic in recent years. One feature of the old world order as it disintegrates is that the discourses among individuals and groups has become riven with dichotomies that pit “us” against “them”; the challenge for Bahá'ís is to assist in recasting these conversations, through insights drawn from Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings, to elevate and frame the subjects for discourse in a manner that creates the conditions for united action, and to rise above the points of discord to find agreement in the search for solutions through consultation and learning. Individual believers participate in a variety of social spaces and everyday conversations, including in their professions, where they can bring to bear relevant insights from the Teachings. The progress of community building activities

at the cluster level has accelerated, thereby opening increased opportunities for both Bahá'ís and other participants from the wider society to engage together on relevant themes of social concern in villages and neighborhoods. At the international level, the United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community and other agencies are expanding the scope of their endeavors to engage governments and organizations of civil society through various published statements and participation in international and regional fora. And at the national level, agencies of National Assemblies, with the support of the Office of Public Discourse at the Bahá'í World Centre, are learning to select and strengthen their participation in discourses of particular relevance to their countries. Some noteworthy recent interactions include the engagement of the Bahá'í communities in certain Arab countries directly with their governments, and the involvement of the Bahá'ís of Germany in the national discourse on immigration, the Bahá'ís of Colombia on peace and reconciliation, the Bahá'ís of Canada on the role of religion in society, and the Bahá'ís of Turkey on the involvement of women in society.

In all these and in others areas as well, Bahá'ís are collectively learning about the practice of true religion and its society-building power. The recent series of Five Year Plans have illustrated how the process of study, consultation, action and reflection gradually refines effective approaches and ensures a steady multiplication

and spread worldwide of endeavors that have been proven by experience to be effective. This does not mean that there are no challenges or even outright problems, but that, with unity of thought and action, through the reflective practice of religion, scientific in its method, solutions can be found and progressively implemented. As such systematic endeavors are sustained in the decades ahead, a different example of religion and a greater demonstration of its civilizing force will become evident. The Bahá'í world at the end of its second century will be significantly transformed and its capacities enhanced to play the vital role anticipated and outlined by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. The forces of disintegration will only continue to intensify, and thus, as the world staggers toward a global order of peace among nations as anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh, the forces of integration must equally build to touch as wide a circle of humanity as possible.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of the assumptions on which science rests is the belief that the universe operates in a lawful manner which the mind is capable of objectively discerning in a reliable, if fallibilistic, way. The demonstrable value of science strengthens our faith in such capacities. At the same time, we have increasingly come to view with suspicion and doubt those capacities of the mind that provide us with perspectives on subjective and normative

dimensions of reality, capacities that are perhaps no less essential for our survival and flourishing. Perhaps we can learn to trust both, so long as these inherent capacities are properly channeled.

The path that ultimately leads to the understanding and practice of Bahá'u'lláh's principle of the harmony between science and religion may be a long one, but the horizon that can guide the next steps in its realization is already somewhat apparent. For science and philosophy, the path requires a move from an atheistic, reductionistic materialism to a kind of agnostic, biological naturalism that better accommodates the reality of the mind and consciousness as it exists in the universe. For religion, the challenge is infinitely harder. For while humanity has made its scientific turn centuries ago, crossing a threshold to rational maturity that is well substantiated and continually refined, religion has not yet been similarly transformed, and remains in a quagmire of superstition, prejudice and immaturity that is too often detached from truth and from proven worth in engendering justice and human well-being.

Searle tells the story of his time as a student with the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell:

Periodically, every two years or so, the Voltaire Society, a society of intellectually inclined undergraduates at Oxford, held a banquet with Bertrand Russell—the official patron of the society. On

the occasion in question, we all went up to London and had dinner with Russell at a restaurant. He was then in his mideighties, and had a reputation as a famous atheist. To many of us, the question seemed pressing as to what sort of prospects for immortality Russell entertained, and we put it to him: Suppose you have been wrong about the existence of God. Suppose that the whole story were true, and that you arrived at the Pearly Gates to be admitted by Saint Peter. Having denied God's existence all your life, what would you say to . . . Him? Russell answered without a moment's hesitation. "Well, I would go up to Him, and I would say, 'You didn't give us enough evidence!'" (36)

Science from various fields, freed from reductionistic interpretations, increasingly sheds light on the ways in which religion has contributed to human survival and evolution of culture, but true religion cannot emerge in the form of an effective knowledge system in harmony with science until it becomes translated into a systematic form of reliable and proven practice. It must be fully compatible with the truths that emerge from science and philosophy, shed additional light on aspects of reality that stand outside their reach, and contribute to a normative framework that distinguishes morality from personal inclination. The redefinition of religion for the age of human maturity by Bahá'u'lláh implies

no less a revolution in the behavior of humanity and the evolution of culture than the creation of science from the late 1500s to the dawn of the 1700s. It is therefore necessary to prove true religion like true science—to act and demonstrate that it works. As Shoghi Effendi explained at the start of the systematic execution of the Divine Plan: “Let the doubter arise and himself verify the truth of such assertions” (*Messages to America* 17).

WORKS CITED

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Foundations of World Unity*. US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979.
- . *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Paris in 1911-1912*. 11th ed. UK Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969.
- . *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. Comp. Howard MacNutt. 2d ed. US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- . *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978.
- . *Some Answered Questions*. Bahá’í World Centre, 2015.
- . *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990.
- Abrams, Nancy Ellen. *A God That Could Be Real: Spirituality, Science, and the Future of Our Planet*. Beacon Press, 2015.
- Arbab, Farzam. “An Inquiry in the Harmony Between Science and Religion.” In *Religion and Public Discourse in an Age of Transition: Reflections on Bahá’í Practice and Thought*. Association for Bahá’í Studies—North America, Bahá’í Study Series. In preparation.
- Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. Trans. Shoghi Effendi. US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994.
- . *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Bahá’í World Centre, 1992.
- . *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Trans. Shoghi Effendi. US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974.
- . *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. US Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1994.
- . *Tabernacle of Unity*. Bahá’í World Centre, 2006.
- Bellah, Robert. *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Harvard UP, 2011.
- The King James Bible.
- Campbell, Heidi and Heather Looy, eds. *A Science and Religion Primer*. Baker Academic, 2009.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.

- Hanley, Paul. *Eleven*. Friesen Press, 2014.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*. Polity Press, 2008.
- Johnson, Dominic. *God is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human*. Oxford UP, 2016.
- Johnson, Dominic D. P., et al. "The Elephant in the Room: Do Evolutionary Accounts of Religion Entail the Falsity of Religious Belief?" In *Philosophy, Theology and the Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2014, pp. 201–31.
- Kauffman, Stuart A. *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason and Religion*. Perseus Books Group, 2010.
- Lample, Paul. *Revelation and Social Reality: Learning to Translate What Is Written into Reality*. Palabra Publications, 2009.
- Nagel, Thomas. *A View from Nowhere*. Oxford UP, 1986.
- . *Equality and Partiality*. Oxford UP, 1991.
- . *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford UP, 2012.
- Norenzayan, Ara. *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict*. Princeton UP, 2013.
- Searle, John. *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World*. Basic Books, 1999.
- Schaller, Mark, et al. *Evolution, Culture, and the Human Mind*. Psychology Press, 2015.
- Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1900.
- . *Directives from the Guardian*. India Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973.
- . *God Passes By*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987.
- . *Messages to America*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1947.
- . *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971.
- . *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984.
- . *The Promised Day is Come*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980.
- . *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974.
- Turchin, Peter. *Ultrasociety: How 10,000 Years of War Made Humans the Greatest Cooperators on Earth*. Beresta Books, 2016.
- The Universal House of Justice. Message dated 26 March 2016 to the Bahá'ís of the United States and of Canada.
- . *Riḍván 2010 Message to the Bahá'ís of the World*.
- Wilson, Edward O. *The Meaning of Human Existence*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015.
- . *The Social Conquest of the Earth*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013.

Advancing in Bahá'í-inspired Education¹

SONA FARID-ARBAB

Abstract

In order to advance significantly in Bahá'í-inspired education, we need to keep in mind Bahá'u'lláh's extraordinary vision of the human being who will walk this earth in the fullness of time. While being respectful of accomplishments in the field of education, we need to remember that in its present state, it is incapable of cultivating such an individual. Humbled by the realization of the magnitude of the work ahead, a growing number of us, together with other like-minded individuals, have to labor in diverse cultural and ecological settings, identifying educational needs, developing elements of a coherent pedagogy, and creating a series of teaching-learning experiences in which these elements are given practical expression. The experience of the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program is offered as an example of an endeavor to advance Bahá'í-inspired education in which modest contributions accumulate and lead to significant progress.

Resumé

Si nous voulons véritablement progresser dans le domaine de l'éducation d'inspiration

bahá'íe, nous devons garder à l'esprit cette vision extraordinaire qu'avait Bahá'u'lláh de ce que deviendra l'être humain ici-bas dans la plénitude des temps. Tout en respectant les réalisations accomplies, souvenons-nous que le système d'éducation actuel n'est pas en mesure d'engendrer un tel être humain. Prenant humblement conscience de l'ampleur du travail à accomplir, nous sommes de plus en plus nombreux à collaborer avec d'autres personnes animées des mêmes valeurs et à œuvrer dans divers contextes écologiques et culturels pour cerner les besoins en matière d'éducation, mettre au point les éléments d'une pédagogie cohérente et créer une série d'expériences d'enseignement/apprentissage qui permettent de concrétiser ces divers éléments. L'expérience du programme d'autonomisation spirituelle des pré-jeunes est présentée comme exemple d'une démarche pédagogique d'inspiration bahá'íe dans laquelle de modestes contributions s'accumulent et mènent finalement à d'importants progrès.

Resumen

Para poder avanzar significativamente en la educación de inspiración bahá'í, necesitamos mantener en mente la visión extraordinaria de Bahá'u'lláh del ser humano que caminará sobre esta tierra en la plenitud del tiempo. Al ser respetuosos de los logros en el campo de la educación, necesitamos recordar que en su estado actual es incapaz de cultivar semejante individuo. Humillados por la realización de la magnitud del trabajo por venir, un número creciente de nosotros, junto con otros individuos del mismo pensamiento, debemos laborar en entornos cultural y ecológicamente diversos, identificando necesidades educativas, desarrollando elementos de una pedagogía coherente, y creando una

¹ This article is the edited transcript of a talk presented at the 40th annual conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies held in Montreal, Quebec, in August 2016.

serie de experiencias de enseñanza-aprendizaje en las cuales se les da expresión práctica a estos elementos. La experiencia del Programa para el Empoderamiento Espiritual de Prejóvenes es ofrecido como un ejemplo de un esfuerzo por avanzar la educación de inspiración bahá'í en la cual contribuciones modestas se acumulan y llevan al progreso significativo.

Bahá'í efforts in education have a long history, dating back to the early years of the Faith in Iran. Although much has been achieved over the decades, it has been clear to all who have contributed to these efforts that the vision of what may be called "Bahá'í education" is a distant one. In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, we read that "there is as yet no such thing as a Bahá'í curriculum" and that "the task of formulating a system of education which would be officially recognized by the Cause, and enforced as such throughout the Bahá'í world, is one which the present-day generation of believers cannot obviously undertake, and which has to be gradually accomplished by Bahá'í scholars and educationalists of the future" (qtd. in Hornby 212).

That the emergence of Bahá'í education is a distant goal does not mean, of course, that there is not a great deal of work to be done at present. A statement prepared at the Bahá'í World Centre in 1993 and approved by the Universal House of Justice suggests that

the gradual development of contents and methods of Bahá'í

education will most probably occur as the result of the diverse activities of an increasing number of educators working in varied cultural and ecological settings throughout the world. Systematic research and high quality academic study are called for, not as isolated activities, but as components, albeit important ones, of a process in which the design of curricula is closely connected with educational practice and systematization of educational experience. (Office of Social and Economic Development 6)

A concept that has been of great assistance to those striving to visualize the gradual evolution of educational effort throughout the Bahá'í world in recent decades is that of "Bahá'í-inspired education"—a term that is meant to suggest incremental contributions to both theory and practice in the field that are inspired by the Bahá'í teachings. This concept has allowed Bahá'ís to become fully involved in hundreds of educational endeavors, free from the pressure created by the expectation that these efforts will, in a relatively short span of time, produce the elements, principles, and curricula of a comprehensive Bahá'í education. But even with this evolutionary perspective, clarity should be sought on what is to be achieved. What—we need to ask—can reasonably be expected from Bahá'í-inspired endeavors? How can they help us advance toward the realization of Bahá'í ideals?

To answer such questions, it is necessary to assess today's educational theory and practice, analyze the underlying assumptions, and understand the forces that determine the directions in which the field of education moves. This is not the place to address such an enormous challenge, but an overall picture is apparent. In 1939, Shoghi Effendi wrote: "Let us be on our guard lest we measure too strictly the Divine Plan with the standard of men. I am not prepared to state that it agrees in principle or in method with the prevailing notions now uppermost in men's minds, nor that it should conform with those imperfect, precarious, and expedient measures feverishly resorted to by agitated humanity" (*Bahá'í Administration* 62). In this same passage, he asks for an "uncompromising adherence to that which we believe is the revealed and express will of God, however perplexing it might first appear, however at variance with the shadowy views, the impotent doctrines, the crude theories, the idle imaginings, the fashionable conceptions of a transient and troublous age" (62).

In the case of education, a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi indicates that people "tend to be very superficial in their thinking, and it would seem as if the educational systems in use are sorely lacking in ability to produce a mature mind in a person who has reached supposedly adult life! All the outside influences that surround the individual seem to have an intensely distracting effect, and it is a

hard job to get the average person to do any deep thinking or even a little meditation on the problems facing him and the world at large" (*Directives* 22).

Although much time has passed since these statements were written, one can hardly argue that today's situation is any better. Contemporary educational systems around the world seem just as impotent to nurture mature minds. While the value of the experience and the ideas generated throughout the years is not being questioned, there are too many thoughtful analyses of the shortcomings of current educational systems and processes for anyone to deny that the crisis of education has continued to deepen over the decades.

Cognizant of this profound crisis in education, we need to reflect on the Bahá'í community's ability to advance in new directions. The claim I wish to make is that the ability to take significant strides in advancing Bahá'í-inspired education does exist, but much of it depends on our appreciation of the nature and magnitude of the work—on how much we expect from ourselves and how willing we are to do the hard work required.

A Bahá'í-inspired educational endeavor could be defined simply as an effort carried out by a group of Bahá'ís and other like-minded individuals inspired by the vision and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. As such, it strives to incorporate Bahá'í principles in the content and the approaches of its programs, particularly the principles of the oneness of humankind,

of equality between men and women, and of the elimination of prejudice. It inculcates a sense of world citizenship and the virtues of an upright character. However, as far as educational practice *per se* is concerned, it simply tries to adhere to the latest educational theories according to the training that the Bahá'ís involved have received at any given time—behaviorism a few decades ago, a combination of computationalism and culturalism along with an emphasis on behavioral objectives some time later, more recently a curious mixture of constructivism and outcome-based curricula, and then whatever may be coming next.²

Alternatively, we could be somewhat more ambitious, and that is the approach being proposed here. In that case, we would value insights from established theories and draw on them when it is appropriate, but at the same time we would be engaged in a rigorous search for educational content and methods that would progressively endow each successive generation with the characteristics of a human race entering the age of maturity.

Shoghi Effendi writes that the “supreme and distinguishing function” of

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is “the calling into being of a new race of men” (*Advent* 17). “A race of men,” according to Bahá'u'lláh, “incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay” (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 32). What is rather obvious in this regard is that no matter how far in the future human beings of such extraordinary powers and incomparable character are to appear, their emergence will not be a sudden phenomenon. It cannot be that for the longest time, human beings behave more or less the same as they do today, and then all of a sudden a new humanity comes into being as if by magic. A process has to be set in motion by which notable changes in character and powers of a growing number of individuals will take deeper and deeper root from generation to generation. Education—the concepts, methods, and content of which will have to systematically develop over time—will be a most significant component of this process.

There are a number of questions that present themselves the moment we place such weighty expectations on Bahá'í-inspired education. Is what we know about education today, including the knowledge contained in fields such as sociology of education, philosophy of education, psychology, ethics, philosophy of mind, and neuroscience sufficient to enable us to educate souls who will “cast the sleeve of holiness

2 For a discussion of computationalism and culturalism, see Jerome Bruner's *The Culture of Education*. For an incisive analysis of the behavioral objectives model, see Joseph Dunne's “Teaching and the Limits of Technique: An Analysis of the Behavioural-Objectives Model.” And for an overview of constructivism, see Denis C. Phillips and Jonas F. Soltis's *Perspectives on Learning*.

over all that hath been created from water and clay" (Bahá'u'lláh qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 32)? The answer is clearly no, far from it.

The next question, then, is whether there is enough knowledge in these fields to show us a way forward, at least to enable us to take the first few steps in the desired direction. We can give an affirmative response to this second question, but in order to succeed, we must follow the guidance offered in the statement quoted at the beginning of this presentation. We should look at Bahá'í-inspired efforts as components of a long-term process of action and reflection in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. We should become well-versed in the theories and practices of education and those fields closely associated with it. We should be engaged in a rigorous process to generate new knowledge that we can share openly. To advance in this process, we should view theories and practices as sources of insight that enrich our own experience.

At the same time, we should avoid fads, not make unreasonable claims, be humble, and cling scrupulously to the highest standards of honesty and rectitude of conduct. We need to search in the rapidly growing river of knowledge flowing through the world for clues and indications that would assist us in solving the innumerable puzzles we will find along the way. We need to identify one by one the elements of an educational process that will—incrementally, to be sure—help cultivate the kind of person Bahá'u'lláh

has envisioned. And we need to refine these elements as we learn from experience, articulate insights, and make conceptual advances.

Everything we do in this complex enterprise will present us with its own challenges; to meet them, we have to organize and reorganize our process of action, reflection, study, and consultation. As we do so, we need to pay special attention to the way we interact with existing educational theories and practices. How should we approach ideas, methods, and content of educational models when we profoundly disagree with some of their underlying assumptions? For example, we do not believe that the human mind is a supercomputer. Yet, there are aspects of the brain's functioning that lend themselves to its being treated as such.

The computationalism of the cognitive movement, then, does have insights to offer us when we are seeking to enhance certain aspects of the workings of the mind. We must be able, however, to select appropriate aspects of computationalism to be incorporated into a Bahá'í-inspired educational endeavor for specific purposes, while avoiding the tendency to disregard a more holistic encounter with the human mind—a tendency that robs the teaching-learning experience of the richness it deserves.

The same holds for culturalism, to use another example, which is the complement to computationalism. According to this perspective, education should initiate the young into a culture, helping them to become participants

in processes that constantly negotiate, create, and recreate meaning. That culture plays a significant role in how human beings develop from infancy is an obvious fact with which no one can disagree. Yet, we believe that educational efforts should enable each generation of youth to contribute more decisively than the previous one to the construction of a new culture and a new civilization. Insights from theories based on culturalism, therefore, are bound to be of some help to us. But no matter how much truth there is to the statement that knowledge is socially constructed, we cannot totally subscribe to constructivism and deny the existence of a reality that is the final arbiter determining the validity of the knowledge being constructed, or ignore the fact that this reality has both material and spiritual dimensions.

To be able to meet all such challenges, we will have to rely on a robust framework for Bahá'í-inspired education, which we are only beginning to elaborate. Working within this evolving framework, Bahá'í-inspired efforts should be able to avoid the extremes of both determinism and radical constructivism and nurture individuals whose constructive powers of thought and action are not governed by vain imaginings but are harmonized with reality, with the will of God and His purpose for humanity. Gaining insights from and carefully modifying elements of existing practices on the way to discovering new and more effective ones calls for scientific rigor. Science cannot advance if

it is required to accommodate every view in the pursuit of a hazy notion of inclusivity. Clearly, that which works is not equivalent to that which does not; claims should be supported by evidence. But to examine evidence rigorously, it is necessary to reject emotivism as a form of social interaction.

Emotivism—the doctrine that our judgments about truth are no more than expressions of preference, attitude, or feeling—has deeply penetrated modern culture, and many strands of progressive education find affinity with its underlying premises. The resulting “emotivist” self is moved only by personal feelings and preferences. For such an individual, it is not the choice between good and evil that matters, but the free rein given to self to choose. Thus, rational arguments contribute little to moral judgments; agreements are to be reached through the expression of feelings and the force they exert. In the eyes of the emotivist, the world is a meeting place of individuals, all exerting their own will to accommodate their preferences, and a stage that presents a series of opportunities for their enjoyment and for the achievement of their own satisfaction.³ This emotivist self is nurtured not only by mass media and advertising, but also by educational approaches that reduce morality to personal preference. In these approaches, divine purpose is at best ignored, and the existence of truth, moral or

3 For an analysis of emotivism, see Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.

otherwise, outside the subjective self is denied. How different is the emotivist self from the image the Bahá'í Writings give of the human potential:

O my servant!

Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer's knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Persian no. 72)

O son of man!

If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 7)

This reference to emotivism is meant only to illustrate the care with which we need to examine current educational theories and practices. Emotivism, of course, is just one of many doctrines that stand in direct opposition to the kind of system of thought and practice that will, in the fullness of time, give rise to those who, "incomparable in character, . . . with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay" (Bahá'u'lláh qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 32).

In our endeavor to advance Bahá'í-inspired education, we find ourselves in a delicate situation: we have to borrow ideas, methods, and content from current educational theories and practices and, at the same time, be constantly on guard lest we overlook the adverse effects that they can produce in the psyche of the human being. We cannot afford to forget that the concepts, categories, and principles that the field of education has so far generated will undergo fundamental transformation, one to which we should contribute. And we must find the courage to elaborate concepts inspired by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh that are being neglected today.

A brief examination of two concepts, those of "understanding" and "spiritual qualities," will help us appreciate the enormity of the work before us as we try to advance in Bahá'í-inspired education. Understanding has been a central theme in education and philosophy, but it needs to be recast in light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. The notion of spiritual qualities as a category of the attributes of the human soul has often been neglected or lost in muddled narratives of virtues, which include culture-specific dispositions, social dexterities, and mental, as well as physical, skills. There is much to be done to clarify the nature of these constituent elements of our being and how they are to be systematically fostered. The concepts of understanding and spiritual qualities are intimately connected, and Bahá'ís are in a unique position to treat them at

the appropriate level of depth both in theory and in practice.

Even a cursory survey of the Bahá'í Writings impresses on us that for human beings to manifest the powers of the human spirit such as justice, humble service, pure and goodly deeds, and love, both the individual and the human race as a whole have to reach new shores of understanding. To help humanity move toward this goal, education is in need of a more accurate depiction of the nature of understanding. This is necessary if educators are to transcend the dichotomy between nature and nurture, between student-centered education and content-focused education, and between subjective and objective knowledge. It is time to free our thinking from the grip of the duality we have inherited from Locke and Rousseau and from the reductionism of educational fads.

To nurture understanding, we have to deal with at least three interrelated and inseparable entities: the "subject of understanding," the student who possesses actual and latent intellectual and moral attributes; the "objects of understanding," items of varying degrees of complexity that are to be grasped and acted upon; and the "process of understanding," the process by which greater insight into reality and the way it is to be transformed is gained. The methods by which the student is helped to advance in understanding depend on that which is to be understood; thus, the process of understanding for different objects cannot be reduced to the application

of a single approach—whether behavioral, cognitive, cultural, empirical, or constructivist. As well, the process of understanding is conceptualized in light of an explicit or implicit notion of the subject of understanding—for example, as a highly complex computer in computationalism, a negotiator of values in culturalism, and so on. For us, the process of understanding will have to correspond to the conception of the subject of understanding evoked by Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the "new race of men." Just as we cannot separate this process from either its object or its subject, it would be a mistake to sharply separate the subject from the object of understanding. The understanding of a specific set of concepts both demands and contributes to the development of certain relevant intellectual and spiritual qualities and attitudes.

Reality is one, and there is continuity between its physical, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. Concepts that help us understand this complex reality are not isolated and self-contained, but closely intertwined and intermingling. So, "understanding" in this respect cannot be circumscribed; there is a boundlessness to it, and nurturing it requires that we do not view it as a point of accomplishment—whether in terms of theory or practice—but as an ongoing engagement of the subject of understanding with its objects.

In a certain sense, understanding is a notion that defies all manner of definition. It is not synonymous with

how the human mind sorts out and processes information; it is not merely a culminating point at which one arrives once certain facts are assimilated; it is not simply the conclusion reached after following one procedure or another; nor is it reducible to sound, rational judgments based on one's beliefs. Understanding differs from both physical action—say, planting a tree—and mental occupation—say, thinking about how to plant the tree. It is also distinct from the mental activity involved in gathering and sorting information. All these contribute to understanding, especially when carried out purposefully, but they do not make up the process in its entirety. As one advances in understanding, at least in relation to substantive concepts, there are significant moments of insight and grasp of specific facts and meanings, but the process is more like moving forward along a path that, although marked by certain milestones, by no means has a predetermined end.⁴

According to this vision, in order to nurture understanding, we need to appreciate that one advances in his or her understanding of reality with the aid of God's grace and bestowals. Understanding is, ultimately, a gift bestowed by God: "First and foremost among these favors, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man," states Bahá'u'lláh, "is the gift of understanding" (Gleanings 195).

4 For a more extensive exploration of this theme see my book, *Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy*.

When we examine carefully passages in which the word "understanding" is employed in the Bahá'í Writings, we see that it is not mentioned only in the context of truths that we need to apprehend, but that it is often used as an adjective to describe the person, to refer to an attribute of the soul. Thus, understanding is intimately linked to our state of being. Like spiritual qualities such as justice, love, generosity and truthfulness, it is a constituent element of who we are.

Spiritual qualities are reflections of divine attributes in the mirror of the human heart, and the development of these qualities defines the capacity of the human soul to set itself on its infinite journey toward God. Understanding, too, is a crucial determining factor of this capacity. Here, then, appears a profound connection between understanding and spiritual qualities, and in the context of Bahá'í-inspired education, between fostering spiritual qualities and nurturing understanding. This would be an obvious connection if we were to refer only to the understanding of concepts directly associated with specific spiritual qualities—to understand, for example, the notions of selfless giving, of forgiveness, and of sympathy in the development of generosity as a spiritual quality. But the claim being made here is much greater. Bahá'í-inspired educational programs are being challenged to engage simultaneously in fostering spiritual qualities and in nurturing understanding of concepts belonging not only to the spiritual realm, but also

to the realms of the physical and social sciences, to literature and the arts, to history and political thought. This is a call to scale the walls that tend to separate education centered on the material and social aspects of human existence from education focused on a moral and spiritual life. It is a call for a level of integration that has not been achieved before.

To meet the challenge of such integration, Bahá'í-inspired education needs a rich account of spiritual qualities in a language sufficiently clear to allow for the design and evaluation of educational activity. This language must embrace an expanded rationality, drawing on the discourses of religion, science, the arts, and philosophy. In developing such a language, we need to avoid relativism and moral equivalency. The language has to set a path toward the higher ground but avoid moralizing. There is a qualitative variance between nobility and baseness that should not be blurred. The desired language must be able to express sensitivity to this contrast, motivating us to aspire to lofty goals and to keep away from unworthy pursuits.

Moreover, a language that is to serve as a vehicle for exploring spiritual qualities and for cultivating susceptibility to the contrast between the noble and the base must convey a vision of human existence that extends beyond the requirements of day-to-day life. The understanding achieved with its aid should enhance the ability to distinguish between superficial and lasting results of one's words and

actions, directing moral purpose toward that which has permanence.

The comprehensive account of spiritual qualities to be elaborated over time should address their autonomous character and offer insights into the dynamics of interaction among them. Further, it should not lose sight of their non-exhaustive, eternal nature, although it must explain evolutionary changes in their meanings as humanity advances from childhood to maturity. Spiritual qualities are not bound to their expressions in finite contexts, no matter how much our capacity to manifest them expands. They exist on a transcendent plane, vital structures in that dimension of reality we call spiritual.

Ponder for a moment these words of Bahá'u'lláh describing how one day, in the Garden of Ridván, He "gazed on one of the Beauties of the Most Sublime Paradise, standing on a pillar of light, and calling aloud saying: 'O inmates of earth and heaven! Behold ye My beauty, and My radiance, and My revelation, and My effulgence. By God, the True One! I am Trustworthiness and the revelation thereof, and the beauty thereof. I will recompense whosoever will cleave unto Me, and recognize My rank and station, and hold fast unto My hem. I am the most great ornament of the people of Bahá, and the vesture of glory unto all who are in the kingdom of creation. I am the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the world, and the horizon of assurance unto all beings'" (*Tablets* 38).

Although spiritual qualities are to express themselves in action, our account of them cannot be limited to observable behavior. Yet, it is necessary to have at least some qualitative measures of how we advance in their acquisition. This is where the concept of service takes center stage. Service refers to acts that are directed by the twofold purpose of pursuing one's own spiritual and intellectual growth and contributing to the civilization-building process, acts seeking the transformation of some aspect of the essential relationships that define human existence. In this connection, the image of a path is being increasingly used in the Bahá'í community to visualize effort and movement as well as resilience in the face of difficulties and the ability to turn stumbling blocks into stepping stones. A path of service invites participation, and participants advance along it at different paces and strides. One does not walk the path alone; there is faith in the capacity of others and joy in their accomplishments.

In addition, the efficacy of service is not to be evaluated merely by the perceived success or failure of an enterprise; the extent to which understanding has advanced and the necessary spiritual qualities have been developed is a more important factor to be considered. This is not an evaluation carried out by external observers, but by every single participant. Further, the reality of service is not confined to specific actions, for service infuses the environment with the potency to

transform the relationships that shape it. Service changes selfish grumble to selfless joy in giving, greedy exploitation to reciprocity and fairness, and arrogant knowing to a humble posture of learning. Although it is manifested through action, service is inseparable from one's state of being. It unites doing and being. At a most fundamental level, it is a requirement of what it is to be human: "That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 250).

The argument presented so far may be summarized as follows: In order to advance significantly in Bahá'í-inspired education, we need to keep in mind Bahá'u'lláh's extraordinary vision of the human being who will walk this earth in the fullness of time; and while being respectful of accomplishments in the field of education, we need to remember that in its present state it is incapable of cultivating such an individual. Humbled by the realization of the magnitude of the work ahead, a growing number of us, together with other like-minded individuals, have to labor in diverse cultural and ecological settings, identifying educational needs, developing elements of a coherent pedagogy, and creating a series of teaching-learning experiences in which these elements are given practical expression. Each group would see itself engaged in a systematic process that involves action—namely, carrying out educational activities and evaluating them—reflection on action, consultation, and analysis of progress

both conceptual and practical, leading to repeated modification of ideas, methods, and materials. In this way, through a series of approximations, curricular elements would emerge that could be shared with others engaged in similar endeavors. What is being suggested is that such a process, which is in fact already in place in several settings throughout the worldwide Bahá'í community, will advance the theory and practice of education as long as action is carried out within an evolving conceptual framework, the knowledge being generated from various experiences is synthesized in a coherent manner, and models and theories are considered sources of insight and not truths to be adhered to at all costs. It is to be expected, of course, that in the pursuit of the distant goal of Bahá'í education, formidable challenges will have to be met. The earlier discussion of emotivism illustrates the kind of capacity that is needed if we are to identify and analyze the false doctrines that tend to invade educational theory and practice. As is evident from the brief mention of the cognitive and other movements, valuable insights can be gained from various educational theories, even when we disagree with some of their basic assumptions. But our interactions with existing theory and practice constitutes only one component of our Bahá'í-inspired endeavors. Many fundamental ideas in education have to be transformed and new ideas have to be elaborated as an ever-deeper understanding of the implications

of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is gained. The search for a proper conception of understanding and a corresponding account of spiritual qualities is but one among the multitude of tasks to be addressed in the effort to advance Bahá'í-inspired education.

It seems reasonable at this point to ask for some indication of the efficacy of the approach being described here. Why should we be so confident that adopting it will actually enable us to advance in Bahá'í-inspired education? There is clearly no decisive evidence to cite this early in the process. Yet the impressive accomplishments of endeavors in the Bahá'í community that have followed this approach is a source of confidence. The number of such undertakings is not large, but witnessing the transformation they have achieved in a diversity of settings is reassuring. The Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program, now established in thousands of clusters around the world, is a clear example.

Many years ago, in Colombia, it was noticed that the Bahá'í Faith was attracting large numbers of youth between the ages of twelve and fifteen. They tended to form a very special kind of attachment to the Bahá'í Faith and its ideals. Over the years, through a systematic process of action and reflection on action, a program for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth was developed and implemented in an increasing number of regions. Reflection on the results made it clear that much of the literature on the characteristics of individuals in this

age range was bound to specific cultures and historical circumstances and did not offer sufficient insight into the reality of a human being during early adolescence.

It could be said that in the history of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, the story of the life of one stalwart youth, Rúhu'lláh Varqá, had already falsified predominant theories about this age group. A different description of a junior youth gradually emerged from action, reflection, study, and consultation and was recorded in Book 5 of the curriculum developed by the Ruhi Institute. The degree of transformation of tens of thousands of youngsters who have benefited from the program is a testimony to the efficacy of its content and the spiritual and social concepts that underlie it.

Two sets of ideas that have contributed to the accomplishments of the program are worth mentioning. One addresses the relationship between the structure of language and the mind's moral structure, and the other deals with the all-important question of spiritual perception. As to the first, repeated reference in the Writings to the influence of utterance confirms the vital role language plays in cultivating the moral as well as the intellectual powers of the individual. Language structure is extremely complex and cannot be discussed in any depth here.

Consideration of a few simple facts, however, leads to valuable insights into the relationship between the way words are organized in one's mind and one's moral structure. It is evident,

for example, that words do not float around arbitrarily; the meaning of a concept comes partly from the connections it has with other concepts. These connections help us understand the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. Some of the connections, such as the one between the noun "chair" and the verb "to sit," are obvious.

But not all connections are so immediate. Bahá'í-inspired educational endeavors can be guided by the wealth of meaning enshrined in the Sacred Writings to discover and create connections among words and concepts that go beyond the obvious and the immediate. The objective would be to open channels in the mind and heart of a young person that would generate profound insights into reality and the ways it can be transformed. Focus would be on the intimate relationship between language structure and moral structure. *The Human Temple*, a textbook inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's *Súriy-i-Haykal*,⁵ is a modest attempt to address such an objective in the program. For instance, that which is closely associated in the language structure of a junior youth with a verb as common as "to see" is assumed to have noteworthy effects on the moral structure governing his or her thought and behavior. Thus the deliberate effort in that text to connect in a natural way the verb "to see" with words such as "knowledge," "mind," "observing," "thinking,"

⁵ See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*.

and “understanding”: seeing with the light of the sun, seeing with the light of knowledge, seeing with our mind, seeing friends not strangers, and thinking of unity.

As to the question of spiritual perception, at least two interrelated ideas need to be carefully examined. The first idea is that the enhancement of spiritual perception requires the removal of veils covering the inner eye: the veils of passion and desire; of covetousness, greed, and envy; of vain imagining and idle fancy; and of egotism. The challenge before us is not just the suppression of inordinate passions and desires, curbing greed and envy and restricting the operation of the ego in order to promote civility. We would not be mistaken in assuming that the human being Bahá'u'lláh envisions walking this earth in the future will have succeeded in burning away these veils. Bahá'í-inspired education, then, must enable the individual to rend asunder the veils that cover the inner eye.

The second idea is that the enhancement of spiritual perception requires setting aside the duality between mind and heart. Some schools of thought believe that emotions and sentiments hinder the operation of rational thinking. Others recommend suspending reason and objectivity so that emotions such as care and sympathy can manifest themselves.⁶ Even

spiritual qualities tend to be divided: we love with the heart, and we exercise justice through the power of the mind. This rift between feelings and thoughts reduces our understanding of both and creates an artificial picture of the interacting faculties of the human soul. We must realize that sentiments such as love and respect, which transcend the self, are vitalized by appropriate thoughts, just as noble thoughts are empowered by appropriate self-transcending emotions such as passion for truth, yearning for justice, and attraction to beauty.

In refusing to make an artificially sharp distinction between thoughts and sentiments, we acknowledge that there is a spiritual as well as an intellectual dimension to perception in which both thinking and feeling take part. In this respect, it is noteworthy how even a small effort to cultivate the perception of forces that emanate in the realm of the spirit, such as divine confirmation and hope, and to set aside the duality between heart and mind in treating a theme such as excellence has appealed to so many junior youth and has exerted such a transformative influence on their lives.

The intention of this reference to some of the ideas that have helped define the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program is to illustrate how we can make incremental advances in Bahá'í-inspired education. The assertion being made is that modest achievements of this nature will accumulate and lead to significant progress. What is required is for more and

6 See, for example, Nel Noddings's *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*.

more of us to fix our eyes on the vision of the human being and the future civilization revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, to gain a more profound understanding of the attributes of that human being, and, through a systematic process of action, reflection, study, and consultation, move toward the goal of Bahá'í education. In this endeavor, we should not attach ourselves to fashionable educational models. We should create a culture that does not favor fads or the dominance of technique over substance. We must do our best to integrate spiritual insights gained from the study of the Bahá'í teachings and from our experience in applying them to the life of humanity with knowledge generated through painstaking scientific research.

WORKS CITED

- Bahá'u'lláh. *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985.
- . *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990.
- . Súriy-i-Haykal. *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*. Bahá'í World Centre, 2002.
- . *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988.
- Bruner, Jerome. *The Culture of Education*. Harvard UP, 1993.
- Dunne, Joseph. "Teaching and the Limits of Technique: An Analysis of the Behavioural-Objectives Model." *The Irish Journal of Education*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 66–90.
- Farid-Arbab, Sona. *Moral Empowerment: In Quest of a Pedagogy*. Bahá'í Publishing, 2016.
- Hornby, Helen Bassett, editor. *Lights of Guidance*. India Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2001.
- The Human Temple*. DL Publicaciones, 2012.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. U of Notre Dame P, 1981.
- Noddings, Nel. *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. U of California P, 2003.
- Office of Social and Economic Development. *Bahá'í Social And Economic Development: Prospects for the Future*. Bahá'í World Centre, 1993.
- Phillips, Denis C., and Jonas F. Soltis. *Perspectives on Learning*. 5th ed., Teachers College P, 2009.
- Shoghi Effendi. *The Advent of Divine Justice*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971.
- . *Bahá'í Administration*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974.
- . *Directives from the Guardian*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994.

Good News

CAITLIN JOHNSON CASTELAZ

“and all the atoms cry aloud” – Bahá'u'lláh

And the scientists told the newspapers
that the atoms had learned to speak
but the journalists had never heard
of such a thing
so they could not trust their ears
or their scribbled notes.

And so when the papers were published
the people read
that the atoms had learned to split,
and that the scientists had taught them,
which was not completely untrue
but what was truer
was that the atoms
had learned to speak
and had, in fact, been speaking for some time.

When the scientists first heard the atoms' voices,
small and grainy like sand,
they were alarmed
that they spoke in unison
using words the scientists did not know,
which was surprising
because
they were scientists
and had learned many words
that even their mothers
could not pronounce.

And as the atoms spoke of rising suns
and blazing fires
the scientists began to catalogue
the things they did not know:
That nameless burning heat
the atoms called a father
and whatever mother
had taught the atoms to rise,
to speak, to circle round like a choir
and pray so quiet and so nice.

The Beauty of the Human Psyche: The Patterns of the Virtues

RHETT DIESSNER

Abstract

The human psyche, or soul, reflects the most beautiful forms of the universe: the human virtues, which are reflections of the attributes of God. It appears that virtues begin with God and in some mysterious way are cast upon the human soul, much as the sun casts its rays upon a mirror. Those divine attributes are then reflected from our soul into our mind and manifested as virtuous thoughts (virtuous cognitions) and spiritual emotions; then the mind interacts with the body, creating patterns of neural activity in our brain. Next, through an act of will, those neuronal patterns are transformed into actual behavior and thus into virtuous deeds. This creates a feedback loop in which those virtuous deeds then influence brain patterns, which then influence cognitions and emotions in the mind, and which then may interact with the soul, burnishing it to reflect more fully and purely God's attributes. This paper combines insights from science and the Bahá'í Writings to outline the "journey" of those virtues.

Resumé

La psyché humaine, ou l'âme, est le reflet des plus belles réalités de l'univers : les vertus humaines, qui elles mêmes reflètent les attributs de Dieu. Il semble que les vertus émanent de Dieu et se projettent, de façon mystérieuse, sur l'âme hu-

maine, à l'instar du soleil projetant ses rayons sur un miroir. Ces attributs divins se réfléchissent alors depuis notre âme jusqu'à notre esprit et s'expriment sous forme de pensées ou d'idées vertueuses et d'émotions spirituelles; l'esprit interagit alors avec le corps, entraînant une activité neurale dans le cerveau. Puis, par un acte de volonté, cette activité neurale se transforme en comportement concret et ainsi en actions vertueuses. Il s'ensuit une boucle de rétroaction par laquelle les actes vertueux influent sur le fonctionnement cérébral qui, à son tour influe sur les pensées et les émotions de l'esprit, lesquelles peuvent ensuite interagir avec l'âme, la purifiant pour qu'elle puisse refléter de façon plus ample et plus pure les attributs de Dieu. L'auteur s'appuie à la fois sur les percées de la science et sur les écrits bahá'ís pour décrire le cheminement de ces vertus.

Resumen

La psique humana, o el alma, refleja las formas más bellas del universo: las virtudes humanas las cuales son reflejos de los atributos de Dios. Aparenta ser que las virtudes comienzan con Dios y de alguna manera misteriosa son arrojadas sobre el alma humana, de manera similar al sol arrojando sus rayos sobre un espejo. Esos atributos divinos luego son reflejados en nuestra mente desde nuestra alma y se manifiestan como pensamientos virtuosos (cogniciones virtuosas) y emociones espirituales; entonces la mente interactúa con el cuerpo, creando patrones de actividad neural en nuestro cerebro. Luego, a través de un acto de voluntad, esos patrones neurales son transformados en comportamiento y así en acciones virtuosas. Esto crea un circuito de retroalimentación en la cual esas acciones virtuosas luego influen-

cian patrones del cerebro, los cuales luego influyen en las cogniciones y emociones de la mente, y las cuales luego pueden interactuar con el alma, puliéndolo para que refleje más completamente y puramente los atributos de Dios. Este ensayo combina ideas de la ciencia y los Escritos Bahá'ís para delinear el "trayecto" de estas virtudes.

Psychologists are confused about the essential nature of the human psyche; it has been called the "mind," or the "brain," or "behavior," or a combination of all three. However, for our purposes we will focus on the original Greek meaning of *psyche*, that is, the "human soul" or "spirit."

From a Bahá'í point of view, the psyche/soul¹ is the fundamental aspect of the human reality; it is non-physical and transcends the death of the human body. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the human soul is a "simple" entity because it is not a composition and is without constituent parts:

Therefore, it is evident that life is the expression of composition, and mortality, or death, is equivalent to decomposition. As the spirit of man is not composed of material elements, it is not subject to decomposition and, therefore, has no death. It is self-evident that the human spirit is simple, single and not composed in order that it may come to immortality. (*Promulgation 306*)

1 For the purpose of this paper I will use these terms interchangeably.

This simple entity has the power of reflecting, like a mirror, the names and attributes of God. Once reflected from the soul, these attributes of God are referred to as the human virtues. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.

These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited,

and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory. (*Gleanings* 65–66)

Metaphorically, the spirit is like light emanating from the soul, refracting into the many beautiful colors we call “virtues,” the attributes of God as manifested in human actions. However, regarding the essential reality of the human being, Bahá’u’lláh observes that “the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel” (*Gleanings* 158–59). With this cautionary observation in mind, we will proceed with care, realizing that any effort we make to discuss the reality of the human soul will necessarily be inadequate and incomplete.

VIRTUES BEGIN WITH GOD
AND ARE REFLECTED BY THE SOUL

The Bahá’í Writings, as well as the sacred texts of several world religions, emphasize that the human soul is created in the image of God: “Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 3).

The Bahá’í Writings also emphasize that God is unknowable, thus implying

that the essence of the human soul is also unknowable. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has noted in *Some Answered Questions* that although we cannot know God’s essence, we can, to some degree, understand God through His attributes (254). This implies that to some degree, we can understand the nature of the human psyche/soul through the virtues reflected by it. As noted earlier, God “hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes [on the human reality] and made it a mirror of His own Self” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 65). Nonetheless, these attributes of God are only partially understood by human beings. Accordingly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “Knowing God, therefore, means the comprehension and the knowledge of His attributes, and not of His Reality. And even this knowledge of His attributes extends only so far as human power and capacity permit, and remains wholly inadequate” (*Some Answered Questions* 254).

VIRTUES ARE REFLECTED
FROM SOUL TO BRAIN

The human psyche associates with the central nervous system (the brain/body) during our physical existence. It is in this sense that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains how the soul is not in the body yet is connected to the body. In *Some Answered Questions*, He refers to the “common faculty” as the intermediary between our outer senses (such as sight and hearing) and our spiritual powers (such as imagination and comprehension); perhaps it this same

common faculty that “transfers” the spiritual power of the virtues, reflected from the soul, into the brain (243).

The Bahá'í Writings also refer to the mind as being the intermediary between the soul and the body. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi reads: “we have three aspects of our humanness, so to speak, a body, a mind and an immortal identity—soul or spirit. We believe the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and the two interact on each other” (*Messages to the Antipodes* 241). Thus it may be that the attributes and virtues of God emanate from God to the mirror of the human soul and are then reflected from the soul to the brain via the mind and common faculty.

VIRTUES REFLECTED AS NEURONAL PATTERNS

Recently, brain researchers have been able to use functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to study patterns of neuronal activity. There is emerging evidence of the specific neuronal patterns that represent such virtues as fairness, compassion, trustworthiness, and gratitude.

YOUR BRAIN ON FAIRNESS

Moll et al., in their fMRI exploration of the “human natural sense of fairness,” determined that a particular pattern of neural firing “in the orbital and medial sectors of the prefrontal

cortex and the superior temporal sulcus region, which are critical regions for social behavior and perception, play a central role in moral appraisals” (2730). Their research suggests that the “natural sense of fairness” with which humans are naturally endowed is called into action for the purpose of appraising moral situations, activating a particular pattern of brain regions (2730).

YOUR BRAIN ON GRATITUDE

Zahn et al. used fMRI to examine the neural correlates of the “social values” of pride, guilt, anger, and gratitude. They determined that the neural firing pattern associated with the virtue of gratitude involved the coactivation of three areas of the brain: the superior anterior temporal lobe, the mesolimbic region, and the basal forebrain (276). Moreover, they discovered that “differences in patterns of fronto-mesolimbic activity are associated with different subjective qualities of moral sentiments evoked by the same abstract conceptual content of social values in different contexts of action” (282). Their research showed that acting or seeing other people act in a way that is consistent with our values is tied to feelings of pride and gratitude that activate specific areas of the brain, while behaviors (either performed or observed) that run counter our social values are linked to a different neuronal pattern and to feelings of guilt or indignation.

YOUR BRAIN ON COMPASSION

Using fMRI, Mary Helen Immodino-Yang and her colleagues investigated the neural firing patterns associated with compassion for those suffering psychosocial or physical pain, and with admiration of virtue. They report, in regard to compassion, that “a previously undescribed pattern within the posteromedial cortices” as “an intriguing territory currently known for its involvement in... self-related/consciousness processes” (8021). They also found that the anterior insula showed a distinct pattern of firing shared by both admiration of virtue and compassion for psychosocial suffering.

YOUR BRAIN ON TRUSTWORTHINESS

Giulia Mattavelli and her colleagues used fMRI to investigate neural responses to trustworthiness in the amygdala and face-selective regions in the occipital and temporal lobes (2205). Their results indicated that the brain has a specific pattern of firing when determining whether someone’s face suggests that person is or is not trustworthy (2205).

SUMMARY OF NEURONAL PATTERNS

Brain science is in its infancy. At this point in time, we only have hints about the meanings of specific patterns of neuronal activity. However, there is emerging evidence, as reviewed

above, that each human virtue may be correlated with a specific and unique pattern of brain-region activation. Along the lines of John S. Hatcher’s early work,² I consider such neuronal patterns as physical manifestations of mystical essences (human virtues) that are communicated from the human psyche through the common faculty to the mind and then translated by the brain into behavior.

VIRTUES AT THE LEVEL OF EMOTIONS AND COGNITIONS

Do cognitions and emotions create neuronal patterns, or do neuronal patterns create cognitions and emotions? It is likely that causality is bidirectional and reciprocal, and perhaps simultaneous: neuronal patterns create thoughts and emotional feelings, and thoughts and emotional feelings create neuronal patterns. For example, as the virtue of justice wafts across our brain, coming from the soul and the common faculty, virtuous cognitions and spiritual emotions concerning fairness will be created in our mind and will also be represented as specific neuronal firing patterns in our brain. As mentioned in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, “the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and the two interact on each other” (*Antipodes* 241). Logically, then, we can infer from

² See, for instance, Hatcher’s 1977 essay “The Metaphorical Nature of Physical Reality” and his 1987 book *The Purpose of Physical Reality*.

this observation that the brain's function will influence the mind's cognitions and emotions, as well as the soul, and vice versa—the virtuous powers of the soul will influence the mind and the body.

According to the Bahá'í Writings, the human reality, may be meaningfully categorized into three aspects: 1) the physical or animal aspect, 2) the human or social aspect, and 3) the divine or spiritual aspect (although, of course, the human being may also be viewed as a single unified whole). When the spiritual entity (the soul) interacts with the physical entity (the body), the human mind is created. Julio Savi details 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments in this regard:

'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that in "man, there are deposited three realities . . . an outward or physical reality . . . a second or higher reality which is the intellectual reality . . . a third reality . . . that is the spiritual reality" [from *Star of the West*, vol. 7, 117–18]. So in man there is a threefold reality: a first reality, an expression of the world of creation, related to the senses, common both to men and animals, subject to nature; a second reality, an expression of the world of the Kingdom, which is conscious and spiritual; and lastly an intermediate reality, typical of man, halfway between the other two. This threefold human reality or nature may be viewed also as a threefold (animal, human and

spiritual) potentiality bestowed upon man. (86)

It seems likely that human thoughts and emotions are variously congruent with those three categories. For example, emotions may be primarily 1) physical or neurochemical (brain and nervous system based), 2) human or social (based on the mind), or 3) spiritual (based on the soul). The word "primarily" is important in the above sentence. Psychologist Albert Bandura's characterization of "reciprocal determinism" in *Social Foundations of Thought and Action* reminds us that all emotions and thoughts likely are influenced by physical, social, and spiritual forces but that particular emotional experiences are more heavily laden with one or another of those factors.³ In the following quotation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the phrase "natural emotions" to refer, I believe, either to emotions that are primarily physical or to those at the social/human level (intellectual) that have been corrupted by the body-based emotions (note that the phrase "spiritual susceptibilities" is a translation equivalent to "spiritual emotions"):

[Humanity] possesses two kinds of susceptibilities: *the natural emotions*, which are like dust upon the

3 An example of this might be calling physical happiness "pleasure" while referring to the gladness of the heart and mind as "happiness" and spiritual happiness as "joy." See Diessner, *Psyche*, Ch. 9).

mirror, and spiritual susceptibilities, which are merciful and heavenly characteristics.

There is a power which purifies the mirror from dust and transforms its reflection into intense brilliancy and radiance so that spiritual susceptibilities may chasten the hearts and heavenly bestowals sanctify them. What is the dust which obscures the mirror? It is attachment to the world, avarice, envy, love of luxury and comfort, haughtiness and self-desire; this is the dust which prevents reflection of the rays of the Sun of Reality in the mirror. *The natural emotions* are blameworthy and are like rust which deprives the heart of the bounties of God. But sincerity, justice, humility, severance, and love for the believers of God will purify the mirror and make it radiant with reflected rays from the Sun of Truth. (*Promulgation 244*; emphasis added)

Please note that in the above paragraph, emotions are divided into emotions of vice (the “natural emotions” such as attachment, avarice, envy, etc.), and good emotions or, basically, the virtues (sincerity, justice, humility, etc.). The vicious emotions appear to begin in our body/brain and then flow toward the mind, thereby corrupting it. This, in turn, adds dross to the mirror of our soul, whereas each virtue reflected from the mirror of our soul creates beautiful, noble thoughts and

spiritual emotions in the mind that are modeled in patterns of nerve cells firing in the brain.

THOUGHT AND COGNITION

In one of His talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have said:

The reality of man is his thought, not his material body. The thought force and the animal force are partners. Although man is part of the animal creation, he possesses a power of thought superior to all other created beings.

If a man’s thought is constantly aspiring towards heavenly subjects then does he become saintly; if on the other hand his thought does not soar, but is directed downwards to centre itself upon the things of this world, he grows more and more material until he arrives at a state little better than that of a mere animal.

Thoughts may be divided into two classes:

(1st) Thought that belongs to the world of thought alone.

(2nd) Thought that expresses itself in action.

Some men and women glory in their exalted thoughts, but if these thoughts never reach the plane of action they remain useless: the power of thought is dependent on its manifestation in deeds. (*Paris Talks 26*)

As a virtue is reflected from God through our soul and into the mind, beautiful, virtuous thoughts are created; and, as noted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, such thoughts are the reality of what it means to be human. The above quotation also has two other important elements we will explore: 1) it mentions "aspiring" toward heavenly subjects, which I believe means using the human will and intention to direct our thoughts toward the virtues reflected in our soul; and 2) the importance of manifesting virtuous thoughts in deeds. Transforming the power of thought into deeds may be achieved by creating virtuous neuronal patterns, which, through application of willpower, activate the muscles of the body to perform patterns of virtuous behaviors (good deeds).

THE ROLE OF THE HUMAN WILL AND BEHAVIOR: PATTERNS

The role of the human will (intention) is essential for developing a beautiful mind and for releasing the potentialities of the virtues into thought, emotion, and behavior. The human will (in terms of goodly intention) is, along with knowing and loving, one of the main spiritual powers of the human psyche ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 346–52; Danesh, *The Psychology of Spirituality* 63–73). An example of this power comes from another talk given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed

by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and content. Thoughts of love are constructive of brotherhood, peace, friendship, and happiness" (*Paris Talks* 29). Foreshadowing cognitive behavior theory and therapy, 'Abdu'l-Bahá recommends that we use our will to direct our thoughts toward virtues (peace and love) and away from vices (war and hate).

To appreciate the importance of the reciprocal interaction of patterns of deeds/behavior and virtues of the soul, we need to take an excursion into the concept of "pattern." Aristotle referred to that which binds together the parts or constituents of an entity as its "essence," or "formal cause." Julius Moravcsik refers to the formal cause as Aristotle's "structural constituent" (9). The structure of an entity includes its shape, form, organization, or, as emphasized in this paper, its pattern. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, evoking Aristotelian concepts, referred to this concept of pattern or formal cause in Persian as *súrí*, which has been translated as "form" (*Some Answered Questions* 323). Each virtue may be thought of as a specific pattern. For example, the virtue of love has a different pattern and form than the virtue of justice. Love creates a particular pattern of thought and emotion, and a particular pattern of neuronal firing, and a particular pattern of behavior; and these patterns differ from the patterns representing the virtue of justice. Certain patterns of virtuous behavior open wide the

gates to divine assistance, drawing to the human psyche a further measure of God's attributes and perhaps further burnishing the mirror of the soul so that it reflects those attributes more purely. This is an example of a reciprocal feedback loop in which the body, by performing good deeds, has a positive effect on the soul, just as the soul is able to have a positive effect on the body if one chooses to allow the virtues from God to be reflected through the mind, cognitions, and emotions and into human behavior and good deeds.

PATTERNS OF THOUGHT, EMOTION,
AND BEHAVIOR THAT DRAW SPIRIT
TO THEM

In one of his talks, Peter Khan discusses at length how in the writings of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the attractive force of a magnet is often employed to describe the manner in which certain human actions attract spiritual empowerment:

certain actions we take attract in a mysterious way great spiritual powers to us. It is not something one can characterize very simply. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá use the analogy of the magnet to describe it. The analogy of the magnet is mentioned in several places by Bahá'u'lláh where He uses [a] word which is translated as "lodestone." [...]you arrange the little elements making up the magnet to conform to a certain

pattern, then that pattern attracts a mysterious power that we call the "force of magnetism." It is mysterious. You can't see it.

So in that sense, the force of magnetism is a mysterious means of representing the analogy to the development of our spiritual awareness. We are told that certain actions attract the spiritual power and these are actions called forth in our Writings. Acts of devotion, the obligatory prayers, the other revealed prayers, the process of fasting for nineteen days each year. Acts of immersing oneself in the Holy Writings. Acts such as sacrificially contributing to the fund, or paying one's Huququ'lláh, participation in one's community life, endeavors to teach the Faith. These and many other things are actions, which we are promised in our Writings will attract great spiritual powers. ("The Needs" 8)⁴

I believe that at a fundamental level, Dr. Khan is referring to how virtuous actions attract a greater measure of God's attributes. Each virtue, when it

4 Transcript of a talk by Dr. Peter Khan in Adelaide, Australia, in August 2002. I received it as a personal communication in an email (and thus accuracy is an open question). Dr. Khan made similar statements in his talk on mental tests in Sydney in September 1995, and that talk may be retrieved at <http://bahai-library.org/talks/mental.tests.html>.

is translated from a reflection in the mirror of the soul into a pattern of behavior, then acts as a magnet to attract more spiritual power; each time the neuronal activity of the brain creates the pattern associated with a virtue it also attracts spiritual power. This is both a linear and a cyclical process. Like a ray of God's sunshine, an attribute of God bounces off the mirror of our soul and goes through the mind, creating a neuronal pattern in our brain. This brain pattern can then be inscribed into our muscles by our will, establishing a pattern of behavior. Both of these patterns (in the brain and in behavior) in turn attract more spirit from God. It is linear in the sense that it moves from God (through God's grace, in the form of a virtue), to the human soul, to the mind, to the brain, and then to behavior; but it is also a cycle, for just as a cleaner mirror reflects a greater amount of sunshine, virtuous behavior attracts a greater degree of the virtues from God. Perhaps the virtuous behavior participates in a feedback loop to the soul, further purifying it so that it can even more potently reflect the attributes of God. This cycle should end in a virtuous ascent. However, if one willfully rejects the virtuous neuronal pattern because of weakness or vice, then a moral descent is equally possible. That is, while the neuronal pattern associated with virtue could light up one's brain, the human will could prevent that neuronal pattern from influencing actual human behavior due to fear, ignorance,

or attachment to the physical world.⁵

It appears that the inspiration for Dr. Khan's observations comes, at least in part, from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talk recorded in section 52 of *Some Answered Questions*:

[T]he members, constituent parts, and composition that are found within man attract and act like a magnet for the spirit: The spirit is bound to appear in it. Thus, when a mirror is polished, it is bound to attract the rays of the sun, to be illumined, and to reflect splendid images. That is, when these physical elements are gathered and combined together, according to the natural order and with the utmost perfection, they become a magnet for the spirit, and the spirit will manifest itself therein with all its perfections. (232)

Several other statements by 'Abdu'l-Bahá involving a magnet metaphor emphasize how human behavior—especially in the form of service to humanity—influences the soul to mirror a greater portion of God's virtues. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that “[s]ervice is the magnet which attracts the heavenly strength. I hope thou wilt attain both” (*Tablets* 621) and that “[t]his service of the beloved of the kingdom of ABHA will be the means of great bounty, a magnet

⁵ See, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 29; *Promulgation* 244.

of strength and power attracting assistance and providence in the divine realm” (*Tablets* 664). Elsewhere He writes, “There is no doubt that thou art assiduously engaged in serving the Cause, giving eloquent talks at the meetings of the friends, and elucidating divine mysteries. These exertions will cause the outpourings of His invisible assistance to descend, and, as a magnet, will attract divine bounties” (qtd. in *Compilation* 195–96). In a similar vein, Shoghi Effendi’s secretary writes on his behalf that “[s]ervice is the magnet which draws the divine confirmations” (*Compilation* 543). These remarks appear to emphasize that particular patterns of behavior, which are herein called “service,” influence the soul’s ability to reflect a fuller measure of God’s light, His bounties, and thus His qualities.

VIRTUES ARE PATTERNS
CHARACTERIZED BY
UNITY-IN-DIVERSITY

According to Aristotle, everything has both a material cause and a formal cause (as well as an efficient cause and a final cause). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá illustrates this principle using the example of a chair: the chair is made of various elements (material), and when those elements are brought together in the form (pattern) of a chair, then a chair exists (*Some Answered Questions* 323). The chair is a “unity” of “diverse” elements. I suggest that the same logic applies to virtues, each of them representing a unity of diverse elements.

For example, the virtue of compassion becomes manifest in human behavior when the reflection of God’s own compassion manifests itself through our soul to our mind, unifies the compassionate thoughts and the spiritual emotion of compassion at the level of mind, unifies this with the diverse neuronal pattern in the brain representing compassion, and then unifies that neuronal pattern with the actual physical response that constitutes the good deed of compassionate action. All virtues follow this pattern: a unity of diverse neuronal elements and behavioral elements are unified with virtuous thoughts and emotions, which are in turn unified with the reflective outpouring of the soul.

To conclude this paper, we shall take a tour of one of the most interesting and important moral emotions currently under study by social psychologists. It is highly relevant to the theme of this paper because it is an emotion that arises in the mind and heart whenever a human being notices the beautiful virtues manifested in action by another.

THE MORAL EMOTION OF ELEVATION

In his chapter in the *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, Jonathan Haidt identifies four families of moral emotions: “the other-condemning family (contempt, anger, and disgust), the self-conscious family (shame, embarrassment, and guilt), the other-suffering family (compassion), and the other-praising family (gratitude and elevation)” (852).

I have focused on the positive moral emotions in this paper, already having mentioned compassion and gratitude. However, one of the most interesting and important moral emotions is elevation. Elevation's eliciting condition is the observance of moral beauty—that is to say, one must experience an occurrence of moral beauty, either consciously or unconsciously, in order to feel the emotion of elevation. Moral beauty shines forth from every attribute of God and from every expression of human virtue. Any time we witness another human being expressing a virtue and are emotionally moved by it, we begin experiencing the emotion of elevation.

Every emotion has eliciting conditions, and every emotion creates what are called “action tendencies.” For instance, the action tendency of anger is to strike out verbally or physically, to attack—or, in the best of circumstances, to seek redress. The action tendency of sadness is to weep, or to hold still and be lethargic. The action tendencies for the moral emotion of elevation are as follows: 1) to strive to become a better person, to emulate the actions of the person whose moral beauty one has just witnessed; and 2) the desire to serve others, to help them, to fulfill their needs.

Psychologists have experimentally induced elevation in research participants and shown that it causes prosocial/altruistic behavior. Recent experimental research demonstrates that elevation affects distinct types of prosocial behaviors compared to other

moral emotions, specifically increasing donation behavior (Van de Vyver and Abrams). Elevation increases people's willingness to volunteer to help others (Schnall and Roper; Schnall, Roper, and Fessler) and to increase charitable donation behavior (Aquino et al.; Siegel et al.; Thomson and Siegel). Under the influence of elevation, subjects improve their attitudes toward mentoring and often desire to become a better mentor (Thomson, Nakamura, Siegel, and Csikszentmihalyi). Elevation reduces the negative effect of social dominance orientation, making Whites more likely to donate to a Black-oriented charity (Freeman et al.), and decreases implicit and explicit sexual prejudices against gay men (Lai et al.). It increases sensitivity to moral dilemmas (Strohlinger et al.) and increases cooperative behavior (Pohling et al.). In another study, experimentally-induced elevation boosted spirituality, especially in non-religious participants, by altering basic world assumptions, increasing belief in the meaningfulness of life and the benevolence of others (Van Cappellen et al.). Correlational research found that self-reported elevation in college students reliably predicted their participation in volunteer activities three months later (Cox). Further, self-reported elevation was related to self-reported altruistic behavior (Landis et al.). It has also been experimentally shown that those who are more susceptible to noticing moral beauty are more likely to experience elevation (Diessner et al.).

YOUR BRAIN ON ELEVATION

Using fMRI, Takahashi et al. found that the experience of admiring morally beautiful actions “was associated with activation in the orbitofrontal cortex [OFC],” and Wang et al. also found the OFC implicated in perceptions of moral beauty (Takahashi et al. 1886; Wang et al.). Besides the OFC, the other major location of brain activity when noticing the moral beauty of others is the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), and studies have repeatedly found this region to be activated during elevation (Englander; Piper et al.). It would appear that the brain has a distinct pattern of neural firing that mirrors the experience of noticing the virtues in others, desiring to emulate that virtuous behavior, and then serving the needs of others.

BI-DIRECTIONAL INTERACTION BETWEEN VIRTUOUS BEHAVIOR AND THE VIRTUES OF THE SOUL

As emphasized in this paper, the influence of God’s attributes is directed from God to the soul, to the mind, to the brain, and finally is reflected in behavior. The influence of the virtues may also flow from behavior, to the brain, then to the mind, and then possibly to the soul to further cleanse the mirror of the soul and better reflect God’s light.

As mentioned in the Bahá’í Writings, “the mind forms a link between the soul and the body, and the two interact on each other” (Shoghi Effendi,

Antipodes 241). This seems to imply that not only does the soul reflecting a virtue to the body through the mind affect the human brain (body), but that the brain, through the body taking virtuous action, influences the mind, which in turn interacts with and influences the soul. This notion is further emphasized in the earlier quotations from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in which He notes that service to others (a behavior) is a magnet that draws spiritual forces toward the human. This may mean that service, through the feedback loop from action to brain to mind to soul, burnishes the mirror of the soul in such a manner that enables the soul to reflect a fuller and purer measure of God’s attributes.

On the other hand, Bahá’u’lláh states:

Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments. Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. (*Gleanings* 153)

This passage from Bahá'u'lláh indicates, in regard to infirmities, that neither the body/brain, nor the mind, influences the soul. Yet perhaps good deeds, done with pure intention in service to humanity, can influence the development of the soul. As Bahá'u'lláh comments, "We verily behold your actions. If We perceive from them the sweet smelling savor of purity and holiness, We will most certainly bless you" (*Gleanings* 307). Receiving God's bounties and reflecting them through one's soul must be one of the best blessings. Bahá'u'lláh wrote, "We exhort the loved ones of God to perform good deeds that perchance they may be graciously assisted" (*Tablets* 131). It seems that one of the greatest forms of assistance that God offers us is a fuller measure of His attributes, shining through the mirror of our soul. A human "reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 115). Perhaps perfection for a human is to mirror forth the attributes of God as purely as is possible. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "Praised be God, ye two have demonstrated the truth of your words by your deeds, and have won the confirmations of the Lord God" (*Selections* 139). It seems likely that one of the most beautiful confirmations from God is for His Grace to bestow a purity upon our soul that allows an ever greater reflection of His virtues.

However, I do not mean to imply that by our good deeds we *cause* God to grant us greater virtues. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes:

man's stillness or motion itself is conditioned upon the aid of God. Should this assistance fail to reach him, he can do neither good nor evil. But when the assistance of the all-bounteous Lord confers existence upon man, he is capable of both good and evil. And that assistance be cut off, he would become absolutely powerless. That is why the aid and assistance of God are mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures. This condition can be likened to that of a ship that moves by the power of wind or steam. Should this power be cut off, the ship would become entirely unable to move. Nevertheless, in whatever direction the rudder is turned, the power of the steam propels the ship in that direction. If the rudder is turned to the east, the ship moves eastward, and if it is directed to the west, the ship moves west. This motion does not arise from the ship itself, but from the wind or steam

Our meaning is that the choice of good and evil belongs to man, but that under all circumstances he is dependent upon the life-sustaining assistance of Divine Providence. The sovereignty of God is great indeed, and all are held captive in the grasp of His Power. The servant can do nothing by his own will alone: God is almighty and all-powerful and bestows His assistance upon all creation. (*Some Answered Questions* 288–90)

CAVEATS AND LIMITATIONS

As I noted earlier, God is essentially unknowable, and, as we were created in God's image, our psyche/soul is essentially unknowable. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have emphasized that the best we can do is know God by His attributes, by the divine qualities. By implication, the best way to know the human soul is through its virtues, the divine attributes that God has radiated "into" our souls. However, "even this knowledge of His attributes extends only so far as human power and capacity permit, and remains wholly inadequate" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 254). Following this logic, then, even our best understanding of the virtues of the human soul will remain inadequate.

This problem of understanding the virtues is longstanding. Plato wrestled with it his entire life, in the context of trying to explicate his theory of forms, against the background of his arguing there is only one God. In my attempt in this paper to reify virtues, or give them an ontological reality, I face the same problems that Plato noted concerning the forms (which are analogous to virtues in many ways):⁶

"[T]hese forms are as it were patterns fixed in the nature of things. The other things are made in their image and are likenesses, and this participation they come

to have in the forms is nothing but their being made in their image." "Well," Parmenides says, "if a thing is made in the image of the form, can that form fail to be like the image of it, in so far as the image was made in its likeness? If a thing is like, must it not be like something that is like it?" "It must," says Socrates. "Will not," Parmenides says, "that in which the like things share, so as to be alike, be just the form itself that you spoke of?" "Certainly," Socrates replies. "If so," Parmenides concludes, "nothing can be like the form, nor can the form be like anything. Otherwise a second form will always make its appearance over and above the first form, and if that second form is like anything, yet a third. And there will be no end to this emergence of fresh forms, if the form is to be like the thing that partakes of it. (*Plato* 930)

I know of no way out of this problem, but it is a cautionary tale as to the limitations of human reason in understanding the divine virtues as reflected in the human reality.

THE UNLIT CANDLE

In the first passage quoted from Bahá'u'lláh in this paper, He uses a light metaphor to depict how God casts His radiance upon the human soul. He then moves to a candle/lamp metaphor to describe the human soul:

6 I wish to thank Steven Phelps for reminding me of these Platonic issues.

Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. . . . These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. . . . Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory. (*Gleanings* 65–66)

This passage is reminiscent of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s previously mentioned use of the ship metaphor. If we regard the human being as a sailing vessel, then the wind that provides the power to set the ship in motion may be likened to the Holy Spirit or the grace of God. Therefore, while we are utterly dependent on God for our existence, we do have the power of choice in determining which direction we move, even as the rudder steers the boat.

TO CONCLUDE

The human psyche is the most beautiful creation in all the worlds of God because it was created in the image of God. It has the amazing ability to reflect and manifest the most beautiful elements of the universe—the human virtues, which are reflections of the attributes of God. The potentialities of these virtues become manifest as patterns of virtuous cognitions, patterns of spiritual emotion, patterns of neural activity, and patterns of behavior. Patterns may be thought of as designs, structures, essential causes, forms, and, above all, unities-in-diversity. A manifest virtue is a unity of diverse elements: mysterious spiritual potentialities of the soul, virtuous cognitions, spiritual/moral emotions, neural firings, and good deeds/behavior.

WORKS CITED

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*. Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1967.
- . *Promulgation of Universal Peace*. 2nd ed., Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1982.
- . *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*. 1909. Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1930.
- . *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Bahá’í Centre, 1978.
- . *Some Answered Questions*. Translated by L. Clifford Barney and the Committee at the Bahá’í World Centre, Bahá’í World Centre, 2014.
- Aquino, K., B. McFerran, and M. Laven. “Moral Identity and the Experience of Moral Elevation in Response to Acts of Uncommon Goodness.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 100, 2011, pp. 703–18.
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Edited by Joe Sachs. Focus Publishing, 2002.
- Bahá’u’lláh. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. 2nd ed. Translated by Shoghi Effendi, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1976.
- . *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988.
- . *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh*. Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1963.
- Bandura, Albert. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social-Cognitive Theory*. Prentice-Hall, 1986.
- The Compilation of Compilations*. Vol. 1, Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991.
- Cox, K. S. “Elevation Predicts Domain-Specific Volunteerism 3 Months Later.” *Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 5, 2010, pp. 333–41.
- Danesh, Hossein. *The Psychology of Spirituality: From Divided to Integrated Self*. 1994. Landegg Academy Press/Juxta Publishing, 1997.
- Diessner, Rhett. *Psyche and Eros: Bahá’í Studies in a Spiritual Psychology*. George Ronald Publishers, 2007.
- Diessner, Rhett, R. Iyer, M. M. Smith, and J. Haidt. “Who Engages with Moral Beauty?” *Journal of Moral Education*, vol. 42, 2013, pp. 139–63.
- Englander, Z. A., J. Haidt, and J. P. Morris. “Neural Basis of Moral Elevation Demonstrated through Inter-Subject Synchronization of Cortical Activity during Free-Viewing.” *Plos One*, vol. 7, 2012.
- Freeman, D., K. Aquino, and B. McFerran. “Overcoming Beneficiary Race as an Impediment to Charitable Donations: Social Dominance Orientation, the Experience of Moral Elevation, and Donation Behavior.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 35, 2009, pp. 72–84.
- Haidt, Jonathan. “The Moral Emotions.” *Handbook of Affective Sciences*, edited by R. J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, and H. H. Goldsmith, Oxford UP, 2003, pp. 852–70.
- Hatcher, John S. “The Metaphorical Nature of Physical Reality.” *Bahá’í Studies*, vol. 3, 1977, pp. 1–27.
- . *The Purpose of Physical Reality*. Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1987.

- Immodino-Yang, Mary Helen, Andrea McColl, Hanna Damasio, and Antonio Damasio. "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, vol. 106, 2009, pp. 8021–26.
- Khan, Peter. "The Needs and Opportunities Facing the Bahá'í Community." August 2002, Adelaide, Australia. Lecture.
- Lai, C. K., J. Haidt, and B. A. Nosek. "Moral Elevation Reduces Prejudice against Gay Men." *Cognition & Emotion*, vol. 28, 2014, pp. 781–94.
- Landis, S. K., M. F. Sherman, R. L. Piedmont, M. W. Kirkhart, E. M. Rapp, and D. H. Bike, D. H. "The Relation between Elevation and Self-Reported Prosocial Behavior: Incremental Validity over the Five-Factor Model of Personality." *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 4, 2009, pp. 71–84.
- Mattavelli, G., T. J. Andrews, A. U. Asghar, J. R. Towler, and A. W. Young. "Response of Face-Selective Brain Regions to Trustworthiness and Gender of Faces." *Neuropsychologia*, vol. 50, 2012, pp. 2205–11.
- Moll, Jorge, Ricardo de Oliveira-Souza, Paul J. Eslinger, Ivanei E. Bramati, Janaína M. Miranda, Pedro Angelo Andreiuolo, and Luiz Pessoa. "The Neural Correlates of Moral Sensitivity: A Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Investigation of Basic and Moral Emotions." *The Journal of Neuroscience*, vol. 22, 2002, 2730–36.
- Moravcsik, Julius. "Aitia as Generative Factor." *Dialogue*, vol. 14, 1975, pp. 622–38.
- Piper, W. T., L. R. Saslow, and S. R. Saturn. "Autonomic and Prefrontal Events during Moral Elevation." *Biological Psychology*, vol. 108, 2015, pp. 51–55.
- Plato. *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*. Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton UP, 1989.
- Pohling, R., R. Diessner, S. Stacy, D. Woodward, and A. Strobel. "Personality Traits as Moderators for Moral Elevation: The Role of Honesty-Humility, Engagement with Moral Beauty, and Need for Cognition." Manuscript in preparation, 2015.
- Savi, Julio. *The Eternal Quest for God: An Introduction to the Divine Philosophy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. George Ronald, 1989.
- Schnall, S., and J. Roper. "Elevation Puts Moral Values Into Action." *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, vol. 3, 2012, pp. 373–78.
- Schnall, S., J. Roper, and D. M. T. Fessler, D. M. T. "Elevation Leads to Altruistic Behavior." *Psychological Science*, vol. 21, 2010, pp. 315–20.
- Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Antipodes: Communications from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í Communities of Australasia*. Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1997.
- Siegel, J. T., A. L. Thomson, and M. A. Navarro. "Experimentally Distinguishing Elevation from Gratitude: Oh, the Morality." *Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 9, 2014, pp. 414–27.
- Strohming, N., R. L. Lewis, and D. E. Meyer. "Divergent Effects of Different Positive Emotions on Moral Judgment." *Cognition*, vol. 119, 2011, pp. 295–300.

- Takahashi, H., M. Kato, M. Matsuura, M. Koeda, N. Yahata, T. Suhara, and Y. Okubo. "Neural Correlates of Human Virtue Judgment." *Cerebral Cortex*, vol. 18, 2008, pp. 1886–91.
- Thomson, A. L., J. Nakamura, J. T. Siegel, and M. Csikszentmihalyi. "Elevation and Mentoring: An Experimental Assessment of Causal Relations." *Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 9, 2014, pp. 402–13.
- Thomson, A. L., and J. T. Siegel. "A Moral Act, Elevation, and Prosocial Behavior: Moderators of Morality." *Journal of Positive Psychology*, vol. 8, 2013, pp. 50–64.
- Van Cappellen, P., V. Saroglou, C. Iweins, M. Piovesana, and B. L. Fredrickson. "Self-Transcendent Positive Emotions Increase Spirituality through Basic World Assumptions." *Cognition & Emotion*, vol. 27, 2013, 1378–94.
- Van de Vyver, J., and D. Abrams. "Testing the Prosocial Effectiveness of the Prototypical Moral Emotions: Elevation Increases Benevolent Behaviors and Outrage Increases Justice Behaviors." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 58, 2015, pp. 23–33.
- Wang, T., L. Mo, C. Mo, L. H. Tan, J. S. Cant, L. Zhong, and G. Cupchik. "Is Moral Beauty Different from Facial Beauty? Evidence from an fMRI Study." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, vol. 10, 2014, pp. 814–23.
- Zahn, R., J. Moll, M. Paiva, G. Garrido, F. Kreuger, E. D. Huey, and J. Grafman. "The Neural Basis of Human Social Values: Evidence from Functional MRI." *Cerebral Cortex*, vol. 19, 2009, 276–83.



Anne Gould Hauberg, 1941

University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections

Anne Gould Hauberg and Mark Tobey: Lives Lived for Art, Cultivated by Spirit

ANNE GORDON PERRY

Abstract

Seattle art patron Anne Gould Hauberg (1917–2016) and Seattle-based painter Mark Tobey (1890–1976) shared a common interest in art and faith. Their friendship spanned decades, with Hauberg providing patronage for Tobey, who, along with creating significant works of art for her and other Northwest collectors, taught her about the Bahá'í Faith, which guided her for the rest of her life. Following the recent death of Hauberg, the author reflects on her visits with the two art lovers—visits that occurred forty years apart—and pays tribute to them as individuals and as friends who nurtured and helped to sustain each other.

Resumé

Une mécène de Seattle, Anne Gould Hauberg (1917–2016), et le peintre Mark Tobey (1890–1976), établi à Seattle, partageaient en commun un intérêt pour les arts et la foi. Ils ont entretenu une amitié qui s'est poursuivie sur plusieurs décennies, au cours desquelles Hauberg parrainait le travail de Tobey et celui-ci, alors qu'il créait d'importantes œuvres d'art pour elle et d'autres collectionneurs du Nord-Ouest américain, lui faisait connaître les

enseignements de la foi bahá'íe, qui l'ont guidée tout le reste de sa vie. À la suite du décès récent de Hauberg, l'auteure nous fait part de ses réflexions sur les visites qu'elle a rendues à ces deux amateurs d'art – visites survenues à 40 ans d'intervalle – et leur rend hommage individuellement et comme amis qui se sont accompagnés et soutenus l'un l'autre.

Resumen

La patrocinadora de arte en Seattle, Anne Gould Hauberg (1917–2016) y el pintor de Seattle, Mark Tobey (1890–1976) compartieron un interés común en el arte y la fe. Su amistad duro por décadas, con Hauberg proveyendo patrocinio para Tobey, quien, al mismo tiempo que creaba obras de arte significativas para ella y otros coleccionistas del noroeste, le enseñó acerca de la Fe Bahá'í, la cual la guio por el resto de su vida. Tras la muerte reciente de Hauberg, el autor reflexiona sobre sus visitas con los dos amantes del arte—visitas que ocurrieron con 40 años de separación—y rinde homenaje a ellos como individuos y como amigos quienes se nutrieron y se ayudaron a sostenerse mutuamente.

Among the most illustrious people I have met in my life are the American painter Mark Tobey and the well-known Seattle art patron Anne Gould Hauberg, two visionaries who shared a great connection to both spirit and art. I was privileged to step briefly into their orbits two years before each passed away, only later realizing the profound influence they had had upon each other and upon the art world.

Tobey had one of the most creative and chaotic residences I had ever visited; he was in his eighties, living in

Basel, Switzerland when I spent a day with him in 1974, after my first pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel. Contrastingly, when I visited her in Seattle in 2014, Hauberg, then ninety-six, lived in a most elegant, orderly, and refined abode. Four decades separated those visits, and yet for me there was a great sense of continuity and connection in what we shared.

Before becoming aware of Hauberg, I had long admired the work of Mark Tobey, about whom I had written papers while studying aesthetics at Mills College. Influenced by my friendship with Arthur and Joyce Dahl, collectors of his work, and visits to their Pebble Beach home, I was thrilled when they arranged my meeting with Tobey in Switzerland. Fascinated by the connection of his Faith (which we shared) and his art, for which I had profound admiration, he became for me a symbol of the interrelation of the two.

When Tobey was a child, he experienced a sense of oneness with nature and an affinity for the sacredness and mystery of life. Born in 1890 in Centerville, Wisconsin, he was especially interested in nature study, biology, and zoology. But in 1911, determined to succeed as a fashion artist, he took a train to New York. His first one-man show of charcoal portraits was held in 1917 and arranged by Marie Sterner, who introduced him to the artist Juliet Thompson, for whom he agreed to pose. During the sittings, Tobey discovered that Thompson was a follower of the Bahá'í Faith, and he read

some of the literature in her studio. Invited to Green Acre, a Bahá'í conference center in Maine, he learned more about and joined the Faith that would have a powerful impact upon his life. Along with the Faith's spiritualizing effect, the "dynamism of New York played a part in [his] desire to liberate and activate form," according to William Seitz, who says those years were for Tobey a montage of "sirens, dynamic lights, brilliant parades and returning heroes. An age of confusion and stepped up rhythms" (45).

In 1922 Tobey moved to Seattle from New York and taught at a progressive school of the arts. The following year, he began to learn the technique of Chinese calligraphy from Teng Kuei, a young Chinese artist studying at the University of Washington (Seitz 47). Eventually he became known as a Northwest painter, though he spent a good part of his life in England, China (with Teng Kuei's family), Japan, and Switzerland.

In 1926, before he had achieved international renown, Tobey was working as an art teacher at the Cornish School and became the instructor of Anne Gould (later Hauberg), who was then nine years old. She remembered how he taught his students to "capture the energy of nature," but the students' mothers "were displeased that their sons and daughters were not being taught to draw realistically," including her own mother, who withdrew her from the class (Johns 27). However, Hauberg never forgot his influence.

The daughter of architect Carl Gould and exuberant social activist Dorothy Gould, Hauberg was born in 1917, grew up in a creative household, and developed an appreciation for all the arts. In Hauberg's biography, *Anne Gould Hauberg: Fired by Beauty*, Barbara Johns describes how the Goulds frequently entertained and also held "memorable family occasions spiked with color and bursts of unconventionality" (29). Hauberg recalls, "We always lived in the two worlds of social and artistic. Anything creative was their motto!" (qtd. in Johns 29).

Johns comments on how Hauberg was

instructed by her father's ethics and creativity and her mother's ebullient sociability and ambition. Reared with the decorum and benefits of privilege although sometimes constrained in means, she married into wealth and used it to create a richly textured personal style. It was a style colored by her passion for art and architecture and warmed by her relationships with artists and designers. (Johns 153)

The family lived on Seattle's Capitol Hill and at a "summer" home on Bainbridge Island and often went on sketching trips to the mountains or the shore and then placed their sketches on the fireplace mantle for a critique session. The children were "encouraged to pursue whatever creative or intellectual interest they expressed" (Johns 29).

Hauberg's father designed a number of prominent buildings in the Northwest, including the Olympic Hotel in Seattle and the Seattle Art Museum (now the Seattle Asian Art Museum following the Seattle Art Museum's move downtown). Hauberg herself studied architecture at the University of Washington and was the only female in the program. Years before her father had designed the university's campus and founded the architecture department. She married John Hauberg, heir to a lumber fortune. The Haubergs had three children and shared many interests, including a large art collection of works that reflected their diverse tastes. They commissioned eminent architect Roland Terry to design homes for them in Seattle and on Bainbridge Island to showcase their collections.

Hauberg became recognized as a civic activist, philanthropist, and patron of the arts. In particular, she is known for her support of Mark Tobey, for discovering Dale Chihuly, and for co-founding (with her husband and Chihuly) the Pilchuck Glass School in 1971. Her obituary notes: "She became the greatest supporter—emotionally, sometimes financially, always creatively—for the scores of glass artists who came to Pilchuck through the years to experience the unique school created by Dale Chihuly ("Anne Gould Hauberg").

A 2006 interview with the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reveals that she "was responsible for the creation of Seattle's Freeway Park, the preservation

of Pioneer Square and Pike Place Market, and the Pilot School for Neurologically Impaired Children, now the University of Washington's Experimental Education Unit" (Sailor). The Pilot School was of special significance for Hauberg, as two of her children were born disabled and she had a deep commitment to contribute to education for those with mental disabilities.

Meanwhile, the Bahá'í teachings had propelled Mark toward innovation, unity, and worldmindedness. As he explains it:

At a time when experimentation expresses itself in all forms of life, search becomes the only valid expression of the spirit. . . . I am accused often of too much experimentation, but what else should I do when all other factors of man are in the same condition? I thrust forward into space as science and the rest do. The gods of the past are as dead today as they were when Christianity overcame the pagan world. The time is similar, only the arena is the whole world. (qtd. in Seitz 14)

In seeking influence from various cultures and art styles and in emphasizing the coming together of East and West, Tobey often addressed the need for social transformation and its relationship to art:

Now it seems to me that we are in a universalizing period. . . . If

we are to have world peace, we should have an understanding of all the idioms of beauty because the members of humanity who have created these idioms of beauty are going to be a part of us. And I would say that we are in a period when we are discovering and becoming acquainted with these idioms for the first time. (qtd. in Seitz 18)

Tobey was perpetually interested in the spiritual quest and in making it alive, relevant, and modern. In a letter, he writes:

To bend the knee on Sunday or to deny the Creator altogether . . . is no solution. The solution is the balancing of the forces which bring man to some state of equilibrium, and that will, and that only, will bring peace. . . . If people would only take time to investigate the writings of Bahá'u'lláh they would find the answers, for we are at the time of the break-up of the evolution of the parts with their peak in nationalism and enter the great universal day when all parts have to function in the whole. . . . Civilization is not something one builds like a cathedral or a building. It is a state of equilibrium which must be maintained if man is to move forward in the right sense of movement, balanced like a man on horseback. There is an old law that frozen ice in a river cannot break itself.

There must be an agency to do this. The ice cannot respond and become flowing water again without the sun, nor to do great changes in civilization come without a spiritual catalyst to break up the frozen forms and free the human spirit. (qtd. in Thomas 30)

Arthur Dahl describes Tobey's work as "fresh, vigorous, strangely spiritual in quality, and very exciting (9). And more than any other modern artist, Seitz claims, Tobey has given form to mystical states, to worship: "Transcendental human consciousness, it could be said, is Tobey's ultimate theme" (Seitz 40).

As a result of her long friendship with Mark Tobey, Hauberg was acquainted with the Bahá'í Faith and was increasingly drawn to it in the 1960s. Johns comments:

Tobey had embraced this syncretic religious teaching when he was a young man, at one point even dwelling on the possibility of giving himself to its mission full-time rather than to art. During the 1960s, when Anne and Tobey were often in correspondence about the Opera House mural, their letters also frequently included mention of Bahá'í principles. . . . Anne was attracted to its call for unity of all people across lines or race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality, its acceptance of the equality of men and women, and aspirations

for universal education and world peace. . . . On October 17, 1969, she was formally registered as a Bahá'í. Her commitment is a sustained one. She found guidance in its code of conduct and tried to live by its principles. (103)

The Haubergs shared a dream of having a cultural center on the Pilchuck tree farm with two museums where regional art could be exhibited and artists could work. In their vision, a performing arts space would be created in a natural amphitheater. In the mid-1960s they wrote to Tobey about this dream, specifying that the larger museum would be named the "Mark Tobey Museum of Fine Art" and would be dedicated to housing his works and archives. They envisioned the smaller museum as being dedicated to various crafts (Johns 119). The Haubergs offered Tobey a "lifetime stipend" along with a pledge to buy art directly from him and his dealers (Johns 121). They also "made plans to buy a house for Tobey in preparation for his eventual return to Seattle, and Anne made arrangements for its supplemental use by the local Bahá'í group, who embraced the idea of its one day being the home of one of their most prominent members" (Johns 121).

But these plans never came to come to fruition. Conditions in the world made it difficult for the Haubergs to carry out their full vision, though their Pilchuck Glass School flourished, and Tobey remained in Switzerland until

his death in 1976. The Haubergs did fund a film, *Mark Tobey Abroad*, which was produced by Robert Gardner of Harvard's Film Student Center (Johns 121).

In 1978, Hauberg's husband decided to divorce her. She asked for a "year's grace period in keeping with the Bahá'í teaching that called for reflection and reconsideration," to which he agreed, but he immediately remarried when the year was over (Johns 133).

Hauberg continued her support of various artistic endeavors; an Anne Gould Hauberg Gallery opened at the Pacific Arts Center; she was a founding member of the board of the Northwest School, which "gave equal emphasis to arts and academics"; and she established a fund at the Seattle Art Museum to purchase craft works for its collection (Johns 140). In addition, she gave portions of her vast collection to Harborview Hospital, The Bush School, the University of Washington, the Seattle Art Museum, and the Bainbridge Island Museum of Art ("Anne Gould Hauberg").

Tacoma, Washington, also became a focal point for Hauberg. She served as a founding member on the board of Tacoma's Museum of Glass. In 1994 she joined the board of the Tacoma Art Museum and focused her attention on developing its collection of American art from the Northwest. She gave 159 works of art to the museum—mostly glass but also jewelry and paintings, including an original work by Tobey. When she died, the museum's executive director Stephanie Stebich said,

"I would call her the patron saint for art. . . . She really understood our singular focus on Northwest art. . . . We lost a Northwest original. She had an original eye an original vision and certainly an original style. She would often say, 'If you don't support artists there won't be any.' That's what she always did. Artists never forgot that generosity of spirit" (qtd. in Sailor). The museum is planning a show of the highlights of Hauberg's collection for the fall of 2017.

In 1984, after a burglary, Hauberg sold her home and moved into a condominium in an "elegant 1920s building on Seattle's First Hill, a neighborhood where the mansions of Seattle's first families, including her grandparents, had once stood" (Johns 144). She opened the walls between living and dining rooms to create a space to hold meetings and parties, filled her home with her own art collection, and commissioned custom furniture. Johns writes that she "could look in any direction and see a colorful, layered, and textured tableau of art objects of varied media" (144). This is where I visited her in 1996, amid her beautiful art treasures. It was a distinct pleasure to be in her environment. We had tea, served by her caregiver companion, in a small room where she reclined. At ninety-six, she still had spunk, spirit, and an avid interest in hearing about how the arts were developing in the Bahá'í community. According to Johns:

The Bahá'í Faith remained a source of renewal and affirmation

for Anne. Its universalist creed encouraged her penchant for holistic thinking. She began to see that its central message affirmed patterns in her own life. Her dedication to education she found in the Bahá'í's [*sic*] instruction to "make education available to all"; her zeal for making creative connections among people of diverse interests, in Bahá'í's [*sic*] call for the joining of "arts, crafts, and sciences." She identified even the internationalism of the glass community she had helped nurture with the Bahá'í teaching "Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own selves;" in such a way she could imagine how it advanced the principle of the unity of humankind. Among the papers she kept at hand was a lyrical poem by Bahá'u'llah ["Blessed is the Spot"]. (149)

In 2001, on the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Pilchuck Glass School, a totem pole was created to honor its founders, who were acknowledged for their unique contributions—"Chihuly's originating idea, Anne's vision of what was possible, and John's sustained financial support" (Johns 152). Anne was represented at the top of the totem pole, "wearing a Northwest Coast-style hat made of blown glass on her head, and the carved patterns of a Chilkat blanket wrapped around her shoulders" (152). Chihuly was depicted at the center, with a bird-shaped shield

bearing a cast-glass image of the sun, and John Hauberg appeared at the base, "holding a cast-glass ceremonial sword" (Johns 152).

Anne Gould Hauberg was known as someone who brought people together to "generate the ideas, network, and synergy necessary to propel" various programs related to art and education. She committed herself "fearlessly and fiercely to the things in which she believed. Late in her life she exclaimed, 'What would life be without the things that give beauty—art, dance, theatre, music—the things that make life bearable?'" (Johns 153).

Hauberg's broad artistic and philanthropic influence in the wider world remains a stellar example to me. Because of her unique position, she rendered valuable service to and shed luster upon her Faith. She may not have been familiar to many members of her faith community, yet faith played a larger part in her life than many realized. Robert Wilson, another Bahá'í artist associated with the Northwest, describes how he held many informational meetings for seekers interested in the Bahá'í Faith at her apartment on First Hill. She asked him to be her traveling companion on pilgrimage, after which they spent a day in Jerusalem at the Citadel of David, where Chihuly had a large installation. They also traveled to London, visiting the gravesite of Shoghi Effendi and spending time at the Victoria and Albert Museum, studying antique glass as it related to the Pilchuck school. (Wilson).

In 2007, the University of Washington Libraries' Artist Images Award was renamed the Anne Gould Hauberg Artist Images Award in her honor. Her obituary lists many other honors including the Matrix Award from the Association of Women in Communication; the Washington State Governor's Award; the Seattle Center's Legion of Honor; the Aileen Osborn Webb Silver Award from the American Crafts Council; the Visionaries Award from New York's American Craft Museum; and the Dorothy Stimson Bullitt Award for philanthropy from the Junior League of Seattle. Pilchuck School crowned her "Queen of Everything." Northwest Designer Craftsmen produced a documentary about Anne, *Anne Gould Hauberg: Visionary*.¹ She is also included in the film *Pilchuck—A Dance With Fire* ("Anne Gould Hauberg").

According to Zabine Van Ness, Seattle's Unity Museum, which is dedicated to peace and intercultural understanding, will have an ongoing exhibit on the life of Anne Gould Hauberg that will be prominently placed near exhibits on Mark Tobey and Dale Chihuly as part of the history of the University of Washington district. A series of presentations and talks on Hauberg will be released through the museum's "Uniting Hearts Academy" speakers' bureau and shared through online university courses and local colleges (Van Ness).

Hauberg once wrote, "My hope for you and for myself is that our lives are filled with purpose and filled with content, expressed with skill and energy, and most of all that our contributions endure in the memories of those whose lives we touch" (qtd. in "Anne Gould Hauberg"). Tobey claimed: "There is no such thing as a distinctly original artist. Every artist has his patron saints whether or not he is willing to acknowledge them" (qtd. in Seitz 22). No doubt Hauberg was one of Tobey's "patron saints"—in a literal sense in terms of her patronage and in a creative sense as well. And she, no doubt, remained appreciative of Tobey's works and spiritual influence to the end of her earthly life.

Two years after I visited each of them in their respective homes forty years apart, they passed away—Tobey in 1976 and Hauberg in 2016. In my mind, I can still see Tobey greeting me in his rumpled white linen suit from the top of a long stairway on a warm summer day in Basel, Switzerland and guiding me through his disheveled collection of African masks and other artifacts amidst all kinds of art that was rolled up, piled up, hung carelessly on walls, everywhere filling his home. He was edging towards senility at the time, but he took great pride in showing me his multi-faceted and prolific collection. Bread crumbs to feed the birds sat on his window ledge; banana peels rested on the mantle. Chaos and creativity were manifest in equal abundance. By contrast, I marveled at the level of order and spatial refinement

¹ Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zkj1WXpNyko>.

in Hauberg's abode. She, too, was nearing the end of her days, but she placed a high importance on the maintenance of all that she had acquired—and sometimes had helped to create—in a life blessed by affluence *and* a quest for beauty. Art, faith, and a deep respect for artists' contributions to the world threaded each of their tapestries.

While I cannot adequately describe either Tobey or Hauberg or their impact upon my own life or art, these visits were of profound significance to me. In my imagination, we—and other souls committed to the comingling of art and spirit—are all intertwined in worlds to come.



Anne Gould Hauberg, 1960
University of Washington Libraries,
Special Collections



Mark Tobey, 1944, Geyserville
Photo by Arthur L. Dahl,
courtesy of Gregory C. Dahl

WORKS CITED

- “Anne Gould Hauberg” *The Seattle Times*. 15 May 2016. <<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/seattletimes/obituary.aspx?pid=179998577#sthash.tK-MZ2SKg.dpuf>>. Accessed 2 July 2016.
- Dahl, Arthur L. et al. *Mark Tobey: Art and Belief*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1984.
- Johns, Barbara. *Anne Gould Hauberg: Fired by Beauty*. U of Washington P, 2005.
- Sailor, Craig. “Arts patron Anne Gould Hauberg dies at 98.” *The News Tribune*. 13 April 2016. <<http://www.thenewstribune.com/entertainment/arts-culture/article71494622.html>>. Accessed 2 July 2016.
- Seitz, William C. *Mark Tobey*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1962.
- Thomas, Edward B. *Mark Tobey: A Retrospective Exhibition from Northwest Collections*. Seattle Art Museum, 1959.
- Van Ness, Zabine. Personal e-mail to the author. 3 Jul. 2016.
- Wilson, Robert. Personal e-mail to the author. 27 Feb. 2017.



Tobey's home and studio
Basel, Switzerland, 1976

Photo by Paul Slaughter, courtesy of Gregory C. Dahl

An Afternoon with Roger

J. A. MCLEAN

He fixed our *rendezvous* for the Best Western Hotel in downtown Richmond. The first images I conjured up were western saddles, long-horned steer, images of the American frontier, and a U.S. hotel chain moving into Canada. "I'll meet you just outside the restaurant," Roger said. I saw the hat before I recognized the man. The trucker's cap didn't seem to fit my preconceived image of a poet. His attire was simple: a beige windbreaker, blue slacks, a demure, quiet motion in his step. We exchanged greetings, the pleasantries, I happy to meet again this "poet laureate of the Bahá'í world,"¹ who once from his stage in Haifa had observed a parade of mahatmas traversing the wings on their way to eternity, Roger, "delighted," he said, to meet the odd soul who savoured poetry.

Our first meeting happened years earlier at a conference in Montreal. His charmed eloquence was quickly in evidence as we stood in line. Only a snippet of the conversation of his days in Israel comes back to me now: "Along came some little Arab girl looking as if she fell out of the Bible," he said. Time has long since claimed the point of the story, but the music

of his speech remains and the easy, quick wit of the man.

That day is a picture-show of memories, made bright by travel and the light of meeting a great soul. The quotidian rubbed shoulders with the sublime that afternoon. I drove him to the printer's for *Notes Postmarked the Mountain of God*. Then off to the doctor. He was already ill with the cancer that claimed his body, but his doctor wasn't there. (It was the wrong day). We did lunch instead on the terrace of a Vancouver restaurant, enjoying the brilliant sunshine, the coast mountains, and a slow-paced conversation. The waiter placed the meal before him—an enormous filet of fish fried golden brown. The silverware glinted in the sun as he cut into the thick coat of batter. I still see the careful movement of his delicate hand, almost hesitant.

Later at the bookstore, I observed the poet-teacher engage two freckled, strawberry-blond teenaged sisters, in a message proclaimed with the energy of a determined simplicity, a mark of nobility in the delivery, the generation gap erased in a sweep of courtesy. Then on to Stanley Park where we lazed on a bench along False Creek, enjoying the sun, chatting, when a Welsh tourist happened by, torso bare, moving to the rhythm of aerobics, breaking stride for a moment to ask directions. He snapped a picture with the office towers at our backs and sailboats anchored in the inlet.

Roger told me then he was weighing anchor one last time for Haifa Bay.

1 This is author Geoffrey Nash's epithet.

There, I mused, he would find a final resting-place in the Carmel mosaic of the Greats, an intricate design undreamt by men, that holy wall alive with color, the wonder of every face and hue reflected under heaven. What a company he has joined, the motley crew that became His lovers! The children of Bahá, those of us as yet unborn, shall run their hands along that wall, and pointing a finger at the divine Lote-Tree say: "This is Roger, our golden-throated bird!"

Biographical Notes

FARZAM ARBAB, Ph.D. in Theoretical Elementary Particle Physics, (UC Berkeley) is also the recipient of an honorary doctorate in science from Amherst College. In 1969, after a short period of research at Brookhaven National Laboratories, he moved to Colombia to help strengthen the Department of Physics at Universidad de Valle, as part of the University Development Program of the Rockefeller Foundation. His association with the Rockefeller Foundation, for which he served as the representative in Colombia from 1974–1984, led to his greater involvement in the field of social and economic development, where he began to focus on the relationship of science, technology and educational policy to problems of development. In 1974, together with a group of colleagues, he founded the Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de las Ciencias (FUNDAEC). Dr. Arbab served on the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Colombia as its chairman, from 1969 until his appointment to the Continental Board of Counsellors in the Americas, in 1980. He then moved to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel, when, in 1988, he was appointed to the International Teaching Centre. In 1993, he was elected to the Universal House of Justice. After serving on that body for twenty years, at the age of

seventy-one, he requested permission to relinquish his membership in 2013.

RHETT DIESSNER has served as a professor of Psychology at Lewis-Clark State College, Lewiston, Idaho, since 1988, and as an adjunct professor at the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education since 2005. He has a doctorate in human development from Harvard University, an M.S. in educational psychology and a B.S. in physiological psychology, both from the University of Oregon. His *Psyche and Eros: Bahá'í Studies in a Spiritual Psychology* was published in 2007 by George Ronald Publishers.

EMARI DIGIORGIO's first book *The Things a Body Might Become* is forthcoming from ELJ Editions. She's received a poetry fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and residencies from the Vermont Studio Center, Sundress Academy for the Arts, and Rivendell Writers' Colony. Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *APIARY*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The FEM*, *HEArt*, *Hot Metal Bridge*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Pith*, *RHINO*, and *White Stag*. She teaches at Stockton University, is a Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Poet, and hosts "World Above," a monthly reading series in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, LEONARD ERICKS left the United States in 1965 to pioneer to Puerto Rico, moving later to Venezuela, then back to study at Ringling College of Design

in Sarasota, Florida. He currently lives in Costa Rica, Central America, where he paints and teaches art.

SONA FARID-ARBAB has a Master's in history of Chinese education from Beijing Normal University and a PhD in Philosophy of Education from the University of London. She has worked extensively in China and is currently an adviser to the Moral Education Research Center at the Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences. From 2003 to 2013, she served as a Director of Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre.

CAITLIN JOHNSON CASTELAZ was raised in Kansas City and resides in New York City, where she works as a writer and editor. Her poems have appeared in *Chiron Review*, *Coal City Review*, and others. She is the founding editor of *Vahid*, an annual Bahá'í-inspired literary magazine now in its third year. Serving as an editor at NineteenMonths.com, she runs "95 Words," an online poetry project that challenges writers to compose short works inspired by their reading of sacred texts.

PAUL LAMPLE has been a member of the Universal House of Justice since March 2005. He served for nine years in the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre and for two years as a member of the International Teaching Centre.

J. A. (JACK) MCLEAN is an independent scholar, writer and poet living in Gatineau, Quebec. He has published five books in the fields of Bahá'í theology and spirituality. In 2013, his literary critical and theological work on the writings of Shoghi Effendi, *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*, won the distinguished scholarship award (book category) from the Association for Bahá'í Studies. In 2016, he published at One Voice Press, *A Love that Could not Wait*, the biography of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh, Catherine and Clifford Huxtable. He has written some 30 academic papers in the fields of Bahá'í theology, mysticism and philosophical theology. www.jack-mclean.com

ANNE GORDON PERRY has a PhD in Aesthetic Studies and teaches writing, humanities, and film appreciation at the Art Institute of Dallas. She has written and published articles and essays on numerous topics and served as primary writer and editor for *Green Acre on the Piscataqua*. With her husband, Tim Perry, she has created a feature-length documentary, *Luminous Journey: 'Abdu'l-Bahá in America, 1912*. She has recently published a book for children, *Magnificent Moles of Mede Meadow*.