

THE JOURNAL OF BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

La Revue des Études Bahá'íes / La Rivista de Estudios Bahá'ís

Volume 13, number 1/4

March-June 2003



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

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The Age of Anxiety and the Century of Light: Twentieth-Century Literature, the Poet's Mission, and the Vision of World Unity

SUHEIL BUSHRUI

Abstract

The twentieth century was a period of crisis and promise, a Century of Light and an "Age of Anxiety." Among the literary figures who recognized and confronted the spiritual and intellectual crisis of their time were W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Kahlil Gibran, among others. Through reference to their works, this article examines the mission of the poet—to bear witness, to maintain the integrity of language, to express and to live those eternal truths and values that lift and inspire the human spirit and which can serve as the basis of a culture of peace and unity.

Résumé

Le XX^e siècle aura été une période de crise mais aussi de promesse, un siècle lumineux à une époque d'anxiété. Parmi les figures littéraires qui ont su reconnaître et confronter la crise spirituelle et intellectuelle qui marquait leur époque, il y avait W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, et Kahlil Gibran, entre autres. Par des renvois à des extraits de leurs oeuvres, l'auteur examine ici la mission du poète, qui est de porter témoignage, de maintenir l'intégrité de la langue, ainsi que d'exprimer et de vivre ces vérités et valeurs éternelles qui inspirent et élèvent l'esprit humain et qui peuvent servir de fondement à une culture de paix et d'unité.

Resumen

El siglo veinte fue un período de crisis y promesa, tanto un Siglo de Luz como

una "Edad de Ansiedad." Entre las figuras literarias quienes reconocieron e hicieron frente a la crisis espiritual e intelectual de su época figuran W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, y Kahlil Gibran. Mediante referencia a sus obras, este artículo investiga la misión del poeta: atestiguar, mantener la integridad del lenguaje, y expresar y vivir aquellas verdades y valores eternos que elevan e inspiran el espíritu humano y que pueden aportarse como base de una cultura de paz y unidad.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1944, while he was staying in New York, W. H. Auden began work on what he originally conceived as a one-page poem in a particular metrical pattern. Over the next few weeks, as he fled the stifling heat of the city to write in air-conditioned cafeterias, he found that the poem was expanding far beyond the confines he had envisaged, and was developing into a major work in dramatic form, recalling his earlier works "For the Time Being" and "The Sea and the Mirror." Like them, this work was a study of the human condition; while they had examined aspects of religion and art, the new poem concentrated on the human consciousness, personified by four strangers (Malin, Rosetta, Quant, and Emble) who meet by chance in a New York bar in wartime and gradually reveal their innermost hopes, fears, and memories. Each of them typifies one of Jung's faculties of the human personality: thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensation. Not surprisingly, this complex and many-layered poem occupied Auden for a long time, and was finally completed in mid-February 1947 and published by Random House in July of that year under the title *The Age of Anxiety*.

It was to be Auden's last long poem, and critical opinions of it were divided. It achieved greater popularity in America than in Britain where Patric Dickinson condemned it as "persistently boring." In America, however, the work won the Pulitzer Prize in 1948 and inspired Leonard Bernstein's second symphony and a ballet by Jerome Robbins. But even here not all critics were favorable; Delmore Schwartz found it self-indulgent and Randall Jarrell considered it one of Auden's worst pieces.

Auden himself did not care for either the symphony or the ballet based on his poem. In time, the poem gradually achieved greater recognition, not only for Auden's poetic gifts but as a perceptive portrayal of the spirit of the 1940s.

I have described the background to this poem and the reactions which it aroused in some detail because, although its title is well known as a pithy summing-up of Auden's times and indeed of much of the twentieth century, its very length makes it less familiar to the average reader than many of Auden's shorter and more accessible works. The title is frequently quoted without reference to its context, and an understanding of that context is essential if we are to grasp exactly what Auden meant by "anxiety" and its map of associations throughout the literature and culture of that age.

In 1944, the same year in which he began *The Age of Anxiety*, Auden published a review in which he declared: "The basic human problem is man's anxiety in time; e.g. his present anxiety over himself in relation to his past and his parents (Freud), his present anxiety over himself in relation to his future and his neighbors (Marx), his present anxiety over himself in relation to eternity and God (Kierkegaard)" (qtd. in Carpenter 332). On a more personal level, he explored in the poem his own experience of loneliness, which he had come to perceive as a universal condition: "As everybody knows, we live today in one world; but not everybody realizes that to live in one world is to live in a lonely world. . . . All the old charms and cosiness have vanished forever. . . . Each must go his way alone, every step of it" (qtd. in Carpenter 332).¹

At the same time as Auden was giving voice to prevailing, and profound, responses to the twentieth century, there were other poets who regarded the age, and their relationship to it, quite differently. No less perceptive than Auden, these others cultivated a broader view of the predicament of modern man. For them, the role of the poet was not restricted to describing the ailments of the time in which they lived, but included diagnosing the causes. Some went even further, raising their vision to the most remote extent of the moral and historical horizons, and seeing in the present agonies the birth pangs of a new age, not of anxiety, but of unity and light.

Moreover, they saw poets, and poetry itself, not in the passive role of bystander, but as an active participant in the response to the evils and darkness that were convulsing every corner of the planet. But this view represented the terminus of poetic development; to begin, we must return to the point at which Auden understood his times to have reached their most acute stage of disintegration.

POETIC ASSESSMENTS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By the 1950s, the epoch we know as the twentieth century had already developed its personality and character. Everything that has followed since only confirmed those salient features that were well in place at the midway point of the century. Jacob Isaacs, in his 1951 book entitled *An Assessment of Twentieth-Century Literature*, offered the following observation:

An epoch is known by the catchwords it bandies about, whether they represent a real epitome of the time or only a fancied malady. The seventeenth century was concerned with "reason," the eighteenth century with "nature," and our concern in the twentieth century is with "the human predicament." Our preoccupations are shown by the frequency with which we talk of frustration, bewilderment, maladjustment and disintegration, the intensity with which we discuss and are aware of cruelty, violence and sadism, the all-pervading sense of anxiety, and in the background a feeling of guilt, sin, humiliation and despair. Never faith, hope or charity. (45)

This concern with "the human predicament" was responsible to a large extent for a psychological and spiritual malady which manifested itself in a condition of anxiety, neurosis, and an intense sense of insecurity. It was a collective malady affecting the whole world and an entire century. The analysis of the cultural predicament of modern man, however, had already been provided more than a hundred years before by Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and it included all those problems that have

become “the stock talking-points of cultural Jeremiahs in our own day and age”:

the evils of specialization, whether of knowledge or skill, or of one function of the psyche at the expense of the others; the dissociation of what once was united—sensibility and thought, feeling and morality, body and mind; the cleavage between different branches of learning, between the sciences and the arts, between the development of the individual and the welfare of the community, between those who are too exhausted by the struggle for existence to think for themselves and those who are too indolent to make creative use of their leisure; the reduction of man to a mere cog in the wheel of an over-developed society; the de-humanization of the citizen in a State where he is valued for the function he performs rather than the being that he is, treated as a classifiable abstraction and administered by laws which seem irrelevant to him as a person. (xii)

By the end of the Victorian age the foundations of faith had been shaken; man lost faith in himself, in nature, in immortality, in progress, and in salvation. A cynical and skeptical frame of mind led to the overthrow of absolute standards in morality, religion, and art, resulting in an attitude of flagrant permissiveness affecting all human behavior. By the dawn of the twentieth century a state of spiritual desiccation had enveloped the world. “The Neutralization of Nature,” as I. A. Richards called it, changed the magical view of the world into a scientific one. Scientific rationalism ruled the day. Astronomical researches widened the physical but narrowed the spiritual universe. A modern barrenness permeated life, a barrenness derived from Marx and Freud compounded by the lack of compassion generated by Darwinian theories. It was the dark night of the soul, everywhere there was a sense of inevitable crisis, and the great poets of the time—Yeats, Eliot, Auden—lamented in anguish, “the lost vision, the lost purpose, the lost meaning, the lost sense of fellowship and the lost sense of self.” In the midst of all this, modern man found himself “wavering between a feeling of boundless power in determining

his own fate [suggested by the great discoveries of science] and a feeling of entire helplessness [intimated to him by political, economic and social experience]" (Horney 289). All this became the neurosis of the age of anxiety in what has been called the "apocalypto-technic age, the age of explosives."

Out of this agony a decadent society was born, the characteristics of which were aptly described by Shoghi Effendi in the 1930s:

The recrudescence of religious intolerance, of racial animosity, and of patriotic arrogance; the increasing evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear, and of fraud; the spread of terrorism, of lawlessness, of drunkenness, and of crime; the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches, and pleasures; the weakening of family solidarity; the laxity in parental control; the lapse into luxurious indulgence; the irresponsible attitude towards marriage and the consequent rising tide of divorce; the degeneracy of art and music, the infection of literature, and the corruption of the press; the extension of the influence and activities of those "prophets of decadence" who advocate companionate marriage, who preach the philosophy of nudism, who call modesty an intellectual fiction, who refuse to regard the procreation of children as the sacred and primary purpose of marriage, who denounce religion as an opiate of the people, who would, if given free rein, lead back the human race to barbarism, chaos, and ultimate extinction—these appear as the outstanding characteristics of a decadent society, a society that must either be reborn or perish. (*World Order* 187–88)

The characteristics described here were universal, and defined a society that had lost touch with the spirit and had fallen victim to the tyranny of the new intellectual theories and notions of the time. Horrified by the new tyranny of the intellect and doubting whether it could be trusted as a reliable organ of truth, the greatest poet of the century defied his age and announced: "I have always considered myself a voice of what I believe to be a greater renaissance—the revolt of the soul against the intellect—

now beginning in the world" (Yeats, in Wade 211). The exuberance of these words uttered by W. B. Yeats was inspired by a profound belief in the existence of a universal "great mind" and a "great memory," in the Unity of Being and in a poetic vision of World Unity. In one of the clearest statements about the spiritual vacuum that the poets of the twentieth century experienced, Yeats confessed, "I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only—I [was] very religious." He also blamed Huxley and Tyndall, whom he detested, for robbing him of "the simple-minded religion of his childhood" (*Autobiographies* 142). No twentieth-century poet of Yeats's stature spent more time and energy than Yeats himself searching for a spiritual philosophy. In his search for truth, he explored recondite and, at times, bizarre fields of knowledge. Oriental religion and philosophy, the ancient Irish religion derived from myth and folklore, mysticism, magic, occult practices, and psychic research—from these he forged his own esoteric faith. His spiritual travels took him to India, Arabia, and Japan, and no poet of the twentieth century has embraced India's culture and spiritual heritage with such tenacity and zeal. Yeats's intention in all his researches was appropriately observed by F. A. C. Wilson as being a search for a universal faith:

He accepted the Christian revelation; but, . . . he could not accept it as exclusive; the Upanishads, Buddhism, the religion of Platonism, the Jewish Kabbala and the Neoplatonic tradition of alchemy (of all of which he had made himself a student) seemed to him also meaningful and valid; and he finished with a philosophy that would enable him to connect all these traditions, and to concur with Blake's maxim that "all religions are one." (16)

Although the last decades of the twentieth century have seen a revival of interest in, and social acceptance of, the mystical attitude, many Western critics are still embarrassed by Yeats's esoteric pursuits. Many still feel, even today, that the recognition of a supernatural world, reincarnation, and other Eastern concepts of the Universe, is too remote from a "rational," post-Christian, and "scientific" age.

T. S. Eliot, however, was the first English-speaking poet of genius to be profoundly struck by the intense hatred and hostility Western society professed against the spiritual life. He feared the implications of such hatred and saw the modern world “in all its naked horror unmasked by the impact of war”; he expressed his growing disgust with modern manners and his aversion to the abject sterility of our civilization in the most notable single poem of the century, “The Waste Land” (1922):

Here is no water but only rock
 Rock and no water and the sandy road
 The road winding above among the mountains
 Which are mountains of rock without water

(1793)

Although “The Waste Land” provides us with a new idiom for expressing the new chaos of Western Culture, the poem itself reflected the poet’s personal order imposed on chaos. His poetry, however, showed how far the cosmopolitan influences have become an integral part of the twentieth-century poetic landscape, and we begin to observe the breakdown of insularity which becomes one of the most important features of twentieth-century English literature. This development, in turn, opened the door before a whole world represented in the growth of a literature written in English by Africans and West Indians in the 1960s.

The main themes of Eliot’s poetry were the vision of a devitalized world robbed of its spiritual life. His realization of how society “is very deeply affected morally and spiritually by material conditions” (*Selected Prose* 205) urged him strongly to write on unbelief and the appalling need for a faith, a tradition, “something which will supply to reality a life quite opposed to that cynical unreliable actuality he saw in the world.” His solution was a personal one. He declared his commitment to the Anglo-Catholic faith, and this new element in his work was the spirit that lit the darkness of the world with which he found himself forced to deal.

By the end of the 1930s, the disease diagnosed by Eliot and Yeats had become chronic. W. H. Auden, arriving on the scene during Europe’s

darkest hour, woke up to the fact that the healing of “the schism in the soul” (Toynbee’s phrase) defied all the prescriptions of humanism, individualism, capitalism, liberalism, Marxism, existentialism, surrealism, humanist agnosticism, and social democracy. He bitterly criticized the English intellectuals who were horrified by Hitler, saying: “The English intellectuals who now cry to Heaven against the evil incarnated in Hitler have no Heaven to cry to, they have nothing to offer and their prospects echo in empty space” (qtd. in Carpenter 283). For him liberalism and humanism seemed to have a fatal flaw in them, as this statement of his in 1940 suggests: “The whole trend of liberal thought has been to undermine faith in the absolute. . . . It has tried to make reason the judge. . . . But since life is a changing process . . . the attempt to find a humanistic basis for keeping a promise, works logically with the conclusion, ‘I can break it whenever I feel it convenient’” (qtd. in Carpenter 283).

It was essential therefore to renew that “faith in the absolute” which according to him seemed to be the only possible ground for moral judgments. Auden was in search of “the vision that objectifies”: “Either we serve the Unconditional / Or some Hitlerian monster will supply / An iron convention to do evil by” (qtd. in Carpenter 283).

His solution to this spiritual crisis, then, was like that of Yeats and Eliot a personal one: he converted to Christianity and began to attend the Episcopalian Church. Nevertheless, he found it necessary to declare:

Whether determined by God or their neural structure, still
All men have one common creed, account for it as you will:
The Truth is one and incapable of self-contradiction;
All knowledge that conflicts with itself is Poetic Fiction.

(*Collected Poems* 231)

K AHLIL GIBRAN—P OET OF THE AGE

But the most impressive intellectual and spiritual revolution in the West during the twentieth century against the materialistic, atheistic, secular, market-oriented culture was led by a man from the East. It provided an

alternative to the cultural chauvinism and religious exclusivism which is associated with the colonial worldview and which still lingers in many political ideologies whether of the Right or of the Left.

At the center of this spiritual revolution, which took place in America, the heart of the industrialized and materialistic West, was a Lebanese immigrant by the name of Kahlil Gibran. Gibran had arrived in the New World in 1895 aged twelve, possessing no English and with only the bare minimum of elementary education. By 1923 he published his immortal *Prophet* in English, and it immediately became a bestseller. The existing critical apparatus of the Western literary establishment, however, lacked the appropriate criteria by which to judge Gibran, and although opinions of his work swung violently from the eulogistic to the condemnatory, he was never properly accepted by Western critics and academicians.

Nevertheless, what is irrefutable today is that *The Prophet* was, and remains, one of the most widely read books of the century, despite its first having appeared in an age when it was impossible to generate through intensive publicity the kind of sales which modern bestsellers enjoy. There is no doubt that *The Prophet* does indeed hold an ambiguous position in the field of English literature, or literature in English—a position which has so far debarred it from serious critical attention in the West. Gibran's particular mystical vision cannot be adequately represented as most Western critics demand in the language of philosophy, or in the framework of materialistic logic. The recognition he has received so far has come from respectable and accomplished poets such as the Irish AE (George Russell) and the American Robert Hillyer, both of whom have paid tribute to Gibran's unique genius, and have proposed for the purpose of correctly evaluating this type of literature, the adoption of a new critical methodology deriving from two separate cultural traditions, and bound by the prejudices and restrictions of neither.

Perhaps the most recent recognition of the true stature of Gibran has come from Kathleen Raine, amongst the most respected contemporary poets, and the astutest of literary critics. She wrote:

Gibran was dismissed . . . because of his immense following of ordinary men and women, for he answered to a deep need within the Western world, starved as it was of its spiritual food. Communism and Capitalism alike have believed that mankind could be fed on “bread alone” but once again the prophets of the ever-living spirit have shown that the “Word of God” is the necessary food of the soul. It is as if one mind had spoken through their several voices, none more eloquent or beautiful than the lonely voice of the Christian Lebanese Arab, Kahlil Gibran. (Foreword vii)

Ultimately, it matters little whether *The Prophet* will ever receive the accolades of university professors. The book’s greatest strength is precisely its avoidance of opaque philosophical terminology in favor of a simple, direct, and consolatory tone which has already succeeded in inspiring many, touching their lives in countless ways, and imparting to them comfort, hope, and joy. In fact, in writing *The Prophet* Gibran has provided us with one of the first manuals of conflict resolution, and his message of gentleness, sensibility, love, and forgiveness has become a universal message of spiritual healing for a world which stands in crying need for balance and reconciliation between heart and mind, between faith and reason, between spiritual values and the dictates and demands of modern technology and progress.

Of all his contemporaries, it is perhaps William Butler Yeats who provides the closest parallel to Gibran. Both were profoundly preoccupied with the question of unity and its achievement in a fragmented world. In Ireland, as in Lebanon, partition of many kinds threatened this vision, as it still does: religious, cultural, social, and geographical. Just as Gibran, who attained equal fluency in his Arabic and English writings, drew on Christian, Sufi, and Bahá’í traditions and imagery, Yeats too attempted to blend the Anglo-Irish literary tradition, the riches of Gaelic myth and poetry, and the purely English tradition, into a new, overarching combination of the best in all three. Philosophically, Yeats and Gibran shared a passion for unity at every level: not the bland, faceless “globalization” of the late twentieth century, a mere reduction of diverse cultures into a

featureless, indiscriminate blend, but a true reconciliation of individual traditions and recognition of the validity of each, enabling them to live in dynamic harmony together to the mutual benefit of all. At a personal level, Yeats's experiments with the Japanese Noh theatre, and Gibran's immersion in the English language, brought both of them a new creative vigor and rejuvenation. Both, in their awareness of the violence and destruction threatening a world running headlong into chaos, assumed the role of prophets, warning mankind of the terrible consequences of pursuing a path of disunity and anarchy.

Indeed, Gibran seems to demonstrate in his own person, more than any other poet or novelist of the twentieth century, the process, delicate and costly as it is, of forging unity between widely disparate cultures and traditions, languages, and literatures. At first sight it might appear irrational and implausible that one man should combine and reconcile in his work influences as diverse as those of Nietzsche, Christianity, and Islam; the Romantic poets such as Blake and Wordsworth and their contemporaries; and the artistic environments of Paris and New York. Yet he triumphantly achieved this, and in so doing stands as a symbol of the unifying vision, a vision capable of embracing the world in both its hemispheres; a vision capable of securing and respecting the rights of all in every walk of life; a vision capable of releasing the peoples of the world to lead a new life free from acrimony and conflict.

From the Arabic works of Ibn al-Arabi, Ibn al-Farid, and al-Ghazzali, Gibran derived the concept of the Unity of Being and evolved a deeper vision of the nature of the universe. The key passage, or basic credo, that may serve to symbolize the vision of Gibran is that passage from *Iram: The City of Lofty Pillars*, where he emphasizes the interdependence of the whole of creation:

All things [that] exist in this creation exist within you,
and all things in you exist in creation;
there is no border between you and the closest
things, and there is no distance between you
and the farthest things, and all things, from
the lowest to the loftiest, from the smallest

to the greatest, are within you as equal things.
In one atom are found all the elements of the
earth; in one motion of the mind are found the
motions of all the laws of existence; in one
drop of water are found the secrets of all the
endless oceans. . . .

(*Treasury* 140)

Such a vision requires a radical rethinking of the present orientation of humanity that is nothing short of revolutionary.

GIBRAN AND THE FORCES OF UNITY

Gibran's entire output represented an attempt to make peace between conflicting interests, factions, and belief systems, and consequently the light of unity seems to illumine every corner of his thought. It is worth considering the source of his inspiration, particularly given how distant the prospect of peace must have seemed to Gibran and his contemporaries.

Indeed, as we enter the twenty-first century, it is sadly obvious that the work of peacemaking is still far from complete. Yet like all great poets, Gibran has striven to show how opposites can be reconciled: ease and hardship, as are joy and sorrow, success and failure, body and soul, life and death. In the poet himself East and West, pagan and Christian, ancient and modern meet in harmony to affirm the same faith in the "Unity of Being" as that expressed in his masterpiece *The Prophet*: here, in striking at the root of the "old corrupt tree of civilization," he penetrates to the heart of the psychological malady resulting in the gross violations of human rights in both the East and the West, and makes accessible a message of hope and inspiration, neither glib nor facile, but imbued with a deep sense of the unity of creation and the presence of an all-embracing love. With the growing recognition he has earned from China to New Zealand, from the Philippines to Russia, his acceptance, as "Gibran of America" as well as "Gibran of Lebanon," as a proponent of global consciousness

whose voice sounds with ever-growing resonance, he would surely rejoice at his ever-increasing fame, though not in any spirit of vaingloriousness but rather in delight at the opportunity thus afforded for the bonds of mutual interest, compassion, and understanding between nations to be strengthened so that—to use his symbolism of the trees—one branch may stoop a little lower and another stretch a little higher in order that they may communicate with each other in the spirit of truth and peace.

The “Century of Light” was at hand, and during the ensuing decades the piecemeal consciousness of the Western mind has correspondingly begun to wither. A vision of the universe as a dynamically interconnected web is emerging, in which each section is seen as part of the whole and the whole as in each part. Physicists now perceive that the “quintessential experience, the experience of multiple oneness and ‘supreme identity,’ might very well be a genuine and legitimate experience of this implicate and universal ground” (Wilber 2).

Of all the formative encounters in Gibran’s development, none exercised so profound an influence on him as his meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1912. For Gibran, the inspiration and template for his unique portrait of Jesus was provided by the indelible impression left upon him by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which moved Gibran to exclaim: “For the first time I saw form noble enough to be a receptacle for the Holy Spirit” (qtd. in Gail 288). But Bahá’í teachings in general influenced his thought and it is easy to detect in his writings echoes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s and Bahá’u’lláh’s sacred words.

Bahá’u’lláh promises humanity that in generations to come the regenerating spirit that has been infused into the world will bring forth a new “generation of men.” In looking forward into the future, Gibran strikingly replicates this vision of a new citizen of the world, and in one of his Arabic works which was translated into English in the late 1950s, Gibran writes:

But the children of tomorrow are the ones called by life, and they follow it with steady steps and heads high, they are the dawn of new frontiers, no smoke will veil their eyes and no jingle of chains will drown out their voices. They are few in number, but the difference is

as between a grain of wheat and a stack of hay. No one knows them but they know each other. They are like the summits, which can see and hear each other—not like caves, which cannot hear or see. They are the seed dropped by the hand of God in the field, breaking through its pod and waving its sapling leaves before the face of the sun. It shall grow into a mighty tree, its root in the heart of the earth and its branches high in the sky. (*Treasured Writings* 778)

He perhaps more than anyone else understood what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá meant by “the Century of Light”: it was a light that illumined the heart with the light of self-transformation, of a new birth and of a new beginning. Gibran wrote in *Spirits Rebellious*: “The true light is that which emanates from within man, and reveals the secrets of the heart to the soul, making it happy and contented with life” (*Treasured Writings* 856).

Since the death of T. S. Eliot in 1965, no poet of universally recognized stature has emerged on the literary scene. The structure of “The Waste Land” was as much a symbol of creativity’s decay as its content. By the latter years of the century the standards had completely changed, and under the guise of “postmodernity” everything was reduced to political, racial, and religious factionalism. The “prevailing creed” was aptly described by Norman Podhoretz in the *Washington Post* of 10 January 1986:

A professor of English at a major university argued against teaching the poetry of John Milton on precisely this ground of irrelevance. Yet far from being discredited in the eyes of his colleagues, he was promptly elected to the presidency of the main academic literary association.

What now certified a book as relevant was not its literary value but its usefulness to a particular political purpose: black nationalism or feminism or the revolution against Western civilization in general. As for literary merit, “good writing,” declared a radical feminist, echoing a remark Lenin had made about music, was “counterrevolutionary.” (A22)

Might we not ask then with Friedrich Hölderlin, “what is the use of poets in a destitute time?” (111).

THE ROLE OF POETRY IN THE AGE OF ANXIETY

As we enter the twenty-first century, and the proliferation of new technology ensures that the world around us continues to contract, the paradox which Auden articulates has become even more poignant: increasingly sophisticated means of communication are of little worth if they convey only the banalities of faceless, and often nameless, strangers in Internet chat rooms, using anonymity as a cloak for their desperate vulnerability and sense of unease. We live in a world where the media also undermine language by ceaselessly assaulting us with images; while these images are assumed to be universally comprehensible by transcending language barriers, they actually diminish the possibility of true communication by confining it to a nonverbal exchange.

In May 1987 I was privileged to meet Samuel Beckett, arguably the greatest dramatist of the twentieth century, certainly one who exercised the profoundest influence over its development and orientation. I believe I was the last person to interview him before his passing; he shared with me then his great concern about the waning power of language. As he remarked, “The word is energy; it keeps me going. When it stops, everything stops. Today’s world is all images, no words.”

The pervasive use of pictures in place of words is the more regrettable because we are in danger of losing the informing power of language. The role of language, and especially poetry, can hardly be overrated as a unifying force. The evolution of a nation’s language, and with it its legacy of poetry, prose, and drama, is a vital element in the growth of its identity and the forging of a sense of unity among its speakers; one thinks of the setting down of the *Kalevala* by Elias Lönnröt in nineteenth-century Finland; or the contemporaneous creation of a Czech literary language in the national revival of that country; or the enthusiastic rediscovery of Celtic myth by Yeats and his colleagues in the Irish Literary Renaissance. By the same token, the word can also exercise a unifying force on the

world scene, and through translations and cultural contacts the spirit of artists can transcend national boundaries and with them the sense of isolation that Auden deplures.

But what is to be done when language, this potential source of healing and unity, has been perverted? Auden's contemporary, George Orwell, who years ago identified the phenomenon of "double-think," warns, in his essay "Politics and the English Language," of the moral danger which ensues when a language has been hijacked for suspect political purposes. Orwell provides several flagrant examples ("the Fascist octopus has sung its swan song, the jackboot is thrown into the melting pot" [134]) of the ludicrous results of slipshod thinking. Writing in 1946, he states, "When the general atmosphere is bad, language must suffer. I should expect to find . . . that the German, Russian and Italian languages have all deteriorated in the last ten or fifteen years, as a result of dictatorship" (137).

Orwell was right about the process by which language is debased; he was right about German, Russian, and Italian, as he would have been about other languages, including Arabic. The decline of the Arabic language in the last half-century resulted largely from its being made subservient to particular ends and ideologies.

Orwell's misgivings were indeed shared by writers in the three languages he mentions. In 1979 Günter Grass published *Das Treffen in Telgte* (The Meeting in Telgte), the story of an imaginary meeting of poets in a fragmented and exhausted Germany towards the end of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), striving to bring a reconciling voice to the language and literature which are all that remains to unite their ravaged and splintered country. Grass dedicated this novel to Hans Werner Richter, founder of Gruppe 47, a free association of writers, publishers, and critics who met annually for twenty years until 1967 to discuss and read new writing. Gruppe 47 members maintained a critical attitude both to Western capitalism and to Eastern socialism and attempted to purify the German language of the jargon of both. Grass drew subtle parallels between the state of Germany and the German language in 1647 and 1947, and between the responsibilities of writers in both eras.

The 1647/1947 parallel confirms that the problems and conflicts of

Auden's "age of anxiety" were not confined to his time alone. As his choice of examples (Freud, Marx, and Kierkegaard) suggests, they had exercised the minds of poets and thinkers long before he coined the phrase. Naming and locating such problems, however, poses another question: how should a poet react to them?

HISTORICAL SOURCES FOR CONTEMPORARY ALIENATION

Perhaps it should be pointed out that the twentieth century represents an apocalyptic consummation of forces and trends that in previous centuries had only been incubating. We have already glanced back to the seventeenth century, that calamitous time when the whole of Europe was convulsed for thirty years by a war which, in the name of religion, left it devastated and scarred for decades. Although England was not directly involved in that conflict, the same century saw the upheavals of the English Civil War, of Cromwell's Commonwealth, of the trial and execution of Charles I, and of threats to apparently unshakeable values and authority. It was in the early years of that century (1611, to be exact) that John Donne pithily expressed the disquieting spirit of change which he sensed in the air:

And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,
 The Element of fire is quite put out;
 The Sunne is lost, and th' earth, and no mans wit
 Can well direct him, where to look for it.

 'Tis all in pieces, all cohaerence gone; . . .

(205–13)

John Dryden, writing at the end of that same century, was no less pessimistic about the course of its events:

All, all, of a piece throughout;
 Thy Chase had a Beast in View;
 Thy Wars brought nothing about;

Thy Lovers were all untrue.
'Tis well an Old Age is out,
And time to begin a New.

(485)

Yet subsequent ages, far from instituting the improvements which Dryden desired, found themselves in yet a worse predicament. Conflicting creeds, under the guise of religion, had been the pretext for the wars of the seventeenth century between Catholic and Protestant, Lutheran and Calvinist. The nineteenth century now saw a broadening crisis which threatened the very nature of religious belief, and of faith itself. It was this perplexity and sense of desolation which Matthew Arnold, writing in 1851, evoked in his poem "Dover Beach":

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

(In Allott and Super 136)

In that final image Arnold might have been describing the fog-bound battle of Lützen where Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden lost his life in 1632, or one of those sanguinary engagements in the Crimea where, just three years after the publication of this poem, so many British soldiers were to lose their lives in another war fought ostensibly about a religious question. Little had changed, except that the weapons had become more sophisticated and the religious pretext an empty pretext, with a dwindling stock of genuine faith to validate it.

Yet the Crimean War (1854–1856), for all the fraudulent use of concern

about the guardianship of the Holy Places of Jerusalem which was the alleged reason for the conflict, already betrayed a symptom of another disease which was to rage in the following century. Russia's ambitions to expand into the territory of the declining Ottoman Empire, viewed with such alarm by western European powers, brought her into increasing conflict with members of other faiths, not only in areas ruled by the Ottoman Turks but in places farther east whose names have a sadly topical ring about them nowadays: Azerbaijan, Chechnya, and Uzbekistan. If, in the world of Western Christendom, the irrational now threatens to destroy faith, then, in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim worlds, true faith has been ousted by the extremism of religious nationalism—religion employed for political or nationalistic goals. Where no real enemies exist, fanatics will invent them, proclaiming the danger of Western “cultural invasion.” We must remember, however, that religious nationalism is not a new phenomenon. In his 1938 book, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Shoghi Effendi cites the following passage from an official report prepared by a Christian missionary organization:

Such a conscious, avowed, organized attack against religion in general and Christianity in particular is something new in history. Equally deliberate in some lands in its determined hostility to Christianity is another form of social and political faith—nationalism. But the nationalistic attack on Christianity, unlike Communism, is often bound up with some form of national religion—with Islam in Persia and Egypt, with Buddhism in Ceylon, while the struggle for communal rights in India is allied with a revival both of Hinduism and Islam. (182)

It is in such a climate of fragmentation and distrust that poets must carry out their task of revealing and affirming truths which transcend the contrived philosophies of both Western intellectuals and Eastern religious nationalists. Secular ideologues in the former Communist countries, for example, attempted to stem the search for spiritual renewal. At the forefront of this search were poets, many of whom openly professed religious beliefs but were regarded as dangerous subversives to be silenced at

all costs because they dared to question the established order. To illustrate how one such poet, Antonín Bartušek, saw the mission of poets in troubled times, I should like to cite his poem “The Return of the Poets”:

Like silkworms
we meet our poets
for years cocooned
in misfortune.

For years shone the sun of darkness
blood fell instead of rain,
the mire of mud came
up to our mouths.

Then
in the green mulberries of hope
the quick eye could have discerned
ever so slight a movement in the branches.
In the leafy mulberry groves
in the cocoons of love
they spun their words into silken threads
of silent speech.

So we should not be naked
when once more we emerge
into the light
of reality.

(103)

In these words Bartušek, a Czech poet who was silent during and after the Stalinist era, expresses the conviction that poets are, as Wentworth Dillon proclaimed in 1684, “the guardians of the state” (1) and of the language of truth, preserving it incorrupt until such time as it can be freely spoken. A Czech critic suggested that Bartušek’s long silence came about

because “the climate of the fifties or the early sixties . . . operated too much with given facts and certainties, whereas his poetic type saw meaning only in searching, in . . . exposure to uncertainties and confusion” (Behnart, qtd. in Martin 14). He is thus a poet of the “age of anxiety,” his first works having been published in the 1940s when Auden was writing the poem of that name.

The role of the artist as the conscience of the nation was dramatically demonstrated during the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In the emerging democracies, political leadership was often provided by artists who had remained untainted during the long, brutal reign of Communism. In 1989, the playwright Václav Havel, for example, became the first post-Communist president of Czechoslovakia; similarly, in 1990, the professor of musicology and violinist Vytautas Landsbergis became the democratically elected leader of Lithuania, a country then on the threshold of achieving independence from the Soviet Union.

THE POET AS WITNESS

If a poet is to accomplish his mission of maintaining the integrity of language and of expressing truths that may serve as the basis of a culture of peace and unity, he cannot do so by means of half-truths, compromises, or subservience, no matter what the threats to his liberty or even his life. The twentieth century has not been lacking in such threats, and no poet has described them more forcefully than Yeats in “The Second Coming”:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

(*Collected Works* 189)

It is against this background that poets must form within themselves a clear conception of their beliefs and convictions, and in their work give voice to them, in order to bring a new moral order and civilization into being and protect its values throughout the time of acute turbulence which heralds the coming of a new age. Inevitably, sacrifices are demanded; one thinks of poets such as Hölderlin, whose sanity snapped at the age of thirty-six under the strain of carrying forward the highest ideals of ancient Greek civilization through the turmoil of Napoleon's Europe; of Lorca, murdered during the Spanish Civil War; of Osip Mandelstam and Vladimir Mayakovsky, who refused to promote the Soviet doctrine of historical necessity, and paid for their convictions with imprisonment and death; of Sergei Esenin and Marina Tsvetaeva, who ended their lives after "the high Roman fashion" rather than submit to the humiliation of compromise. Yet these sacrifices were not without effect; the word *martyr*, after all, is nothing other than the Greek for "witness"; likewise the Arabic word *shahid* conveys exactly the same dual sense, clearly indicating that the highest form of "bearing witness" to a truth is to lay down one's life for it. Such a witness will indeed resound down the centuries. It is a witness devoid of any taint of insincerity or hypocrisy. Here again, Antonín Bartušek speaks for their company:

It's no use, said a little girl without even knowing
what it was all about, and yet she was almost right,
until she met the tree which, petal by petal,
was losing its blossom
to prepare for the obligatory delivery of fruit.
Perhaps one day we shall not regret
having bloomed a little too briefly
in order to deliver our fruit,
in order to bear witness. . . .

(“Witness” 69)

The poet must also perform his or her duty of bearing witness, whatever form this may take, with courage and spirit, not diffidence and reluctance. Poets must, if possible, not only create characters and vehicles

capable of expressing their values, but themselves live out those values with dignity and grace:

Yet they, should the last scene be there,
 The great stage curtain about to drop,
 If worthy their prominent part in the play,
 Do not break up their lines to weep.
 They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
 Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.

(Yeats, *Selected Poems* 183)

Such was the response to the threat of “aeroplane and Zeppelin” that Yeats urged in “Lapis Lazuli,” and again in *The King's Threshold*, a play that vigorously defends the poet's role:

And I would have all know that when all falls
 In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
 Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
 The victim's joy among the holy flame,
 God's laughter at the shattering of the world.

(*Plays* 77)

Resistance to the forces of brutishness and ugliness comes in many forms. Thus Yeats insisted that the palette, the fiddle-bow, and the poet's pen offered the means, through the imagination, of bridging the gap between two worlds, the worlds of insensate matter and of the quickened spirit. Auden's contemporary, Stephen Spender, in “An Elementary School Classroom,” suggests how, for stunted and repressed slum children in the urban wilderness, the pictures on their classroom walls of scenes from Shakespeare offered a means of escape, of transcending the narrowness and squalor of their present reality: “O that beauty has words and works which break / Through coloured walls and towers” (258–59). The poet's supreme task is to bring forth these words and works to lift and liberate the human spirit, to lend it wings with which to escape the brutishness of

the present, and soar into liberating worlds of wonder and delight, of exquisite sensibility and spiritual refinement.

In his quest to uplift the human spirit, the poet cannot, however, afford to isolate himself from humanity and its concerns, alien and abhorrent as they may sometimes appear. Here Hölderlin writes in “Der Einzige” (The Unique One): “Die Dichter müssen auch / Die geistigen weltlich sein” (Poets, even the spiritual, must also be of this world) (188)—an assertion which encapsulates the sacred responsibility as a bridge between two worlds. In it he answers the question which he asks in “Brot und Wein,” his elegy on an age of spiritual barrenness contrasted with the intellectual and cultural richness of the Hellenic world: “[W]ozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?” ([W]hat is the use of poets in a destitute time?) (111) and finds the confidence to assert, in “Andenken” (Remembrance): “Was bleibt aber, stiften die Dichter” (But what endures, the poets provide) (211). Hölderlin’s words echo those of the ninth-century Arab poet Abu Tamam: “But for the noble traits, by poets hailed / The path of glory would to man be veiled.” It is no accident that Hölderlin, neglected and dismissed as a madman in his own time, finally found the acclaim he deserved in the twentieth century, the century in which the collapse of the old order became consistently apparent, and in which he and other previously unrecognized and preternatural talents, like that of William Blake, became more fully recognized.

THE ROLE OF THE POET IN THE CENTURY OF LIGHT

In his adoption of ancient Greek meters, and his attempts to reconcile them with the very different rhythms of the German language, Hölderlin illustrates the paradox of the poet’s situation: limited only by the confines of his own imagination, he nevertheless needs the discipline of poetic structure to convey his vision effectively. Yeats, in his speech at the opening of the Tailteann Games in 1924, expressed something of the same perception, though in a wider application: “The world can never be the same. The stream has turned backwards, and generations to come will have for their task, not the widening of liberty, but recovery from its errors—the

building up of authority, the restoration of discipline, the discovery of a life sufficiently heroic to live without the opium dream" (qtd. in Freyer 95).

It is only when poets, and those whom they inspire, attain the courage to live such a life without comforting illusion, to perceive reality as it is, to become, in Hölderlin's words, both *weltlich* and *geistlich*, that reconciliation can follow, not only between the conflicting elements of the human personality (one thinks again of Auden's drama), but between the confused currents of mankind's life on earth. But, just as "politics is too important to be left to politicians," the life of the imagination is too important to be left as the exclusive province of artists, especially since it is so-called artists nowadays who are at the forefront of the degradation and despiritualization of the surrounding cultural climate. As Kathleen Raine has demonstrated in "Poetry and Peace," unlike the finite resources of the material world, those of the realm of the imagination are boundless; hence there is no need to quarrel over them. Nor is the imagination limited by the past: "every time and place must be incorporated into that world" as new forms emerge and the power of the imaginative faculty enables those who live by it to achieve a peace between nations unattainable by political maneuvers.

Kathleen Raine movingly evokes the unity experienced by an audience listening to a Schubert symphony, or watching a play by Shakespeare, whereby their unique and individual perceptions merge into a greater whole capable potentially of including the whole world. In her vision of a unity based on rejection of materialism and a sharing of the treasures of the imagination, she comes close to another vision of world peace and unity, that of Bahá'u'lláh, which "transcending material frontiers, reached out to humanity as a whole, without petty differences of nationality, race, limits or beliefs."²

Bahá'u'lláh identified mankind's central spiritual imperative as that of laying the foundations of a global society capable of reflecting, embodying and promoting the oneness of the human spirit. "So powerful is the light of unity," He insists, "that it can illuminate the whole earth" (*Epistle* 14).

His foreshadowings of change were remarkably fulfilled during the course of the twentieth century, as assumptions about the environment, women's rights, and race relations all changed radically, along with

perceptions of the universe and of humanity's place within it, and as the establishment of bodies such as the United Nations and the World Bank marked undoubted progress, however tentative, in the direction of world unity. "A new life," He affirmed, "is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive" (*Gleanings* 196).

As the darkness of error and suffering recedes, a new day is to dawn. "Peerless is this Day, for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and as a light unto the darkness of the times" (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *Advent* 79). Yet His is no naive vision, but the outcome of a worldview which causes Bahá'u'lláh to appeal to His hearers, "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements" (*Gleanings* 213). Only thus, with the grasping of the potential of the new era in full awareness of the needs to be met and dangers to be avoided, can progress towards justice and unity be made.

What, then, is the role of the poet in this Century of Light? "Soon, Bahá'u'lláh promises, "will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead" (*Gleanings* 7). How can poets help this process forward? Can poetry, indeed, influence the course of world affairs?

Seamus Heaney has demonstrated that it can, pointing to the immense power of poetry to "make something positive happen" (10), from Sylvia Plath's influence on the course of the women's rights movement and Hugh MacDiarmid's on the evolution of Scottish national consciousness, to the challenge to totalitarianism represented by Osip Mandelstam or the Eastern European poets who, by refusing to truckle to Communism, contributed to its downfall in 1989. This positive force effectively counters Theodor Adorno's claim that to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric. To bear witness through poetry to the victims of barbarism, and thus enable the human spirit to survive and soar, is the surest form of opposition to inhumanity.

CONCLUSION

I should like to close, as I began, with Auden. Yeats, whom he so greatly admired, had already seen the "blood-dimmed tide" loosed in one world

war, but was spared the experience of a second by his death in the fateful year of 1939. Auden's response to his passing was to write an elegy whose final section, as Heaney says, throws down the gauntlet to the twentieth century. In a conscious echo of Yeats's appeal to his fellow Irish poets in "Under Ben Bulbin," Auden describes the state of contemporary Europe, and the poet's role in clearing its chaos and healing its rifts and bringing about the end to the Century of Light:

In the nightmare of the dark
All the dogs of Europe bark,
And the living nations wait,
Each sequestered in its hate;

Intellectual disgrace
Stares from every human face,
And the seas of pity lie
Locked and frozen in each eye.
Follow, poet, follow right,
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse
Make a vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress;

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.

(*"In Memory"* 239)

The poet, then, can never dissemble, or use his art to deceive his hearers

with pleasing artifice; he cannot pretend that barbarism did not happen, or play down its consequences. Yet in a shared acknowledgment, not only of these horrors but of their ultimate impotence to destroy the human spirit and the power of imagination, poets may find the basis for their journey towards peace and unity for the world, and the inspiration to lead those who wish to join them.

Turning eastwards again, I would like to recall the words of Yehuda Amichai, an Israeli poet who saw active service in two wars, witnessed the destruction of six million of his fellow Jews, and could still write “An Appendix to the Vision of Peace”:

Don't stop after beating the swords
into ploughshares, don't stop! Go on beating
and make musical instruments out of them.

Whoever wants to make war again
will have to turn them into ploughshares first.

(84)

The twentieth century was a century of light and great promise but it was also a century of great suffering and pain. At the heart of it all was the fact that humanity was experiencing the most severe spiritual crisis in its history, the crisis of its incipient, emergent globalization, the unprecedented tumult of its collective coming of age. “Let your vision be world embracing,” is Bahá'u'lláh's dictum, and events have so unfolded as to reveal this as the paramount imperative of the age, artistic no less than poetical. Robert Bridges, who belongs both to the Victorian age and to the early decades of the twentieth century, grasped perhaps more deeply than any one else the reality of this crisis, and realized its implications. Fired by his vision, he compiled in 1915, during the horrors of the First World War, an anthology of philosophic writing entitled *The Spirit of Man*. In the preface to the book, Bridges wrote: “Spirituality is the basis and foundation of human life . . . rather than the apex or the final attainment of it. It must underlie everything . . . man is a spiritual being, and the proper

work of his mind is to interpret the world according to his higher nature, and to conquer the material aspects of the world so as to bring them into subjection to the spirit" (i–ii).

NOTES

Presented at the 24th Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, on 3 September 2000.

1. For circumstances of composition, reviews, etc., see Carpenter.
2. Remarks by Deputy Luis Gushiken and Deputy Rita Camata. "Sessão Solene da Câmara Federal em Homenagem ao Centário da Ascensão de Bahá'u'lláh," Brasília, 28 May 1992.

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Protecting the Human Family: Humanitarian Intervention, International Law, and Bahá'í Principles

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Abstract

This article explores the moral and legal problems raised by the recent experiments of the world community with using some kind of military force to come to the rescue of human rights victims—or “humanitarian intervention.” It then examines a variety of ethical principles in the Bahá'í Writings that bear on these problems. Finally, it investigates how these principles might assist us to discover and implement practical measures to reform existing international law to better protect all members of the human family.

Résumé

L'auteur explore les problèmes éthiques et juridiques découlant des récentes tentatives de la communauté mondiale pour venir en aide aux victimes de violations des droits de l'homme en ayant recours à la force militaire, dans le cadre d'interventions dites « humanitaires ». Il se penche sur divers principes éthiques énoncés dans les écrits bahá'ís portant sur ces questions. Enfin, il examine comment ces principes peuvent nous aider à trouver des solutions pragmatiques pour réformer la législation internationale actuelle afin de mieux protéger les droits de tous les membres de la grande famille humaine.

Resumen

Este artículo sondea los problemas morales y legales surgidos a raíz de los experimentos recientes de la comunidad mundial en el uso de algunas formas de fuerza militar para llegar al rescate de víctimas de violaciones de los derechos humanos,

es decir, “intervención humanitaria.” Pasa a investigar una variedad de principios éticos en los Escritos Bahá'ís que recaen sobre estos problemas. Por último, explora la forma en que estos principios podrían llevarnos a descubrir e implementar medidas prácticas para reformar el derecho internacional, ayudándonos así a mejor proteger todos los miembros de la familia humana.

As so eloquently conveyed by the theme of the 2002 Association for Bahá'í Studies Annual Conference, long-term solutions to the many vexing problems facing the world, including the problem of preventing and ending human rights abuses, must ultimately be inspired by spiritual principles. In its visionary statement, *The Promise of World Peace*, issued in 1985, the Universal House of Justice provided the following guidance:

There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. . . . The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them. (8–9)

In this paper, I will explore the moral and legal problems raised by the recent experiments of the world community with using some kind of military force to come to the rescue of human rights victims—what I will refer to as “humanitarian intervention.” Next I will briefly review a variety of ethical principles in the Bahá'í Writings that bear on these problems. Finally I will offer my own perspective on how these principles might help us discover and implement practical measures to reform existing international law so that it can help us better protect all members of the human family.

THE MORAL PROBLEM OF PROTECTING THE HUMAN FAMILY

The last century, and even the last decade, has witnessed some of the worst atrocities against innocent populations that the world has ever known. In its 2000 Riqvan Message, the Universal House of Justice observed, in surveying the state of the world during the Four-Year Plan (1996–2000), that “wars fomented by religious, political, racial or tribal conflict raged in some 40 places; sudden, total breakdown of civil order paralyzed a number of countries; terrorism as a political weapon became epidemic [and] a surge of international criminal networks raised alarm” (par. 21). Genocide, war crimes, and torture have become rampant in many parts of the globe. Also evident are often less visible, but no less insidious and destructive, human rights violations, such as the perpetuation of racism, which the Universal House of Justice has called “one of the most baneful and persistent evils”; the “inordinate disparity between rich and poor”; and the continued subjugation of women in many cultures (*Promise* 7–8). Furthermore, violations of the right to religious freedom are on the rise. In this connection, the statement of the Universal House of Justice to the world’s religious leaders issued in April 2002 refers to “the horrors being visited upon hapless populations today by outbursts of fanaticism that shame the name of religion” (3).

PROGRESS MADE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Despite the ubiquity of human rights violations and atrocities today, the twentieth century saw groundbreaking efforts on the part of the international community to institutionalize safeguards of basic human rights in international law. More importantly, towards the end of the century, it witnessed attempts, however sporadic, by the international community to enforce these standards through military action in cases of shocking violations that attracted the attention of the great powers.

The Rise of International Human Rights Law

With respect to standards, the United Nations Charter, adopted in 1945, affirmed for the first time in a multilateral treaty that all human beings have equal rights and called upon UN members to promote and safeguard those rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, attempted to specify the moral rights which all human beings, as members of one “human family,” are entitled to enjoy. Eventually many of the rights mentioned in the Declaration were codified in human rights treaties, which impose binding legal obligations on those states ratifying them. These treaties and conventions multiplied in the last five decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, there has been a veritable “explosion” in human rights lawmaking at the international level—a truly stupendous achievement in a remarkably short period of time.

The Universal House of Justice itself has commented favorably on this “human rights revolution.” In *The Promise of World Peace* it referred to these human rights treaties and declarations and called for their widespread expansion and, more importantly, “courageous” enforcement (6–7). Furthermore, the impressive document *Century of Light*, written under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice, affirms that “together with world peace, the need for the international community to take effective steps to realize the ideals in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its related covenants is an urgent challenge facing humanity at the present moment in its history” (121).

Collective Security Action in Defense of Human Rights

Another important development during the twentieth century was the use of UN-authorized collective military action to defend human rights victims. This development accelerated in the last decade of the century and will come to be seen in hindsight, I believe, as one of the most important signs of the achievement of the unity of nations as part of the process of the Lesser Peace. It represented an attempt, however tentative, to courageously

enforce international human rights law and make it more than a mere paper promise. It is helpful to recount just a few examples of humanitarian intervention in the last decade.¹

In 1992, famine ravaged Somalia, exacerbated by civil war and the systematic looting of humanitarian relief by bandits and rival factions. With UN authorization, the United States provided troops to protect humanitarian relief. The U.S.-led coalition operation was followed by a UN-commanded peace operation that was the first UN peacekeeping mission authorized to use force for purposes other than the self-defense of the participating military personnel.

Also in the early 1990s, the state of Yugoslavia disintegrated as its republics sought independence. Ethnic groups led by cynical, prejudiced leaders jockeyed for domination and sought to repress and even extinguish members of long-hated rival groups. The UN deployed a peacekeeping force to the region but did not give it a strong mandate and military capability suitable for the state of war and the horrific campaign of so-called ethnic cleansing into which it was inserted. UN troops failed to prevent many massacres, including most famously the slaughter of thousands of Bosnian Muslim men and boys at Srebrenica in the summer of 1995. In hindsight, UN officials, including Secretary-General Kofi Annan himself, have acknowledged that the lesson of this experience is that intervention to protect victims of such a systematic campaign of persecution and extermination must be swift and forceful.

In Rwanda, in April 1994 a calculated campaign of genocide was unleashed by Hutu leaders against the Tutsi population in that country. The world watched in horror, but at first the UN Security Council refused to authorize intervention. Indeed, the Security Council decided to decrease, rather than increase, the size of the small peacekeeping force that already happened to be stationed in the country. That inaction exacted a terrible toll: in a few short months, over 800,000 Tutsis were slaughtered, often in the most sadistic ways imaginable. In the last few years the UN and many other international institutions, feeling a sense of shame at their complacency, have soberly reflected on their behavior and concluded that they should have taken more decisive and courageous action

to prevent the genocide in Rwanda, and have vowed to do better in the future.

Perhaps in part because of this apparent vow, when the government of Yugoslavia appeared to be launching a new campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Albanian population of the Serb province of Kosovo in early 1999, members of NATO decided that forceful military action against that government was required to prevent massacres on the scale so recently witnessed in Bosnia. Because disagreement was viewed as forthcoming from the governments of countries that wielded vetoes on the Security Council, they did not seek Security Council authorization for such an operation. Instead, for several months, NATO forces pounded Serbian cities with bombs. A massive refugee crisis ensued, but eventually the government of Yugoslavia agreed to a UN-approved peace plan which included the placement of Kosovo under temporary UN administration and the deployment of a NATO-led military force in Kosovo, KFOR. Many governments, while happy that the immediate human rights crisis was resolved by the NATO action, felt that it was nevertheless illegal under the Charter and may have used force excessively against civilians.

Most recently, the Security Council approved the deployment of a security force in Afghanistan after the U.S.-led military campaign aimed at ousting the terrorist al-Qaida organization from that country and installing a new government. Many other examples of humanitarian intervention may also be cited, including interventions in Haiti, East Timor, and Sierra Leone.

Alongside these military experiments, the UN fostered the creation of new international courts and tribunals to try individuals accused of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. During the Yugoslav conflict, the Security Council created the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia to try such crimes committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. And it created a sister tribunal, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, to try similar crimes committed as part of the Rwanda conflict. Perhaps most importantly, in 1998 the UN facilitated the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, the world's first standing international criminal court empowered to try individuals

for gross violations of the basic norms of human dignity. The court came into existence in July 2002.

Despite their shortcomings and failures, the experiments with humanitarian intervention I have mentioned reflected a new willingness on the part of the international community to come to the rescue of those persons who have experienced the most flagrant human rights abuses. In its 2000 *Riḍvān* message, the Universal House of Justice pointed out, perhaps with these types of collective humanitarian interventions in mind, that during the period 1996–2000 “attempts at implementing and elaborating the methods of collective security were earnestly made, bringing to mind one of Bahá’u’lláh’s prescriptions for maintaining peace” (par. 21). The Universal House of Justice has likewise praised the establishment of the International Criminal Court, noting that this action “accords with Bahá’í expectations” (par. 21).

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION— ADVANCES AND CHALLENGES

These moral and political developments relating to humanitarian intervention have occurred within an ambiguous international legal framework that, in turn, reflects a great deal of moral confusion about the propriety of such intervention and the institutions that should regulate it. I will highlight here five important legal issues.

HUMAN RIGHTS VERSUS STATE SOVEREIGNTY

First, humanitarian intervention, which necessarily involves intervention within a sovereign state for the ostensible purpose of preventing or stopping human rights violations, forces us to confront a conflict in international law in general, and the UN Charter in particular, between human rights and state sovereignty. Article 2, Paragraph 7 provides that nothing in the Charter shall authorize the UN “to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State,” but goes on to declare that “this principle shall not prejudice the application of

enforcement measures under Chapter VII." I will refer to Chapter VII below. However, in Articles 55 and 56, the UN Charter simultaneously imposes duties on UN member states to take "joint and separate action in co-operation with the Organization" for the achievement of the purpose, among others, of promoting "universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all." As mentioned earlier, fundamental human rights were later elaborated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and have been codified in many human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in 1966. It is not clear how to reconcile this conflict between the legal norms of sovereignty and human rights.

THE USE OF FORCE VERSUS THE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES

Second, the practice of humanitarian intervention in the last decade brings to the fore the legal question of whether the use of force is appropriate or justified or whether peaceful negotiations are legally the preferred, or indeed only permissible, way to stop civil wars and human rights atrocities. The UN Charter in general calls for the peaceful resolution of disputes between states (see, for example, Article 1, Paragraph 1), and it prohibits the use of force by one state against another, except in self-defense or as part of Security Council-authorized collective security action, which is provided for by Chapter VII of the Charter (see Article 2, Paragraph 4; Articles 39–51). But collective security action under the UN Charter was originally envisioned exclusively, or at least primarily, as a means of protecting the security of states, not people. Accordingly, international lawyers have been sharply divided on the issue of whether the Charter authorizes the Security Council to mandate the use of force to protect human rights victims. Furthermore, many policy makers believe that the use of force in the long run simply produces more conflict and more pain for the very people such intervention is claimed to help. On the other hand, in the cases of Bosnia and Rwanda, for example, many critics maintain that a much more forcible response by UN peacekeepers was required in order to forestall the orgy of bloodshed that occurred in those troubled lands.

OBLIGATIONS TO INTERVENE

Third, the new experiments with humanitarian intervention have highlighted the problem of whether the UN and its member states are obligated to intervene to prevent genocide, mass killings, or other widespread and severe violations of human rights. While the UN Charter imposes on the Security Council an apparent duty to decide on measures necessary “to maintain or restore international peace and security” (Article 39), it is completely silent on the question of whether there is any kind of obligation, legal or moral, of states or the UN to intervene in the case of gross human rights violations. And while the Charter in Article 43 obligated member states to agree to provide contingents for collective security action at the request of the Security Council (Article 43), this provision of the Charter has been a dead letter. Therefore at present there is no generally recognized legal obligation to support UN-authorized humanitarian intervention operations.

THE SECURITY COUNCIL’S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Fourth, humanitarian intervention authorized by the Security Council has raised weighty questions about its voting procedure and the method it uses to take decisions. Any decision of the Council requires not only nine affirmative votes out of fifteen, but no negative votes by any of the five permanent members—China, France, Russia, the U.K., and the U.S. (see Article 27). Thus, any single permanent member can “veto” and prevent action by the Security Council. Vetoes or threatened vetoes have often prevented Security Council action with respect to gross human rights violations, for example, in the case of Kosovo. This raises the question: Is the veto ethically or legally justified?

Furthermore, the Security Council, as a political body, also makes decisions concerning humanitarian intervention after extensive bargaining and compromises, many of which are aimed at placating the permanent members. But the result of such a process has been decisions that many observers criticize as inconsistent and as biased towards the interests of

the permanent members—for example, a willingness to intervene in Eastern Europe, but not in Africa.

THE LEGALITY OF UNAUTHORIZED INTERVENTION

Fifth, and last, the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia without the authorization of the UN Security Council directly forces us to confront the question of whether intervention without the blessing of the Security Council can ever be legal. In this connection, Article 2, paragraph 4 of the UN Charter prohibits the threat or use of force by any UN member state against the political independence or territorial integrity of any other state. Under Chapter VII of the Charter, only the Security Council can authorize enforcement action in the case of a threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, although Article 51 allows each state to exercise a right of self-defense until the Security Council has taken appropriate measures. Articles 52 through 54 of the Charter relate to regional security arrangements and organizations. Article 53 provides that “no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council” (Article 53). Taken together, do these provisions prohibit humanitarian intervention by a state or regional organization if it has not been authorized by the Security Council?

How can these legal problems be resolved? Ultimately these legal questions relate to moral issues, and to fundamental spiritual values. They can only be resolved through reference to a sophisticated framework of moral and spiritual principles. The Bahá'í Writings can help to provide such a framework of principles, and we can speculate on how these legal problems may be resolved in the future as these principles are gradually recognized and internalized by world leaders.

IDENTIFYING RELEVANT BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLES

I now turn to a consideration of a number of important Bahá'í ethical and spiritual principles that appear to be directly relevant to the legal questions

concerning humanitarian intervention that I have just identified. Many of these principles are also reflected in the sacred scriptures of other Faiths, as I have demonstrated in *Rethinking Humanitarian Intervention*.

THE UNITY OF THE HUMAN FAMILY AND RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

The first, and most important, relevant Bahá'í principle is that of "unity in diversity." The pivotal teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the fundamental unity of humankind. Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed: "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established" (*Gleanings* 286).

At the same time, the Bahá'í Writings indicate the legitimacy of identification with one's family, nation, and religious community. But they stress that human beings morally ought to recognize, above all, their membership in one human family. The Bahá'í Writings thus emphasize that the central Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humankind "can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. . . . Its watchword is unity in diversity" (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 41–42).

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Bahá'í Writings also emphasize respect for the fundamental human rights of all members of the human family, including women, as a foundational ethical principle. For example, in numerous passages the Bahá'í Writings stress the omnipresence of human rights violations by governments. In the words attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "kings and rulers have been able to control millions of human beings and have exercised that dominion with the utmost despotism and tyranny" (*Promulgation* 276–77). This reality must be transformed, according to the Bahá'í Writings, through the adoption and implementation of international human rights standards. In this connection, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, quite presciently given

the later human rights revolution of the twentieth century: "Bahá'u'lláh taught that an equal standard of human rights must be recognized and adopted" (*Promulgation* 182).

TAKING ACTION TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS

The Bahá'í Writings further emphasize the importance of taking action to protect the human rights of others. For example, Bahá'u'lláh enjoined individuals not to tolerate violations of human rights, including violations of the rights of women: "As [the friends of God] do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God" (*Compilation of Compilations* 2:379). And he instructed all human beings to be "as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression" (*Gleanings* 285).

The Bahá'í Writings also suggest the imperative of prosecuting and punishing individuals who commit egregious assaults upon the human rights of others, so as to protect the human community. In this connection, 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicated that human rights violators must be dealt with justly, not compassionately: "Kindness cannot be shown the tyrant, the deceiver, or the thief, because, far from awakening them to the error of their ways, it maketh them to continue in their perversity as before" (*Selections* 158).

A TRUST THEORY OF GOVERNMENT AND LIMITED STATE SOVEREIGNTY

The Bahá'í Writings furthermore advocate a trust theory of government under which governments are to exercise their powers as trustees for the benefit of the people, and a concomitant limitation of absolute state sovereignty. Bahá'u'lláh called upon rulers to recognize their duty to aid the oppressed and safeguard human rights: "For is it not your clear duty to restrain the tyranny of the oppressor, and to deal equitably with your subjects, that your high sense of justice may be fully demonstrated to all mankind? God hath committed into your hands the reins of the government

of the people, that ye may rule with justice over them, safeguard the rights of the down-trodden, and punish the wrong-doers" (*Gleanings* 247). 'Abdu'l-Bahá explicitly emphasized the importance of governments ensuring "the free exercise of the individual's rights, and the security of his person and property" (*Secret* 115).

For these and other reasons, according to the Bahá'í Writings, the world's leaders must abandon an extreme doctrine of state sovereignty. In the words of Shoghi Effendi: "The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life" (*World Order* 202).²

CONSULTATION

The Bahá'í Writings repeatedly stress the importance of open-minded consultation among individuals and all social institutions as a means of finding the truth and discovering solutions to practical and moral problems. 'Abdu'l-Bahá described consultation as follows:

[C]onsultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. . . . Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth. (*Promulgation* 72)

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEACE

Another essential ethical principle in the Bahá'í Writings is that of the peaceful resolution of disputes. 'Abdu'l-Bahá declared: "O ye beloved of

the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God's grace" (*Will and Testament* 13).

RESPECT FOR TREATIES AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

The Bahá'í Writings furthermore evidence a basic ethical principle of respect for treaties and international law. For example, they call for the conclusion of a binding collective security treaty, with severe sanctions against violating states, thereby suggesting the sanctity of international treaty obligations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirmed that the sovereigns of the world "must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. . . . In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained" (*Secret* 64–65).

The Bahá'í Writings also support the development of international law by recommending the establishment of a world federation among independent states in which "the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded" (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 203). This statement indicates that one of the purposes of the federation will be to protect human rights. This world federation will include an international court, a democratically elected world parliament, and a world police force (*World Order* 202–4). In the words of Shoghi Effendi, "A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth" (*World Order* 203).

COLLECTIVE SECURITY ACTION AND JUST WAR

At the same time that Bahá'u'lláh advocated peaceful relations among states, he called for the implementation of a system of collective security

to deter aggression by states against one another. He exhorted world leaders to consult on establishing

the world's Great Peace amongst men. . . . Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. (*Gleanings* 249)

There is also some evidence in the Bahá'í Writings of support for certain just wars undertaken by a single state, pending the establishment of a functioning collective security system, as a last resort to stop an aggressor or end civil strife that is claiming the lives of innocents. 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated:

[T]here are times when war becomes the powerful basis of peace, and ruin the very means of reconstruction. If, for example, a high-minded sovereign marshals his troops to block the onset of the insurgent and the aggressor, or again, if he takes the field and distinguishes himself in a struggle to unify a divided state and people, if, in brief, he is waging war for a righteous purpose, then this seeming wrath is mercy itself, and this apparent tyranny the very substance of justice and this warfare the cornerstone of peace. Today, the task befitting great rulers is to establish universal peace, for in this lies the freedom of all peoples." (*Secret* 70–71)³

HUMANITARIAN LIMITATIONS ON THE CONDUCT OF WAR

The Bahá'í Writings repeatedly condemn inhumanity and cruelty in war.⁴ Nevertheless, they indicate that sufficient force must be used against the government (but apparently not the people) violating the comprehensive and sacrosanct collective security treaty envisaged in the Writings. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure. (*Secret* 65)

HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION TO RESCUE HUMAN RIGHTS VICTIMS

Finally, and most directly relevant to the subject of humanitarian intervention, there is evidence in the Bahá'í Writings of support for the proportionate use of military force to rescue victims of extreme human rights violations.

In this connection, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated: "The communities must protect the rights of man. So if someone assaults, injures, oppresses and wounds me, I will offer no resistance, and I will forgive him. But if a person wishes to assault [someone else], certainly I will prevent him" (*Some Answered Questions* 271). Bahá'u'lláh, too, instructed all human beings to be "an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression" (*Gleanings* 285). One passage from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh might be interpreted as endorsing collective military intervention for purposes of preventing gross human rights abuses. Bahá'u'lláh exhorted all the rulers of the earth to unite to implement a system of collective security. In describing this system, he affirmed: "We fain would hope that the kings and rulers of the earth, the mirrors of the gracious and almighty name of God, may attain unto this station, and shield mankind from the onslaught of tyranny. . . ." (*Gleanings* 249).

IMPLICATIONS OF BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLES FOR HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

What are the implications of these ethical principles in the Bahá'í Writings for humanitarian intervention and for the legal problems I identified

earlier? First, it seems clear that the Bahá'í Writings are adamant in establishing the responsibility of the entire international community to care for and protect, through military force if necessary, all members of the human family. They are not strictly pacifist. But the Bahá'í principle of consultation also implies that military responses to human rights violations must be the product of careful and considered consultation among all the governments of the world, or at least as many of them as possible, and must not merely reflect the selfish political interests of the most powerful states.

Furthermore, we know from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's call for a comprehensive multilateral treaty addressing many global problems, including, we can imagine, gross violations of human rights, that such a treaty explicitly permitting humanitarian intervention under certain circumstances must ultimately be negotiated. This enterprise might take the form of a revision of the UN Charter or it might involve the negotiation of an entirely new treaty. In any case, this is a goal that we must constantly encourage present-day governments to pursue.

With respect to some of the conflicts among principles and doctrines evident in contemporary international law, Bahá'í ethical principles can point the way towards solution of some of these dilemmas.

First, on the problem of reconciling the principles of state sovereignty in the UN Charter with human rights obligations under international law, Bahá'í principles indicate that respect for the fundamental autonomy of states is essential, but such respect can in no wise affect the moral obligations of those states to rule justly and respect fundamental human rights. When governments fail to fulfill their "clear duty," in the words of Bahá'u'lláh, to "restrain the tyranny of the oppressor" and to deal equitably with their subjects, sovereignty cannot be used as a shield to excuse them from fulfilling this duty. The legal provisions of the UN Charter ought to be interpreted in light of these moral principles, which also are apparent in the teachings of other religions.⁵

Second, on the resolution of competing principles in the UN Charter that call, on the one hand, for the peaceful resolution of disputes, and on the other, for effective collective security action in response to a threat to the peace, the Bahá'í Writings clearly urge multilateral peaceful methods

of conflict resolution. They indicate that the presumption should always be in favor of such methods, particularly those that involve genuine and open-minded consultation with all relevant parties. But the Writings also envisage the need for an ultimate option of a multilateral military deployment by an international police force. We can surmise, therefore, that in certain circumstances Bahá'í principles would endorse, as already suggested, the multilateral measured use of force against a state as a last resort if necessary to prevent or stop widespread and severe violations of essential human rights. They would also endorse the establishment of a permanent "rapid reaction force," such as has been proposed by many scholars and governments, including the Government of Canada, with the capability of responding quickly to urgent human rights crises.⁶ But any uses of military force to put an end to human rights violations must comply with existing legal limits aimed at protecting civilians, both because of the principle of respect for treaties and international law, and because such limits are, according to the Bahá'í Writings, a moral imperative.

At the same time that military intervention has a place as an emergency measure, it must be part of a multifaceted approach to human rights problems that includes judicial processes and moral education. It is clear from the Bahá'í teachings that perpetrators of human rights atrocities must be apprehended, prosecuted, and prevented from carrying out such unspeakable deeds again. It is for this reason that the Universal House of Justice has indicated that the establishment of the new International Criminal Court accords with Bahá'í principles and expectations. It is also evident from the Bahá'í teachings that long-term solutions to human rights crises must include the education of all individuals, but especially children and youth, in the foundational principle of the unity of the human family as well as the human rights concepts that principle entails.

Third, on the question of whether there is a legal obligation to intervene or to contribute to humanitarian intervention operations, the Bahá'í passages I referred to earlier suggest there is at least a strong moral obligation to come to the defense of "victims of oppression," to use the words of Bahá'u'lláh, by appropriate means, which may or may not warrant the use of military assets in particular cases. It is imperative that this type of moral

obligation, which is articulated in the scriptures of other religions as well, be universally recognized and used to guide interpretation of the legal duties prescribed by the UN Charter and modern-day international law.

Indeed, it suggests, together with the language of the Charter, that there may well be a *legal* obligation on the part of the UN to intervene in cases involving the most flagrant human rights abuses, such as genocide. And it suggests that Article 43 of the Charter, providing for the assembly of national contingents under the command of the Security Council, ought to be revived and used to constitute a rapid reaction force capable of conducting humanitarian intervention.

Fourth, on problems relating to the Security Council's decision-making process, Bahá'í principles strongly indicate that the veto cannot enjoy moral legitimacy because it grants a permanent privileged position to some states over others and can impede effective collective action against gross human rights abuses simply because of the self-interests of one of the permanent members. Indeed, as long ago as 1955 the Bahá'í International Community called for elimination of the veto (see *Proposals*). Members of the Council must also be trained in the ethical principle of consultation. They must come to see themselves as trustees for the entire world community who must consult openly and earnestly with one another to devise the most appropriate responses to severe human rights violations, regardless of their self-interests in the matter at hand. Too often they have viewed their Council seat as simply another opportunity to pursue "politics as usual." Such practices undermine the legitimacy of the Council.

Fifth, and finally, on whether uses of force for humanitarian purposes should require the prior authorization of the UN Security Council, the ethical principles of consultation and of human unity strongly imply the moral desirability of consultation among the states of the world, especially about such a morally complex issue as humanitarian intervention. These principles suggest that, morally and legally, attempts should be made to work through mechanisms like the UN Security Council that states intended to be primarily responsible for international peace and security. They imply that the apparent plain meaning of the Charter's

legal prohibitions on nondefensive military action not authorized by the Security Council ought to be upheld and respected. But because of the potential for the Council to be stymied by the veto, pending the conclusion of the comprehensive treaty foreseen in the Bahá'í Writings, it is possible that in extreme circumstances, after exhaustive diplomatic attempts have been made to work through the Council, individual states may be morally entitled to respond with the minimal amount of force required to thwart extreme human rights violations, such as genocide, even if such a response is best viewed as illegal. Such an exception is at least implied by the statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá referring to the permissibility of action in certain cases by a "high-minded sovereign."

CONCLUSION

I have attempted in this brief paper to give my own personal view of how Bahá'í principles can point to changes in our understanding of existing international law as it relates to humanitarian intervention, as well as to long-term reforms in the international legal system's ability to assist human rights victims. In the long run, the countries of the world need to reform contemporary international law so that it addresses the problem of humanitarian intervention and its legality explicitly in ways that accord with Bahá'í principles. As these principles, many of which are also promulgated by the scriptures of other religions, gain wider acceptance, we can hope that the leaders of the world will rise to the challenge and adopt the far-reaching reforms implied by them. But we must not only hope for this result; we must earnestly endeavor to bring it about —again, in the words of the theme of the 2002 Annual Conference, to put spirit into action. Our suffering brothers and sisters around the globe deserve no less.

NOTES

A version of this paper was presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, on 31 August 2002.

1. For more information about these examples, see Lepard 7–28.
2. See Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 202–4.
3. In light of all of the passages from the Bahá'í Writings quoted elsewhere in this paper referring to the duties of rulers to protect human rights and to the prevention of over-centralization, the reference to uniting a “divided state and people” should probably be read as referring to putting an end to bloody civil wars, not to attempts by rulers to maintain their power through oppression.
4. See, for example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 28–30, 108.
5. See generally Lepard 39–98.
6. See, for example, Government of Canada.

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Religion and Evolution Reconciled: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Comments on Evolution

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Abstract

The harmony of science and religion is a central teaching of the Bahá'í Faith that has important implications for the development of society and the emergence of a global civilization. Science and religion, “the two most potent forces in human life,” have often been at odds, most notably over evolution and the origins of man. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has commented at length on evolution and man's origins, providing the most extensive exploration of the harmony of science and religion in the Bahá'í canon. We systematically survey 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings on evolution and show that He reconciles two viewpoints—evolution and divine creation—that other thinkers have deemed irremediably in conflict.

Résumé

L'harmonie essentielle entre la science et la religion, un enseignement de base de la foi bahá'íe, est de grande importance pour l'évolution de la société et l'émergence d'une civilisation mondiale. Toutefois, la science et la religion ont souvent été mises en opposition, en particulier en ce qui a trait à l'évolution et à l'origine de l'homme. 'Abdu'l-Bahá a formulé des commentaires détaillés sur l'évolution et l'origine de l'homme, fournissant l'exploration la plus approfondie de l'harmonie entre la science et la religion que l'on puisse trouver dans les enseignements bahá'ís. L'auteur passe en revue tous les enseignements d'Abdu'l-Bahá concernant l'évolution, et il montre comment celui-ci réconcilie ces deux points de vue—l'évolution et la création divine—que d'autres penseurs estimaient à tout jamais inconciliables.

Resumen

La armonía de la ciencia y la religión es una enseñanza clave de la Fe Bahá'í que

entraña implicaciones importantes para el desarrollo de la sociedad y el surgimiento de una civilización global. La ciencia y la religión, sin embargo, no pocas veces han estado en desacuerdo, marcadamente acerca de la evolución y los orígenes del hombre. 'Abdu'l-Bahá ha comentado detalladamente sobre este tema, proporcionándonos una investigación a fondo acerca de la armonía entre la ciencia y la religión en el canon bahá'í. En forma sistemática contemplamos las enseñanzas de 'Abdu'l-Bahá sobre la evolución y demostramos como Él empareja dos puntos de vista, la evolución y la creación divina, supuestamente en conflicto irremediable según otros pensadores.

INTRODUCTION

Science is extraordinarily successful at explaining the world, unceasingly producing new knowledge and updating older understandings. Among its fruits are marvelous and powerful technologies: world-embracing communications, sophisticated computers, and life-enhancing medical technologies are but examples. The powerful impact of these technologies, combined with the multiple successes of science in explaining natural and human phenomena, has led to the widespread view that science—not, as once was held, religion—is our primary source of reliable knowledge. Not surprisingly, ideas derived from science have clashed with ideas derived from religion.

The most visible of the clashes between scientific and religious ideas concerns evolution and the origins of man. This conflict started to take definite shape after the publication of Darwin's famous *Origin of Species* in 1859 in Europe and the United States. By the time of the Scopes "monkey trial" of 1925, it had hardened into a polarized standoff between evolutionism and creationism. At issue were specific questions about human origins as well as broader questions about the validity of religion in a scientific age. Were human beings created by God or by evolutionary processes? Is scientific knowledge or revealed knowledge the truest knowledge? What is the role of revealed truth? Conflict over these questions continues unabated to this day.

A consequence of the clash of scientific and religious ideas about evolution

is the widespread belief that science and religion themselves are necessarily in conflict. True or not, this belief has had significant consequences. The loss of the moderating influence of thinkers familiar with science and its methods, for example, has led many religious groups to adopt certain ideas regardless of their rationality, increasing the component of superstition and myth in their religious systems. Distrust of the moral and ethical perspectives inculcated by religion has made it easier for scientists to embrace ideologies—for example, social Darwinism and eugenics—that have contributed to the horrors of the totalitarianisms of the twentieth century. Fortunately, these and other negative consequences of the clash between science and religion have been widely recognized, and many scientists and religionists are now calling for an updated assessment of the relationship between science and religion.¹

The harmony of science and religion is a central tenet of the Bahá'í teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained the Bahá'í view thus: "Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress" (*Paris Talks* 143). Rejecting the view that science and religion are in conflict, Shoghi Effendi describes them as "the two most potent forces in human life" (*World Order* 204). Religion, he says, "must go hand-in-hand with science."² The task facing humanity, the Universal House of Justice has written, "is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence." This can only be accomplished by "a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry."³

How do the Bahá'í teachings resolve the seeming conflicts between evolution and the widely shared religious doctrine of divine creation? In this article, we address this question by surveying 'Abdu'l-Bahá's extensive comments on evolution and the origins of man. Addressed primarily to educated Western audiences in the first two decades of the twentieth century, these comments provide the fullest and most sustained discussion of the relationship between science and religion in the Bahá'í Writings. We show that 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the human species as coming into being by developmental processes that are consistent with the mechanisms of

scientific evolution and, further, that these processes are the working out of the divine creative impulse. 'Abdu'l-Bahá thus reconciles two perspectives—evolution and divine creation—that many modern thinkers have deemed irremediably in conflict.

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S COMMENTS ON EVOLUTION

'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on evolution may be found mainly in *Some Answered Questions*, *Paris Talks*, and *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. The first is a compilation of notes of His table talks with pilgrims in the Holy Land; the latter two are compendiums of His addresses delivered in the early part of this century in Paris and America, respectively.⁴ The majority of His comments touch on issues that, although contemporary to His time, still command great interest. They span a number of inter-related themes and resist simple categorization.

It should be mentioned that the transcriptions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks do not all enjoy the same degree of authenticity. Thus, care is required when drawing conclusions based solely on these works. To fully understand 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on evolution, it is important to take into account the many different topics they contain and their context in the body of the Bahá'í teachings. Shoghi Effendi has cautioned that statements by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on evolution "must be taken in conjunction with all the Bahá'í teachings," emphasizing that "we cannot get a correct picture by concentrating on just one phrase" (*Arohanui* 85–86). In this article, we explore some of the major themes that run through His comments on evolution.⁵ We group them under nine topical headings:

1. Creation is perfect
2. Nature has no conscious intelligence
3. Life evolved gradually from a sole origin
4. Diversity is necessary
5. Man has progressed through stages
6. Man is a distinct species, not an animal
7. Man is a composition of elements that attracts the human spirit

8. Evolution is governed by law
9. Man is a necessary part of existence

In the following, we look at each of these topics in detail. Throughout, we use the terms “man” and “human” interchangeably in their non-gender-specific sense.

1. CREATION IS PERFECT

A central foundation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings on evolution is an affirmation of the perfection of creation:

When man . . . sees the state, the organization and the perfection of the world, he will be convinced that in the possible world there is nothing more wonderful than that which already exists. . . . [T]he universe has no imperfection, so that if all beings became pure intelligence and reflected for ever and ever, it is impossible that they could imagine anything better than that which exists. (*Some Answered Questions* 177)

When we carefully investigate the kingdoms of existence and observe the phenomena of the universe about us, we discover the absolute order and perfection of creation. The dull minerals in their affinities, plants and vegetables with power of growth, animals in their instinct, man with conscious intellect and the heavenly orbs moving obediently through limitless space are all found subject to universal law, most complete, most perfect. (*Promulgation* 79)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá compares the universe to the human body; if the chief member of the human body, the brain and the mind, were missing, it would be imperfect:

[I]f we imagine a time when man belonged to the animal world, or when he was merely an animal, we shall find that existence would

have been imperfect—that is to say, there would have been no man, and this chief member, which in the body of the world is like the brain and mind in man, would have been missing. The world would then have been quite imperfect. It is thus proved that if there had been a time when man was in the animal kingdom, the perfection of existence would have been destroyed; for man is the greatest member of this world, and if the body was without this chief member, surely it would be imperfect. (*Some Answered Questions* 178)

If, however, the creation in the past had not been adorned with utmost perfection, then existence would have been imperfect and meaningless, and in this case creation would have been incomplete. (*Some Answered Questions* 177)

A universe without man, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts, would be incomplete and therefore meaningless. This implies that human existence is an essential part of creation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá did not elaborate on the physical mechanisms by which creation gave rise to man. Recent scientific findings have led some scientists to the conclusion that our existence is critically dependent on the exact form of the laws of nature.⁶ The laws of physics and the fundamental constants of nature are delicately balanced in such a way that permits stars and galaxies to form. Furthermore, the basic building blocks of life—hydrogen, carbon, oxygen, water, and so on—have chemical and physical properties that appear to be finely tuned to enable the evolution of complex life forms. The physicist Paul Davies summarizes this perspective as follows: "It almost looks as if the structure of the universe and the laws of physics have been deliberately adjusted in order to lead to the emergence of life and consciousness" (*Are We Alone?* 118). This point of view is consistent with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's claim that the universe is perfect, and that humanity is a central part of that perfection.

2. NATURE HAS NO CONSCIOUS INTELLIGENCE

Despite the order and perfections evident in the universe, nature lacks

conscious intelligence. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us: “Nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart. . . . But when you look at Nature itself, you see that it has no intelligence, no will” (*Some Answered Questions* 3).

This can readily be illustrated:

For instance, the nature of fire is to burn; it burns without will or intelligence. The nature of water is fluidity; it flows without will or intelligence. The nature of the sun is radiance; it shines without will or intelligence. The nature of vapor is to ascend; it ascends without will or intelligence. Thus it is clear that the natural movements of all things are compelled; there are no voluntary movements except those of animals and, above all, those of man. (*Some Answered Questions* 3)

While nature lacks consciousness, humans do not: “Man is intelligent, instinctively and consciously intelligent; nature is not. Man is fortified with memory; nature does not possess it. Man is the discoverer of the mysteries of nature; nature is not conscious of those mysteries herself” (*Promulgation* 81).

The Darwinian model of evolution similarly assigns no intelligence to nature. For example, Richard Dawkins, in *The Blind Watchmaker*, explains how unintelligent forces operating over long periods give rise to organisms of unimaginable complexity and marvelous design. The distinction is that Dawkins (and others who believe as he does) sees the marvelous complexity that is intrinsic to life and consciousness as created entirely by unintelligent processes, whereas ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes both nature and consciousness as products of the same cause. This cause, He says, must possess greater intelligence than its consequences.

3. LIFE EVOLVED GRADUALLY FROM A SOLE ORIGIN

A cornerstone of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings on evolution is His affirmation of a single origin of life: “the origin of all material life is one. . . .” (*Promulgation* 350).

From this sole origin, the diversity of life was produced: "Consider the world of created beings, how varied and diverse they are in species, yet with one sole origin" (*Paris Talks* 51–52).

[T]here is no doubt that in the beginning the origin was one: the origin of all numbers is one and not two. Then it is evident that in the beginning matter was one, and that one matter appeared in different aspects in each element. Thus various forms were produced, and these various aspects as they were produced became permanent, and each element was specialized. But this permanence was not definite, and did not attain realization and perfect existence until after a very long time. Then these elements became composed, and organized and combined in infinite forms; or rather from the composition and combination of these elements innumerable beings appeared. (*Some Answered Questions* 181)

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the development of complex entities as a slow, gradual process: "the growth and development of all beings is gradual; this is the universal divine organization and the natural system. The seed does not at once become a tree; the embryo does not at once become a man; the mineral does not suddenly become a stone. No, they grow and develop gradually and attain the limit of perfection" (*Some Answered Questions* 198–99).

Thus, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, life on earth is extremely old: "life on this earth is very ancient. It is not one hundred thousand, or two hundred thousand, or one million or two million years old; it is very ancient. . . ." (*Some Answered Questions* 160).

These teachings are in harmony with the conclusions of the evolutionary sciences that life originated approximately 3.8 billion years ago from a single bacterial form, as evidenced by the common biochemical foundation of all life on earth.

4. DIVERSITY IS NECESSARY

The theory of evolution as developed by Darwin placed a strong emphasis

on the role of competition. Since Darwin's time, the interdependence of the different components—both animate and inanimate—in a habitat has been recognized as playing an equally important role. Evolution takes place in ecosystems that are complex webs of interactions between plants, animals, geography, bacteria, weather patterns, and other phenomena (see Lewontin). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on evolution strongly emphasize the importance of interdependence:

For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. It is confirmed through evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association. (*Some Answered Questions* 178–79)

Cooperation and reciprocity are intrinsic components of the created world, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. . . . co-operation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness. (*Huqúq'u'lláh* 21)

This passage calls to mind modern ideas about the dynamics of ecosystems and the modern evolutionary biological concepts of cooperation and altruism.⁷

'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes that diversity is a necessary condition for the order and perfection of the whole universe:

Know that the order and the perfection of the whole universe require

that existence should appear in numberless forms. For existing beings could not be embodied in only one degree, one station, one kind, one species and one class; undoubtedly, the difference of degrees and distinction of forms, and the variety of genus and species, are necessary—that is to say, the degree of mineral, vegetable, animal substances, and of man, are inevitable; for the world could not be arranged, adorned, organized and perfected with man alone. In the same way, with only animals, only plants or only minerals, this world could not show forth beautiful scenery, exact organization and exquisite adornment. Without doubt it is because of the varieties of degrees, stations, species and classes that existence becomes resplendent with utmost perfection. (*Some Answered Questions* 129)

5. MAN HAS PROGRESSED THROUGH STAGES

‘Abdu’l-Bahá compares the evolution of man to the growth of an embryo into an adult. Man did not appear all at once but developed gradually: “it is evident and confirmed that the development and growth of man on this earth, until he reached his present perfection, resembled the growth and development of the embryo in the womb of the mother: by degrees it passed from condition to condition, from form to form, from one shape to another. . . .” (*Some Answered Questions* 183). There are different stages in the evolution of man:

[M]an, in the beginning of his existence and in the womb of the earth, like the embryo in the womb of the mother, gradually grew and developed, and passed from one form to another, from one shape to another, until he appeared with this beauty and perfection, this force and this power. It is certain that in the beginning he had not this loveliness and grace and elegance, and that he only by degrees attained this shape, this form, this beauty and this grace. (*Some Answered Questions* 183)

In each stage (degree) of his development, man acquired new virtues:

In the world of existence man has traversed successive degrees until he has attained the human kingdom. In each degree of his progression he has developed capacity for advancement to the next station and condition. While in the kingdom of the mineral he was attaining the capacity for promotion into the degree of the vegetable. In the kingdom of the vegetable he underwent preparation for the world of the animal, and from thence he has come onward to the human degree, or kingdom. Throughout this journey of progression he has ever and always been potentially man. (*Promulgation 225*)

In every stage of existence through which he progressed—mineral, vegetable, and animal—man was potentially man. Potentiality, as we will see, is a key concept in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s discussion of evolution.

6. MAN IS A DISTINCT SPECIES, NOT AN ANIMAL

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, man progressed through many stages before attaining his present form. But always, he was potentially human. That he passed through an animal stage does not mean he is an animal:

But at all times, even when the embryo resembled a worm, it was human in potentiality and character, not animal. The forms assumed by the human embryo in its successive changes do not prove that it is animal in its essential character. Throughout this progression there has been a transference of type, a conservation of species or kind. Realizing this we may acknowledge the fact that at one time man was an inmate of the sea, at another period an invertebrate, then a vertebrate and finally a human being standing erect. Though we admit these changes, we cannot say man is an animal. In each one of these stages are signs and evidences of his human existence and destination. (*Promulgation 358*)

It may seem that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments differ from the standard Darwinian picture of human evolution. In the latter picture, *Homo sapiens*

is considered to be one species which, along with the great apes—chimpanzees, gorillas, and orangutans—evolved from a common ancestor living in Africa some five to ten million years ago. This common ancestry is often said to imply that man is an animal. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rejects this interpretation, saying that man is a distinct “species.” However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not using the word *species* in the modern taxonomic or biological sense. Rather, He is using it with the implication of “kind” or “category.”⁸ With this meaning in mind, we further examine ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements about human nature and origins.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá likens the development of human beings to the growth of an embryo in the mother’s womb to emphasize that the evolution of man through different stages does not bind him to any of those stages:

To recapitulate: as man in the womb of the mother passes from form to form, from shape to shape, changes and develops, and is still the human species from the beginning of the embryonic period—in the same way man, from the beginning of his existence in the matrix of the world, is also a distinct species—that is, man—and has gradually evolved from one form to another. (*Some Answered Questions* 193–94)

Although he evolved through many stages, man was always distinctly man, a unique species: “man’s existence on this earth, from the beginning until it reaches this state, form and condition, necessarily lasts a long time, and goes through many degrees until it reaches this condition. But from the beginning of man’s existence he is a distinct species. . . . Man was always a distinct species, a man, not an animal” (*Some Answered Questions* 184). “Therefore, this change of appearance, this evolution of members, this development and growth, even though we admit the reality of growth and progress, does not prevent the species from being original.” (*Some Answered Questions* 194)

What makes man unique, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is his intellectual endowment, not his physical makeup.⁹ He urges us to understand man’s

reality not by focusing on his physical connection with the animal kingdom, but rather by considering his spiritual nature. It is wrong, He repeatedly emphasizes, to assume that man's physical body makes him merely an animal: "Man is not man simply because of bodily attributes. The standard of divine measure and judgment is his intelligence and spirit" (*Promulgation* 184). "Again, there are men whose eyes are only open to physical progress and to the evolution in the world of matter. These men prefer to study the resemblance between their own physical body and that of the ape, rather than to contemplate the glorious affiliation between their spirit and that of God. This is indeed strange, for it is only physically that man resembles the lower creation, with regard to his intellect he is totally unlike it" (*Paris Talks* 71). "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" (*Paris Talks* 17).

'Abdu'l-Bahá does not deny what humans have in common with the animal world. Rather, He denies that their animal characteristics comprise their entire nature. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, human beings are on a different plane than the animal because of their spiritual and intellectual powers, powers that are evidenced by the sciences, the arts, and human inventions. "Though man has powers and outer senses in common with the animal, yet an extraordinary power exists in him of which the animal is bereft. The sciences, arts, inventions, trades and discoveries of realities are the results of this spiritual power" (*Some Answered Questions* 186). Further elaborating on the differences between humans and the rest of living things, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains: "Man is endowed with ideal virtues—for example, intellection, volition, faith, confession and acknowledgment of God—while nature is devoid of all these. The ideal faculties of man, including the capacity for scientific acquisition, are beyond nature's ken. These are powers whereby man is differentiated and distinguished from all other forms of life" (*Promulgation* 51).

'Abdu'l-Bahá collectively calls the human powers which distinguish man from the animal the spirit of man: "The animal is the captive of the senses and bound by them; all that is beyond the senses, the things that they do

not control, the animal can never understand, although in the outer senses it is greater than man. Hence it is proved and verified that in man there is a power of discovery by which he is distinguished from the animals, and this is the spirit of man" (*Some Answered Questions* 188). The evidence for the spirit of man lies in its visible signs:

There is no doubt that from its effects you prove that in the animal there is a power which is not in the plant, and this is the power of the senses—that is to say, sight, hearing and also other powers; from these you infer that there is an animal spirit. In the same way, from the proofs and signs we have mentioned, we argue that there is a human spirit. Since in the animal there are signs which are not in the plant, you say this power of sensation is a property of the animal spirit; you also see in man signs, powers and perfections which do not exist in the animal; therefore, you infer that there is a power in him which the animal is without. (*Some Answered Questions* 189–90)

Man differs from the animals, possessing mental and spiritual capacities that animals lack. In a similar way, animals differ from the plants, possessing the power of movement and senses that plants lack. Paleo-anthropologist Ian Tattersall comments on this difference when he writes "that with the arrival of behaviorally modern *Homo sapiens*, a totally unprecedented entity had appeared on Earth" (188). Man's mental and spiritual capacities make him a distinct species.

7. MAN IS A COMPOSITION OF ELEMENTS THAT ATTRACTS THE HUMAN SPIRIT

'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that man's perfections—his powers—result from a measured and balanced combination of elements:

[A]ll these endless beings which inhabit the world, whether man, animal, vegetable, mineral—whatever they may be—are surely, each one of them, composed of elements. . . . [T]he perfection of each individual

being—that is to say, the perfection which you now see in man or apart from him, with regard to their atoms, members or powers—is due to the composition of the elements, to their measure, to their balance, to the mode of their combination, and to mutual influence. When all these are gathered together, then man exists. (*Some Answered Questions* 178–79)

When the appropriate combination of elements appears, the human spirit is attracted to it:

Moreover, these members, these elements, this composition, which are found in the organism of man, are an attraction and magnet for the spirit; it is certain that the spirit will appear in it. . . . [W]hen these existing elements are gathered together according to the natural order, and with perfect strength, they become a magnet for the spirit, and the spirit will become manifest in them with all its perfections. (*Some Answered Questions* 201)

Lest this statement be construed materialistically, it should be pointed out that according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the human spirit does not depend for its existence on the body. He states: “The spirit is independent of the body, and in relation to it the spirit is an essential preexistence” (*Some Answered Questions* 280). He emphasizes: “The spirit does not need a body, but the body needs spirit, or it cannot live. The soul can live without a body, but the body without a soul dies” (*Paris Talks* 86–7). He further expands: “The life of the spirit is neither conditional nor dependent upon the life of the body. At most it can be said that the body is a mere garment utilized by the spirit. If that garment be destroyed, the wearer is not affected but is, in fact, protected” (*Promulgation* 259). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms that the human soul has a beginning, but has no end: “Know that, although the human soul has existed on the earth for prolonged times and ages, yet it is phenomenal. As it is a divine sign, when once it has come into existence, it is eternal. The spirit of man has a beginning, but it has no end; it continues eternally” (*Some Answered Questions* 151).¹⁰

The human soul is associated with the body but continues to exist after the body disintegrates:

The human spirit may be likened to the bounty of the sun shining on a mirror. The body of man, which is composed from the elements, is combined and mingled in the most perfect form; it is the most solid construction, the noblest combination, the most perfect existence. It grows and develops through the animal spirit. This perfected body can be compared to a mirror, and the human spirit to the sun. Nevertheless, if the mirror breaks, the bounty of the sun continues; and if the mirror is destroyed or ceases to exist, no harm will happen to the bounty of the sun, which is everlasting. (*Some Answered Questions* 143–44)

8. EVOLUTION IS GOVERNED BY LAW

‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that natural laws regulate all physical phenomena: “The phenomenal world is entirely subject to the rule and control of natural law” (*Promulgation* 17). These laws are so comprehensive that nature is bound by them: “Nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart. . . .” (*Some Answered Questions* 3). In particular, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that these laws apply to the evolution of living things:

Similarly, the terrestrial globe from the beginning was created with all its elements, substances, minerals, atoms and organisms; but these only appeared by degrees: first the mineral, then the plant, afterward the animal, and finally man. But from the first these kinds and species existed, but were undeveloped in the terrestrial globe, and then appeared only gradually. For the supreme organization of God, and the universal natural system, surround all beings, and all are subject to this rule. When you consider this universal system, you see that there is not one of the beings which at its coming into existence has reached the limit of perfection. No, they gradually grow and develop, and then attain the degree of perfection. (*Some Answered Questions* 199)

All beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees. The organization of God is one; the evolution of existence is one; the divine system is one. Whether they be small or great beings, all are subject to one law and system. (*Some Answered Questions* 199)

Having established that evolution is governed by universal law, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the composition of elements responsible for the appearance of beings is not a chance process:

[I]t is evident that in the beginning matter was one, and that one matter appeared in different aspects in each element. . . . Then these elements became composed, and organized and combined in infinite forms; or rather from the composition and combination of these elements innumerable beings appeared.

This composition and arrangement, through the wisdom of God and His preexistent might, were produced from one natural organization, which was composed and combined with the greatest strength, conformable to wisdom, and according to a universal law. From this it is evident that it is the creation of God, and is not a fortuitous composition and arrangement. (*Some Answered Questions* 181)

In accordance with this natural organization—this universal law—the mature properties of things are not evident at the beginning. Rather, they appear gradually. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, man’s essential qualities—mind and spirit—emerged from this same gradual process. He invokes the analogies of the embryo and the seed:

[T]he formation of man in the matrix of the world was in the beginning like the embryo; then gradually he made progress in perfectness, and grew and developed until he reached the state of maturity, when the mind and spirit became visible in the greatest power. In the beginning of his formation the mind and spirit also existed, but they were hidden; later they were manifested. . . . So it is that in the seed the tree

exists, but it is hidden and concealed; when it develops and grows, the complete tree appears. (*Some Answered Questions* 198)

Central to these analogies is the concept of potentiality. Seed-like growth and embryonic development bring into reality the potentialities inherent in their respective DNA structures. The potentiality of human existence is embedded in the laws of the universe. Man existed from the beginning, but his physical appearance is a gradual process.

9. MAN IS A NECESSARY PART OF EXISTENCE

'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that the universe requires human existence: "One of the things which has appeared in the world of existence, and which is one of the requirements of Nature, is human life" (*Some Answered Questions* 4). The purpose of human existence in the universe is the appearance of divine perfections: "[W]e . . . have also proved logically that man exists from his origin and foundation as man, and that his species has existed from all eternity, now we will establish spiritual proofs that human existence—that is, the species of man—is a necessary existence, and that without man the perfections of Divinity would not appear" (*Some Answered Questions* 195). "If man did not exist, the universe would be without result, for the object of existence is the appearance of the perfections of God" (*Some Answered Questions* 196). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's intent is not that we simply consider our own planet, but the whole of existence:¹¹ "Therefore, it cannot be said there was a time when man was not. All that we can say is that this terrestrial globe at one time did not exist, and at its beginning man did not appear upon it. . . . Therefore, it cannot be imagined that the worlds of existence, whether the stars or this earth, were once inhabited by the donkey, cow, mouse and cat, and that they were without man!" (*Some Answered Questions* 197).

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the reality that humans embody—mind and spirit—is necessarily present in the world:

[I]t is necessary that the signs of the perfection of the spirit should

be apparent in this world, so that the world of creation may bring forth endless results, and this body may receive life and manifest the divine bounties. . . . [I]f the perfections of the spirit did not appear in this world, this world would be unenlightened and absolutely brutal. By the appearance of the spirit in the physical form, this world is enlightened. As the spirit of man is the cause of the life of the body, so the world is in the condition of the body, and man is in the condition of the spirit. If there were no man, the perfections of the spirit would not appear, and the light of the mind would not be resplendent in this world. This world would be like a body without a soul. (*Some Answered Questions* 200–1)

The appearance of human consciousness is assured because it is woven into the fabric of the universe at the deepest level—that of its laws.

This outline of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments on evolution, while not exhaustive, covers many of the major themes in His comments and provides an overview of His approach, an approach that resolves the apparent differences between science and religion at one of its most contentious dividing points.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

We have systematically explored ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings on evolution and can summarize them succinctly: The process of evolution operates according to universal law and its outcome is the appearance of the human spirit—and divine perfections. Before looking at some of the implications of these teachings, we first briefly describe the current conflict between science and religion over issues pertaining to human evolution. We then outline the Bahá’í perspective on the harmony of science and religion.

CONFLICTING VIEWS OF HUMAN ORIGINS

The tension between science and religion over human origins has its roots

in conflicting views of how man was created. According to European tradition (and cultural traditions strongly influenced by monotheistic religion), man was created—designed—by God. The traditional view is conveyed very effectively by William Paley's argument from design. In his 1828 book *Natural Theology*, Paley argues that the complexity and perfection of living creatures proves the existence of God. Consider a person walking across a heath. If he discovers a watch with its intricate machinery lying on the ground, he would conclude that the watch had an intelligent maker. Similarly, an observer aware of the intricate workings of nature would conclude that an intelligent maker—God—fashioned living things.

Darwin's theory of evolution, in the eyes of many scientists and religionists, contradicts the view that God designed man. These scientists, especially biologists, have argued that there is no need to postulate the existence of an intelligent maker. Evolutionary theories, they argue, provide simple, broad, and fully adequate explanations of the intricate machinery of life in purely material terms. The blind forces of nature, they hold, are responsible for biological complexity. If the blind forces of nature can explain the intricate workings of the natural world, then there is no evidence of an intelligent maker. It follows, according to many, that there is no compelling reason for belief in God.¹² Stephen Jay Gould, for example, has argued that the emergence of man is accidental, a result of blind forces interacting with historical contingencies. He views the evolution of humans as an unlikely event and the appearance of intelligence singularly improbable:

Wind back the tape of life to the origin of the modern multicellular animals in the Cambrian explosion, let the tape play again from this identical starting point, and the replay will populate the earth . . . with a radically different set of creatures. The chance that this alternative set will contain anything remotely like a human being must be effectively nil, while the probability of any kind of creature endowed with self-consciousness must also be extremely small.¹³ (*Full House* 214)

Suppose we accept that humans and their self-consciousness are simply the products of evolutionary processes driven by random chance. It might then seem logical to conclude that an intelligent maker did not create man and that man has no purpose. “The human species,” according to one such conclusion, “was not designed, has no purpose, and is the product of mere mechanical mechanisms” (Futumya 12–13).

Clearly, Darwin’s theory of evolution strongly challenged traditional European religious beliefs about God and the origins of man. The backlash to this challenge has been the emergence of religious movements, usually Christian, that oppose Darwinian evolutionary theories and that frequently promote a literal interpretation of the Biblical creation story. This movement—creationism—encompasses a variety of views with the common theme that Darwinian evolution cannot be correct. Creationists believe their views on human origins to have the backing of sacred scripture and therefore to be superior to evolutionary theory.¹⁴ Creationism has fanned the flames of conflict between science and religion and has lent widespread credence to the belief that religion is inherently irrational. As we will see in the following sections, the Bahá’í Writings advocate a different approach.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION IN THE BAHÁ’Í TEACHINGS

Science and religion, according to the Bahá’í Writings, are “the two most potent forces in human life” (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 204). A central principle of the Bahá’í teachings is that religion must conform to science and reason. True religion and science must agree. This central principle of the Bahá’í Faith has numerous facets, many of which are interrelated. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá often conveys these themes together in His Writings and utterances. We quote several comments from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in support of this central principle.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that science and religion cannot be opposed because they are aspects of the same truth, while at the same time affirming that reasoning powers are required to understand the truths of religion:

It is impossible for religion to be contrary to science . . . God made religion and science to be the measure, as it were, of our understanding. . . . To him who has the power of comprehension religion is like an open book, but how can it be possible for a man devoid of reason and intellectuality to understand the Divine Realities of God? Put all your beliefs into harmony with science; there can be no opposition, for truth is one. (*Paris Talks* 145–46)

He emphasizes that science and religion are aspects of the same reality: “Religion must stand the analysis of reason. It must agree with scientific fact and proof so that science will sanction religion and religion fortify science. Both are indissolubly welded and joined in reality” (*Promulgation* 175). He further declares that religious beliefs must accord with the intellect and the power of reason, otherwise they are merely superstition:

Every religion which is not in accordance with established science is superstition. Religion must be reasonable. If it does not square with reason, it is superstition and without foundation. . . . God has endowed man with reason that he may perceive what is true. If we insist that such and such a subject is not to be reasoned out and tested according to the established logical modes of the intellect, what is the use of the reason which God has given man? . . . It is evident that within the human organism the intellect occupies the supreme station. Therefore, if religious belief, principle or creed is not in accordance with the intellect and the power of reason, it is surely superstition. (*Promulgation* 63–64)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ascribes the majority of the blame for the rift between science and religion to religious claims to superior authority: “Between scientists and the followers of religion there has always been controversy and strife for the reason that the latter have proclaimed religion superior in authority to science and considered scientific announcement opposed to the teachings of religion” (*Promulgation* 231). Religious claims to authority often create conflict between religious sects. One consequence of this

conflict has been to convince many that religion is irrational and not reconcilable with science:

Many religious leaders have grown to think that the importance of religion lies mainly in the adherence to a collection of certain dogmas and the practice of rites and ceremonies. . . .

Now, these forms and rituals differ in the various churches and amongst the different sects, and even contradict one another; giving rise to discord, hatred, and disunion. The outcome of all this dissension is the belief of many cultured men that religion and science are contradictory terms, that religion needs no powers of reflection, and should in no wise be regulated by science, but must of necessity be opposed, the one to the other. The unfortunate effect of this is that science has drifted apart from religion, and religion has become a mere blind and more or less apathetic following of the precepts of certain religious teachers, who insist on their own favourite dogmas being accepted even when they are contrary to science. (*Paris Talks* 143-44)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “There is no contradiction between true religion and science” (*Paris Talks* 141). He pronounces those who hold religion to be opposed to science as failing to distinguish between true and false religion and true and false science:

Any religious belief which is not conformable with scientific proof and investigation is superstition, for true science is reason and reality, and religion is essentially reality and pure reason; therefore, the two must correspond. Religious teaching which is at variance with science and reason is human invention and imagination unworthy of acceptance, for the antithesis and opposite of knowledge is superstition born of the ignorance of man. If we say religion is opposed to science, we lack knowledge of either true science or true religion, for both are founded upon the premises and conclusions of reason, and both must bear its test. (*Promulgation* 107)

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, much of human conflict can be traced to man-made differences between science and religion and between the various religious sects: "Much of the discord and disunion of the world is created by these man-made oppositions and contradictions. If religion were in harmony with science and they walked together, much of the hatred and bitterness now bringing misery to the human race would be at an end" (*Paris Talks* 144).

'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes the indispensability of both science and religion for human progress. An important aspect of this is that science safeguards religion against superstition and religion protects science from dogmatic materialism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá puts it as follows:

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)

IMPLICATIONS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S COMMENTS ON EVOLUTION

The Bahá'í teachings in general, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments in particular, make it clear that science and religion, if properly understood, are in agreement. Does this imply that scientific knowledge can be used to enhance understanding of religion? Can religion enrich scientific understanding? Questions like these raise more general issues about the nature of the agreement between science and religion. In the following, we use 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on evolution to explore some of these issues from a Bahá'í perspective.

SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND AUTHORITY

Central to any discussion about the relationship between science and religion

is the question about the extent to which each enjoys authority. The Bahá'í perspective is that "religion which is not in accordance with established science is superstition." While this seems to suggest that religion must accept current scientific knowledge as authoritative, this is not necessarily always the case. The present scientific point of view is not always correct, nor is the truth limited to only what science can explain.¹⁵

Ultimately, according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the worth of a given science is determined by whether or not it leads to love of God: "Every kind of knowledge, every science, is as a tree: if the fruit of it be the love of God, then is it a blessed tree, but if not, that tree is but dried-up wood, and shall only feed the fire" (*Selections* 181). In a similar vein, He describes science without religion as blocking progress by leading man to "fall into the despairing slough of materialism" (*Paris Talks* 143). Thus, we can characterize the Bahá'í Writings as saying that religion must be in conformity with reason and science, and that science should not be misused to turn people's hearts away from God.

AGREEMENT OF RELIGION WITH SCIENCE

Let us consider whether or not 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments on evolution are in agreement with the truths of the evolutionary sciences. Clearly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá espouses an evolutionary perspective as the framework for understanding the emergence of man. He describes man as evolving through stages, starting in the mineral kingdom, then moving through the vegetable and animal kingdoms before arriving in the human kingdom. He also describes life as developing from a single origin by a slow process over extremely long periods of time. Thus, He embraces an evolutionary viewpoint that is in broad general agreement with that of the biological sciences: the earth is very ancient, life evolved from simple origins, man evolved through the animal world, and man's attributes are a consequence of his evolution.

DEPARTURES FROM THE CONVENTIONAL INTERPRETATION

Aspects of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's thought are at odds with certain conventional

interpretations of evolution. He emphasizes that humans, while sharing characteristics in common with the animals, are in some fundamental ways distinct and different from them. He also emphasizes—repeatedly—that humans have always existed, either potentially or in actuality. He explains evolution by analogy with the development of an embryo or a seed. Much as a tree exists potentially in a seed or as an adult exists potentially in an embryo, man is present at the beginning in the evolutionary process. He thus describes evolutionary mechanisms of development not only as intrinsic to the growth of life on earth (and an essential aspect of spiritual development), but as the unfolding of God's creation. He stresses that man—and all the rest of creation—is created by God.

Do these seeming departures from the conventional interpretation of evolution conflict with the Bahá'í view that religion should be in conformity with science? Are they assertions that modern scientific understandings of evolution are wrong or incomplete? When considering these questions, we should be careful to distinguish between factual accuracy, an area where science often has indisputable authority, and metaphysics, philosophy, and ideology, areas where science has no special privilege. Because 'Abdu'l-Bahá classifies any religious belief that contradicts established science as superstition, it is unlikely that He would endorse a view that dismissed recognized bodies of scientific truth (like the evolutionary sciences) as factually wrong. It is likely, therefore, that His departures from the conventional interpretation of evolution are due to disagreements with the metaphysical, philosophical, and ideological aspects of those interpretations, not with scientific findings.

Man Is Not an Animal

Consider, for example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's insistence that man is a distinct species, not an "animal." Taxonomically scientists place *Homo sapiens* as one species in the order of primates, along with apes and monkeys—a classification based on humans' biological similarity to the primates. 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines man as a separate species on the basis of those qualities that differentiate humans from animals—their rational faculties, for

example—so there is no intrinsic contradiction. Indeed, the differences between man and the animals in many aspects are significant and obvious, suggesting that purely biological classification schemes are inadequate. Classifying man as an animal, while perhaps useful for narrowly defined scientific goals, ignores both human rational and spiritual aspects, making it misleading as guidance for wider philosophical explorations. Recognizing humans' special nature—their rational faculty and spiritual capacity—as a category of considerable significance opens up to discussion those aspects of life that are unique to humans, such as science, art, ethics, and the possibility of a peaceful global civilization.

The Missing Link

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, hominid forms intermediate between humans and their primate ancestors had not been discovered. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have stated that a "missing link" between man and the animals would never be found: "Between man and the ape, however, there is one link missing, and to the present time scientists have not been able to discover it. . . . It will never be found" (*Promulgation* 358–59).

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the fossil record is much more complete, although new discoveries continually challenge and alter existing understandings. Fossils of many early hominid forms have been found and a family tree has been constructed for the human species. Do earlier hominid forms, having substantial anatomical differences from modern humans, constitute the missing link, negating 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assertion that it would never be discovered? In the talk in which He discusses the missing link, 'Abdu'l-Bahá underscores that theories of evolution claiming human beings to be descended from the animals concern themselves solely with human anatomical characteristics:

[T]he philosophers of the West have certain syllogisms, or demonstrations, whereby they endeavor to prove that man had his origin in the animal kingdom; that although he is now a vertebrate, he originally

lived in the sea; from thence he was transferred to the land and became vertebrate; that gradually his feet and hands appeared in his anatomical development; then he began to walk upon all fours, after which he attained to human stature, walking erect. They find that his anatomy has undergone successive changes, finally assuming human form, and that these intermediate forms or changes are like links connected. . . . Therefore, the greatest proof of this western theory of human evolution is anatomical. . . . (*Promulgation* 358)

Other philosophies, in contrast, describe reason as man's essential reality, separating humans from the animals:

The materialistic philosophers of the West declare that man belongs to the animal kingdom, whereas the philosophers of the East—such as Plato, Aristotle and the Persians—divide the world of existence or phenomena of life into two general categories or kingdoms: one the animal kingdom, or world of nature, the other the human kingdom, or world of reason.

Man is distinguished above the animals through his reason. (*Promulgation* 356–57)

'Abdu'l-Bahá endorses this point of view. Man clearly has scientific attainments attributable to the faculty of reason, attainments animals fail to possess. The "missing link" between man and the apes thus signifies the distinction between the human and animal kingdoms: "The lost link of Darwinian theory is itself a proof that man is not an animal. How is it possible to have all the links present and that important link absent? Its absence is an indication that man has never been an animal. It will never be found. The significance is this: that the world of humanity is distinct from the animal kingdom" (*Promulgation* 359).

So in the Bahá'í view, while humans are anatomically connected with the animals, their true reality, which is intellectual and spiritual, is distinct and separate.¹⁶

Man Has Always Existed

‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that man has always existed. Even when man did not physically exist, or when he existed in a form different than he has today, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that he nonetheless existed. In His comments on evolution, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá frequently uses the analogies of the development of a mature plant from a seed and the development of an adult from an embryo. In many of His other comments and writings, He describes similar developmental processes that transform potentiality into actuality. Thus, before humans physically existed, their existence was potential, like the existence of the tree in the seed, or the full adult form in the embryo.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s standpoint is very simple but subtle. Two factors may make His argument difficult to grasp for those accustomed to modern debates about human origins. The first factor is that evolutionary processes are often thought to proceed without goals or purpose. The second factor is that it is difficult to see how the very simple constituents of primordial matter—subatomic particles and the like—could contain within them instructions for building the biological complexity of man. What is it in the structure of reality that allows human existence to become realized? From a scientific perspective, what allows mankind’s existence must be built into the laws of nature. Of course, certain conditions have to be met before human existence becomes a reality, that is, a planet must be at a suitable distance from its star and have a suitable atmosphere, chemical composition, water content, and so on. But these are conditions that are made possible by the laws of nature. Therefore, it follows that the laws of nature contain within themselves everything that brings about man’s existence. An important consequence of this thesis is that it locates both the possibility and the current actuality of the existence of man in the laws underlying the entire universe.

The Laws of Nature Embody God’s Will

The view that humankind was created through the laws of nature differs from a traditional Western Christian stance, which holds humans to have

been created by the miraculous intervention of God. In contrast, 'Abdu'l-Bahá ascribes the origins and evolution of man—indeed of all life—to natural developmental and evolutionary processes. This view equates the scientific understanding of human origins with a religious perspective unencumbered by ancient dogmas and superstitions. 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes the central role of evolutionary processes and calls attention to parallels that exist between physical and spiritual development (*Promulgation* 131). He identifies evolution as a universal divine law: "The organization of God is one; the evolution of existence is one; the divine system is one. Whether they be small or great beings, all are subject to one law and system" (*Some Answered Questions* 199).

Bahá'u'lláh describes the laws of nature as an expression of God's will: "Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world" (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 142). A corollary of this is that God's creation of human beings has been effected through natural law.

COMPLEXITY AND 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ'S COMMENTS ON EVOLUTION

Complexity theory offers an increasingly popular way to probe the interplay of historical contingency and natural law responsible for the persistent increase of complexity in the universe. Although still an emerging field, it has brought important new perspectives to the study of evolution.¹⁷ Questions it poses are central to the discussion of human evolution: In a universe with omnipresent randomness, where does order come from?¹⁸ What in the structure of physical law gives rise to complexity?¹⁹ Is the emergence of life probable or improbable? Is evolution governed by general laws (see Kauffman, *Investigations*)? Are intelligence and consciousness inevitable (see Simonton; Byrne)?

A compelling interpretation of what we know about the history of the universe is that it can be characterized as an unfolding of greater levels of complexity leading from primordial matter to galaxies, stars, and planets

and eventually to life. Throughout all of the processes responsible for these unfoldings—processes at scales ranging from the subatomic to the cosmological—randomness plays a role. Chance and law (see Monod) work together in this grand scheme to produce the complex universe we see today. Randomness is the engine that drives the relentless discovery of new complex configurations of matter, and therefore is indispensable to evolution at all levels. Therefore, the presence of randomness as a central mechanism of biological evolution does not contradict the idea that God created man.

The complexity theory approach to evolution exhibits strong parallels with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings. It suggests that general laws govern evolution, in resonance with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s assertion that evolution conforms to universal law. Complexity theory states that new properties emerge from complex configurations of matter, mirroring ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s affirmation that man’s perfections are an outcome of his physical makeup. Complexity theory strongly suggests that intelligence and consciousness are the inevitable results of evolution, echoing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s principle that man is necessarily present in the universe. From both viewpoints, human beings are the product of historical processes as well as the long-awaited expression of underlying order latent in the laws of nature (see Kauffman, *At Home* 149–89). Championing these ideas, the physicist Freeman Dyson declares: “I do not feel like an alien in this universe. The more I examine the universe and study the details of its architecture the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known we were coming” (250).

CONCLUSION

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s comments on evolution show that belief in divine creation and evolutionary thought are compatible, illustrating the Bahá’í principle of the unity of science and religion. Here we briefly examine some of the wider implications. A central issue is how we view ourselves: Is man just an animal or is he something more? Does man have purpose or not? Other questions concern the relationship of science and religion: Is religion

compatible with science? How do science and religion contribute to the development of a peaceful global civilization? Are science and religion both necessary?

We have seen that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments on evolution support the view that physically humans are the product of the natural processes responsible for animals and all living beings. Animals, and most other living beings, are captive to nature—they cannot deviate from a range of behaviors imposed on them by evolution (see Wilson). If man is simply an animal, it follows that animal behavioral patterns—conflict, aggression, and the like—are inherent, inescapable, and ineradicable aspects of human nature as violence and conflict are chronic and permanent realities in the animal world.²⁰ If man is an animal, he cannot be held individually responsible for his actions, nor does it follow that he is capable of altering them. Similarly, if man is solely a product of the random mechanisms of evolution, then he was not created with a purpose. An attitude of hopelessness and meaninglessness—"the despairing slough of materialism" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks* 143)—seems to be the unavoidable consequence of such beliefs.²¹

To 'Abdu'l-Bahá, man is much more than an animal. Man has a three-fold reality, He asserts:

Man is endowed with an outer or physical reality. It belongs to the material realm, the animal kingdom, because it has sprung from the material world. This animalistic reality of man he shares in common with the animals.

The human body is like animals subject to nature's laws. But man is endowed with a second reality, the rational or intellectual reality; and the intellectual reality of man predominates over nature. . . .

Yet there is a third reality in man, the spiritual reality. (*Foundations* 51)

Man's physical nature is rooted in the animal kingdom. Evolution has left its imprint on us: we are constrained by the need for food, shelter, sleep, and other physical necessities. But human beings, unlike animals, are not slaves

to nature's command. Their rational mind and spiritual capacity open to them a vast range of choices not available to animals. Aggression, selfishness, and conflict, far from being inescapable aspects of human individuals and society, are the outward signs of undeveloped spiritual potential.

One of the unique capacities of man is science. 'Abdu'l-Bahá maintains that science is a divine gift: "The virtues of humanity are many, but science is the most noble of them all. The distinction which man enjoys above and beyond the station of the animal is due to this paramount virtue. It is a bestowal of God; it is not material; it is divine" (*Promulgation* 49). 'Abdu'l-Bahá urges humanity to apply its scientific powers to unify the human race:

"How shall we utilize these gifts and expend these bounties [science]? By directing our efforts toward the unification of the human race. We must use these powers in establishing the oneness of the world of humanity, appreciate these virtues by accomplishing the unity of whites and blacks, devote this divine intelligence to the perfecting of amity and concord among all branches of the human family. . . ." (*Promulgation* 51).

Another unique human capacity is religion. "The essential purpose of the religion of God," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "is to establish unity among mankind" (*Promulgation* 202). "It is evident," He asserts elsewhere, "that the fundamentals of religion are intended to unify and bind together; their purpose is universal, everlasting peace" (*Promulgation* 97). As we have seen, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that true religion and science do not conflict with each other, nor does science obviate the need for religion.

'Abdu'l-Bahá declares that both religion and science should direct their services towards a common goal: the unity of humanity. When their harmony becomes widely understood, this will set into motion processes that will convert conflict and struggle into peace and unity: "When religion, shorn of its superstitions, traditions, and unintelligent dogmas, shows its conformity with science, then will there be a great unifying, cleansing force in the world which will sweep before it all wars, disagreements, discords and struggles—and then will mankind be united in the power of the Love of God" (*Paris Talks* 146).

The enterprise of creating a peaceful global civilization is a formidable

one. If it is to be accomplished, both science and religion must be brought into play. Science trains and develops humanity's intellectual capacity, frees humanity from ignorance and superstition, and provides the material, technological, and wealth-creating mechanisms that make a global civilization possible. Religion provides the spiritual and moral impetus that takes the benefits of science and directs them into appropriate application. Religion trains and develops humanity's spiritual capacity, identifies and establishes the moral and ethical foundations of society, and provides a universally compelling vision of the goal to be achieved. Without both science and religion, a peaceful and unified world civilization is impossible.

NOTES

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to Stephen Johnson, Francis Ratnieks, Safa Sadeghpour, Ron Shigeta, Kelly Snook, and Ron Somerby for valuable discussions on the themes covered in this paper. They would also like to thank Matthew Weinberg and Safa Sadeghpour for commenting on the manuscript before publication.

A version of this paper was presented at the 24th Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada, on 1 September 2000.

1. See Barbour; Brooke; Gould, *Rocks of Ages*; McGrath; Polkinghorne; Richardson and Wildman.

2. From a letter to the High Commissioner for Palestine, June 1933.

3. From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, dated 19 May 1995.

4. This article will consider only a general position about evolution that was prevalent in the Christian West, as it is the one to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá was specifically responding. The position of other religions with respect to evolution is outside the scope of the paper. For a discussion of the nineteenth-century reception of Darwin's theory of evolution in the Middle East and its relationship to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments, see Brown.

5. The view of evolution and religion that this article describes 'Abdu'l-Bahá

as engaging with is of necessity generalized, but it represents the general view His audience most likely had in mind when they asked Him about the topic.

6. See Barrow and Tipler; Davies, *Accidental Universe*; Eiseley.

7. See Kauffman, *At Home*; Axelrod.

8. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses the Persian word *naw’*—translated as “species”—which has the broad sense of “kind” or “category.”

9. Fossils of the earliest known hominid species, *Australopithecus anamensis* were discovered in Ethiopia and Kenya. Living slightly more than four million years ago, Australopithecines were bipedal, a trait which may be taken as the first hominid adaptation. Many other species of hominids inhabited the earth before modern *Homo sapiens* appeared about one hundred thousand years ago. The physical features of hominids (bipedal locomotion, large brain, slender build, etc.) were unique adaptations that have been seen nowhere else in the animal world. It is, therefore, evident that humans are unique even in the physical sense. See Lewin, *Origin*, and Tattersall, *Becoming Human*, for reviews of human evolution.

10. The human spirit and the human or rational soul designate one thing. See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 208–9.

11. The continuity of human existence is dependent upon the continuous presence of stars and planetary systems that are home to life and evolution. Bahá’u’lláh affirms that the earth is not the only planet to host life: “The learned men, that have fixed at several thousand years the life of this earth, have failed, throughout the long period of their observation, to consider either the number or the age of the other planets. Consider, moreover, the manifold divergencies that have resulted from the theories propounded by these men. Know thou that every fixed star hath its own planets, and every planet its own creatures, whose number no man can compute” (*Gleanings* 163).

12. Robert Wright has remarked that evolution may obviate the need to posit a God that designs organisms, but it does not rule out a God who designed the machine (natural selection) that designs organisms (see *Nonzero* 294).

13. Intelligence, consciousness, and self-consciousness are terms used interchangeably in the literature to refer to the unique cognitive abilities of humans.

14. For an exploration of creationism from the point of view of a biologist who is a believing Christian, see Miller, *Finding Darwin’s God*.

15. The nature of scientific knowledge has been the subject of vigorous and

controversial debates by philosophers, historians, and sociologists. For a balanced overview of these debates, see Kitcher; Klee. For an eminent scientist's response, see Weinberg:

16. Above we discuss parallels between 'Abdu'l-Bahá's approach to evolution and that of complexity theory. According to the latter, biological species constitute quasi-stable points (sometimes called attractors) of a complex dynamical system. Stable points in the state-space—the space of biological possibilities—are discrete. Transitions between states are sharp and the distinctions between them can be dramatic. If the human species constitutes an attractor in biological state-space, complexity theory suggests that there may be no link, in terms of traits, that connects the human species with other species. Thus, complexity theory may offer an explanation of why the missing link will never be found.

17. See Lewin, *Complexity*; Wright, *Nonzero*; Kauffman, *At Home*.

18. Quantum mechanics—one of the pillars of modern physics—is a theory of probabilities. Thus, randomness is embedded in the very structure of the laws of the universe.

19. Complexity theorists ascribe the accumulation of complexity in the biosphere not to mutation and natural selection alone, as Neo-Darwinism contends, but also to the intrinsic self-organizing properties of complex systems. See Kauffman, *At Home*.

20. The emerging discipline of evolutionary psychology attempts to explain a great deal—perhaps the majority—of human behavior in Darwinian terms, i.e., as determined genetically, either directly or indirectly through the creation of “mental organs.” For a review of evolutionary psychology, see Wright. Conversely, a group of distinguished scientists and scholars has condemned the misuse of evolutionary theory to justify the existence of war and violence in the *Seville Statement on Violence*, which was adopted by UNESCO in 1989.

21. See also Universal House of Justice 28.

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Book Reviews

Postnationalism Prefigured: Caribbean Borderlands by Charles V. Carnegie.
New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002. xii + 241 pages,
including notes, references, index.

LIN POYER

Bahá'í communities have offered themselves as a model of the world of the future. What will that world look like? For many people, scenarios of the future are depressing: will racism and nationalism result in an ever-greater increase in armed conflicts? Will globalization smother local cultures, producing a drab sameness worldwide? Will a giant global state reproduce the ills of nation-states on a larger scale?

Bahá'ís know that there is a more positive way to envision the “post-nationalist” future—the future as the era of nation-states draws to its end. Carnegie’s book gives us an expert angle on that future from the perspective of a cultural anthropologist. He argues that we can use historical and contemporary Caribbean societies—and Bahá'ís—to explore “forms of community suited to our transnational circumstances” (1). While many social scientists studying race, nationalism, and transnationalism have explored “the condition of the world as it is,” and how that has come about through history, he writes, “I am equally interested in urging readers to think about what and how the world might become” (8).

Well-written, rich with local detail and fascinating history, this book nonetheless requires careful reading and a tolerance for sometimes complex sociocultural theory. Carnegie’s book begins with a summary of the liabilities of nation-states, including the problematic intersection of “racial” identity with citizenship. Nation-states are beset by internal problems, and at the same time are caught up in transnational trends over which they have little control: money, people, and ideas flow ever more rapidly across the old national borders. At the same time, globalization proceeds with little structured support for human rights or needs. This is

the modern dilemma; Carnegie writes: “[B]etween the contradiction and instabilities of the nation-state and the compulsory but undemocratic character of the global system, people everywhere find themselves caught between the devil and the deep blue sea” (6).

Luckily, the deep blue sea is the Caribbean, and here Carnegie thinks we can find some guideposts (or channel-markers) to a desirable future.

In the Caribbean islands and coasts, ethnic diversity, problematic nationalism, cultural synthesis, porous boundaries, and transnational flows of money and people have been part of life for five hundred years. What can we learn from this dynamic world region that can help us understand more widespread global processes?

In the book's first section, entitled “Struggling with and against Race and Nation,” Carnegie uses his own personal identity to dissect complexly entwined ideas of race, identity, and nation. Jamaican-born Carnegie is a Caribbean albino—a person who lacks visible “blackness” and so confuses cultural categories, thus letting us see those categories in highlighted relief. Carnegie expertly uses historical and ethnographic data to explore how racialized thinking permeates Caribbean nationalist discourse and politics. He argues that the idea of human oneness, far from being a simple platitude, has to be understood deeply and elaborated thoroughly if it is to counter deep-seated racialized thinking, even in a place like the Caribbean where mixed and creolized identities are familiar. In the following chapter, Carnegie explores the theoretical context in which he develops his approach to how nationalist ideologies are constructed and maintained. Nation-states make their existence, and their citizens' identities, seem natural; a strong counterweight of cultural analysis is needed to “contest nationalism's stranglehold on our consciousness” (49). The wonderful complexity of the historical and modern Caribbean gives Carnegie a broad canvas on which to “contest nationalist ideologies” (51) by exploring how ideas of racial identity have both constrained and assisted efforts of Caribbean peoples to find freedom and prosperity.

“Our present vision of a global order,” Carnegie comments, “consists of little more than a conglomeration of nation-states” (64). What can help us imagine the different forms a global future might take? In a section entitled

“Nation and Transnation,” Carnegie proposes that the Caribbean, with its international flows of people, goods, and ideas, offers insight into creating “global-local community” (81): how to maintain a global sensibility, while also encouraging vibrant local cultures. A chapter based on his ethnographic research into small-scale international marketers (called “speculators” in St. Lucia) shows how these inter-island entrepreneurs use and manage transnationalism. Their “strategic flexibility has a counter-hegemonic quality” (111) that offers one alternative way to view the nation-state and its borders.

Part 3, “Prefiguring the Postnational,” provides us three other alternative models. One is the engrossing history of the active movement of enslaved Africans and their descendants, who traversed the seas and islands as sailors, escapees, maroons, and travelers. Carnegie’s description of “motion in the current of freedom” (117)—a wonderful phrase—opens a way of “reframing narratives of the past to raise questions about the present” (137). What if, instead of thinking of the Caribbean past in terms of fixed racial identities and rigid borders, we recognized its full complexity? Instead of Caribbean “roots” (in Native, African, and/or European ancestors), Carnegie proposes that we look at “routes”: how people then and now moved and intersected and transgressed colonial and post-colonial efforts to fix boundaries and identities.

The penultimate chapter, about Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, argues that a convincing vision of a transnational future depends not only on shared political and economic interests, but also on shared culture and religion: symbols, rituals, and beliefs that link people across borders. Garvey “needed to appeal to divine authority for a radical change in the prevailing order” (158) in order to build an effective international constituency. Despite the racialistic essentialism and patriarchalism evident in Garvey’s ideology, he built such a convincing vision of the future across and beyond the borders of nation-states that the countries affected by the UNIA were seriously worried about its success. It is ironic that Garvey has been adopted by Jamaica as a national hero; in Carnegie’s view, his heroism was creatively transnational.

By the end of the book, Carnegie’s theoretical argument is clear. “Race”

and “nation” must be deconstructed thoroughly in order for us to begin to envision futures beyond the limitations of nation-state organization. Evidence from the Caribbean’s history and present show us that there are flexible, effective, and creative movements and behaviors already in existence that propose alternative ways to live. The history of the Caribbean, and Marcus Garvey’s successful motivation of large numbers of peoples of African descent throughout the Americas to embrace a transnational vision, indicate the power of religion and of cultural symbols to generate such movements. But Garveyism is dead, and in any case its race-based appeal is quite inadequate to the needs of the moment. What, then?

The final chapter concludes the argument by presenting the Bahá'í global community as a model that satisfies the requisites this book has laid out for envisioning new futures. After presenting a brief history and summary of Bahá'u'lláh’s teachings, Carnegie explains how “Bahá'u'lláh’s far-reaching conceptual reorientation directly addresses the ideological limitations of race and nation” (182) while avoiding the truism of a simple assertion of our common humanity. How does the Bahá'í Faith meet the challenge of empowering both the local and the global, and linking them effectively? First, through powerful religious symbols and concepts that allow people to think about unity and diversity in new ways, replacing the divisive metaphor of “shared blood” with the refreshing and creative metaphor of diverse flowers within a garden, for example. Second, by giving Bahá'ís around the world the “commonplace experience” of belonging both to a distinctive local community and a global culture (e.g., through a universal calendar and culturally variable Feasts). (Although this dual consciousness may be “commonplace” for Bahá'ís, Carnegie reminds us that it is rare and precious in a world caught up in the disjuncture between the local and the global.) Carnegie adds a satisfactory link to this final chapter by presenting a brief history of the Jamaican Bahá'í community. Significantly, some of the early Jamaican Bahá'ís were Garveyites, important and active members in the waning UNIA as they also were important and active members of the growing Bahá'í community.

“The tendency to think of the local and the global as inherently

oppositional and the related fear that the latter must necessarily eclipse the former has perhaps inhibited scholars' efforts to theorize world community and seriously consider movements that promote it" (189), Carnegie writes. He criticizes the overwhelmingly negative approach that most scholars have taken to transnational and globalization studies, with their focus on colonialism, imperialism, consumerism, cheap labor, and war; "Global cultural and social forms are, in other words, conceived of largely in negative terms" (193). He sees a great need for scholars to start to think creatively about places—like the Caribbean, or communities—like the Bahá'ís, that offer innovative models of future possibilities. "To achieve a global vision and global citizenship," he concludes, "we must be endowed 'with a new eye, a new ear, a new heart, and a new mind' (Bahá'u'lláh 1983, 196)" (199).

In the book's first chapter, Carnegie writes that his "larger aim is to kindle a renewed passion for sustaining a condition of global belonging that nurtures the positive features of localized, patriotic attachments but does away with the fundamental contradictions inherent in the present-day nation-state order" (8). This book will kindle the reader's passion for helping that condition emerge, provide solid theoretical backing for asserting that it is practical, and outline ways in which the Bahá'í community creates that condition for its members.

The Wellbeing of Nations: A Country-by-Country Index of Quality of Life and the Environment by Robert Prescott-Allen Washington: Island Press/Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001. xiii + 322 pages; tables, appendices, references, index.

KIM NAQVI

Two years ago, at a colloquium on sub-Saharan Africa, a colleague raised an uncomfortable question. How, she asked, can we teach about broad social and economic patterns without stereotyping sub-Saharan Africa as region of deprivation? Most students encounter sub-Saharan Africa in an introductory social science elective, without the context of colonial history and cultural diversity. Mass-produced texts, with repetitious maps of GDP per capita; birth, death, and fertility rates; available calories; and urbanization present a patchwork quilt of data with one recurring hole in the center. Such false comparison with the supposedly unqualified success of older industrialized countries dulls and disempowers the curious mind. One achievement of Prescott-Allen's *The Wellbeing of Nations* is to provide alternatives to this map. For those applying the Bahá'í International Community's development publications in search of counterweights to material measures of well-being, this work identifies new patterns and raises new questions.

The Wellbeing of Nations applies the 1996 Bellagio principles for assessing sustainable development at the global and nation-state scale. It presents the rationale for and results of two new indices for both critical evaluation and application. But it is also a valuable resource for the critical researcher and instructor looking for new data and visuals, and the increasingly skeptical mainstream researcher looking for new explanations for old failures. In addition to proposing new indices for human well-being (HWI) and ecosystem well-being (EWI), the book reviews existing development measures. Most of the book comprises appendices of explanation and data, and readers would do well to tackle appendices A and B after the introductory chapter for a thorough background on the rationale.

All development research and measures are normative, and the guiding

norm for *The Wellbeing of Nations* is the concept of sustainable development. Here, it is applied with the particular assumption that human and ecosystem well-being are of equal importance. The proposed HWI and EWI are each further defined through five elements and ten sub-elements, captured through over fifty indicators. Results for indicators, elements, and indices are then ranked from 0 to 100, with qualitative ranks from “bad” to “good” calculated separately for each indicator. They are also mapped, although an unfortunate color choice makes the ordinal scale difficult to read. From this analysis, Prescott-Allen produces two further indices, a two-dimensional well-being measure (WI), which graphs HWI versus EWI; and a well-being stress ratio (WSI) of human well-being to shortfall in ecosystem well-being (that is, $\text{HWI}/[\text{EWI}-100]$).

Assigning equal weight to human and ecosystem well-being might seem arbitrary, but the WI's strength is transparency and readability. Causal assumptions about human and ecosystem interaction are left to policy makers and planners responding to conditions identified in the WI graph. Despite its obvious limitations, a WI average is also used as a general measure of “distance from sustainability.”

Transparency and simplicity of measures are key requirements of the Bellagio principles. They require that indicators reflect a framework which links vision and goals to measures, are described in simple language, are based on readily available data, are generated with broad participation, include policy recommendations, and can be replicated and improved. In brief, they are a commitment to open communication, participation, and practical action.

Prescott-Allen compares the HWI and EWI to the established Human Development Index (HDI) and ecological footprint. The HWI arguably improves upon the HDI by including controversial and more complex measures such as community, equity, knowledge, and communication, and by refining health and education measures. It captures distance from an ideal, rather than distance from destitution, thus mapping a broader range of well-being, lowering the rank of most countries, and reducing the gap between Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Most elements of the HWI are linearly related, with the telling exception of equity. This makes the index

both easy to interpret, and fertile ground for further critical analysis. Regional blocs of missing data do affect the strength of inflation, unemployment, basic services, public debt, corruption, and household equity indicators, while the selection and availability of others reflect Western cultural biases. There are no measures for culture, no sub-national measures for community, or sub-household measures of equity or structure, and no differentiation between the acquisition of new knowledge and the loss of traditional knowledge. These gaps are not unnoticed by the author, nor reflective of his views. But their absence at the national scale does illustrate why development research is increasingly done at local scales, where a greater complexity of well-being determinants can be investigated.

One odd categorization, with tremendous significance for overall rankings, is the categorization of low fertility as “good,” even when it drops below population replacement rates. The impact of aging populations on financial systems, population distribution, immigration patterns, and ethnic strife is increasingly hard to ignore, and its absence is a conspicuous limitation.

While the HWI broadens the range of well-being, the EWI radically changes world patterns. No country ranks as “good,” and those ranked “fair” are in less-industrialized countries. Most older industrialized countries and industrializing countries are in “poor” shape. However, only two of the EWI’s five elements are linearly related, making the index difficult to interpret. This complexity leaves the reader wishing for fewer or simpler indicators, as reading each distinct summary becomes an information overload. On the other hand, it accurately reflects ecosystem complexity, diversity, and disjunction with national boundaries. While the cross-boundary nature of ecosystems and resource use is addressed through adjustments to individual indicators, the variability of nation-state size, shape, population distribution, and trade relations still weakens the index at times. Nation-states with large, sparsely populated areas have higher EWI ranks for land and water than small densely populated areas. Yet this difference reflects national resource endowment, not local well-being. Likewise, heavily transformed areas of ancient civilization may be ranked lower than more recently urbanized areas, even though a long-term balance

may have deteriorated only recently. Prescott-Allen does note that EWI's measurement needs to be taken in broader regional context. However, additional adjustments should to be made for national population patterns. Also, regional scale measures of resource use will not capture globalized trade. Tying imports and high HWI in specific countries to exports and low EWI in others would be a complex, but valuable, extension of basic ecosystem rankings. Finally, regional patterns of missing data for inland water, local air quality, and plant species may artificially raise some ranks in less-industrialized countries.

Regional reviews of the WI and WSI are left to the reader. Here, it is sufficient to note two patterns. First, the two-dimensional WI also produces a new map of well-being. No country has both a high HWI and EWI, so the remaining general categories of low HWI and high EWI, high HWI and low EWI, and low HWI and EWI are mapped. Again, a poor color scheme renders interpretation virtually impossible, but two observations stand out. First, many countries with both low HWI and EWI are those undergoing rapid industrialization. Second, EWI varies in all groups, despite an overall trend to decline as HWI rises. This, Prescott-Allen argues, is evidence that human well-being does not necessarily require ecosystem destruction.

The second notable pattern is that countries with high HWI still cluster in one group. The HWI has higher values than the EWI, so simple arithmetic isolates high HWI countries in any comparative measure. Thus, maps of the WI average and WSI ratio produce the old familiar patterns of "well-off" and "poorly off" countries, with some exceptions. True, "well-off" countries are now ranked "medium" or "poor," rather than "good," but the overall geographic distribution can also be used by the skeptic to argue that ecosystem destruction is a necessary consequence of improving human well-being. Hence, the map of the two-dimensional WI is more effective at capturing worldwide development diversity, while the maps of WSI and the WI average capture worldwide low ecosystem well-being.

There are so many ways to measure development and well-being that to criticize Prescott-Allen's extensive effort seems almost petty. The new

HWI is fertile ground for application and comparative analysis. It should be adjusted for new concerns about aging, which would break the bloc of high HWI-high income countries. The EWI combines a wealth of material but is difficult to interpret. One wonders if its separate components are more valuable for detailed research. Poor graphics are an unfortunate handicap, sometimes masking critically important information. Policy recommendations, while integral to the Bellagio principles, seem to draw on general principles of sustainable development rather than specific observations of the study. Inevitable shortcomings aside, Prescott-Allen has produced an extensive, original, and valuable work, with practical applications for the researcher, instructor, and planner. *The Wellbeing of Nations* turns up in required course readings and in policy presentations. However, a search of citation indices found no academic citations or reviews. Given its practical and research potential, let us hope that will change.

Biographical Notes

SUHEIL BUSHRUI was appointed as the first holder of the Bahá'í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland, College Park, in 1992. A distinguished author, poet, critic, and translator, and the recipient of many awards, he is the foremost authority on the works of Kahlil Gibran. His publications include *The Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: Aspects of the Sublime*, *Kahlil Gibran, Man and Poet: A New Biography* (co-authored with Joe Jenkins); and *The Wisdom of the Arabs*.

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STEPHEN R. FRIBERG is trained as a physicist and has written more than forty-five scientific articles on optical telecommunications and quantum physics. He is a founding member of the Science and Religion Special Interest Group of the Association for Bahá'í Studies–North America, the Association for Bahá'í Studies–Japan, and the Bahá'í Bay Area Entrepreneurial Network and currently serves as secretary of the Association for Bahá'í Studies California Area Committee. He is president and CEO of Lambda Control, Inc., an optical telecommunications start-up, and is a visiting scholar at Stanford University.

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COUROSH MEHANIAN completed bachelor's degrees in physics and mathematics at the University of Pennsylvania, and a PhD in physics at Cornell University. He did postdoctoral research in artificial intelligence at Boston University, focusing on models of early visual processing in mammals. At MIT, he shifted his attention to computer vision. Subsequently, he became involved in applications of computer vision to medical imaging and semiconductor quality control. He currently works as a research and development manager at KLA-Tencor Corporation.

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