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Towards the Enlightened Society

Some thoughts about the critique of western society have been rattling round in my head lately, particularly as regards the relation of the individual to society. A few years ago I was very much influenced by the liberation theologians, whose critique of western society and individualistic theology was very much influenced by Marxist critiques of western capitalism. A critique of individualism as the character-fault of Western society finds ready acceptance in the Bahá'í community. As time goes by, and history works itself out, I begin
to think that this view of modern western society, or modern western history, may be entirely wrong. The question comes down to deciding whether some key trends in post-enlightenment history are part of the creative, or the disintegrative, processes which we know are occurring.

What I am beginning to question is a view shared by Marxists, many Liberation theologians, and some Bahá'ís, who see the individuation of society which accelerated so sharply at the enlightenment as a disintegrative, negative, movement. At its most positive, individuation is seen as the regrettable side-effect of epistemological freedom, a side-effect for which remedies are sought. Medieval society had been integrated: the people and the land, the worker and his produce, the classes of society, the church and the community, were bound in coherent (meaningful) relationships. These relationships have been radically disrupted, and we are in search of a new basis on which the integrated society can be re-established. Materialism is the replacement of the principle of position which characterised feudal society by the principle of property - a principle which no longer gives everyone a place, however lowly, because it is a principle of things. Individualism is a disintegrative philosophy on which nothing can be built. In literature Pound and Eliot express this backward-looking philosophy most forcefully, not advocated a return to the

past, but looking to the society of the past - the integrated society - for their model of what a society is. We see this in the use of images of past 'ideal' societies in the Cantos and The Waste Land and Four Quartets, and in the gestures towards an integrated model in The Rock. According to this view, the integrated but technologically inferior societies of the world are being swamped and destroyed by the virus of individualism which accompanies the spread of Western Society. In theology, the critique of individualism means 'grass-roots communities', house-churches, a theological critique of the competitive basis of capitalism as sinful, a view of the individual as essentially social (the human exists only as a social animal, we are 'becoming human together'), and of sin and salvation as social phenomena: original sin is the structural sin of society which distorts our humanity. In the Bahá'í version of this, western society is progressively disintegrating as its religion loses force, and excessive individualism is one of the secondary causes of this - perhaps the characteristic ill of western society. This disintegrative process represents the negative phase of cyclic evolution whose overall thrust is towards ever larger circles of integration, from the family group to the clan, from clan to city-state to nation and ultimately to world integration. Where other religions have offered individual salvation, the Bahá'í Faith offers social salvation.

Marxist societies are likewise disintegrating, but I have not noticed any Bahá'í explanation of what particularly are their shortcomings. While we have been able to take over the Marxist explanation of the inevitable (posited) failure of alienating western society, we have not adopted western explanations of the actual failure of marxist societies. Western philosophy is of course much less coherent and much less vigorously expressed, and the western critique is most often couched in pragmatic and technical terms - the superior efficiency of the market mechanism etc - which offer no attractive handle for Bahá'ís since we are looking for 'spiritual' or at least philosophical concepts. There is a western moral critique of marxism, in that it makes the individual subordinate to society and so undermines the source of the 'human' values on which the society is supposed to be based. But for various reasons we have not found it propitious to take up a critique based on the value of the individual.

Perhaps I have set up something of a straw man. The nostalgic nature of this view of pre-enlightenment/pre-capitalist society ought to immediately awake our suspicion, as should its close alliance with Marxist views of social dynamics. There are logical difficulties in saying that Western society is based on an individualistic ethos which is basically a-social or even anti-social, a contradiction of what it is to be a society, while the evidence of our eyes is that, since the enlightenment, western societies have flourished, have merged into Western Society, and are, indeed, threatening to swamp all others. Either Western Society is not based on individualism, or individualism is not so much at odds with the foundations of social existence as we have supposed. Which of these is true is a question of definitions: if we define individualism narrowly in its destructive manifestations, we will find that it is not really basic,

perhaps not even common, in western society. If we define it broadly as the recognition that fundamental values are individual, that the collective gains its life from its members and not vice-versa, then we will find (see below) that it is not really destructive.

Before I turn this all on its head to see what it looks like other way up, it might be worth considering what is at stake from the Bahá'í point of view. It is partly a question of getting our bearings: we know that everything is changing, that there are integrative and disintegrative forces at work, etc - what we need to know is which is which, and what direction we are heading in. But the question has implications which go further than our intellectual orientation.

Western societies and western values are the environment in which the Bahá'í community lives: there are areas in which this is not true, but these exceptions would not appear to have a long life-expectancy. In every particular place the Faith must relate to the culture and environment of that place - Islamic or Chinese, new country or old world, wealth or poverty. But an influence, at the least, from western/ enlightenment/ liberal values is the almost universal common factor. So what is at stake is our stance towards our environment. Our attitude to our physical environment - to the good things of the world and the enjoyment of the senses - is very positive. We can expect that this will in the long term shape the Bahá'í community into forms very different to those taken by religious communities which have a fundamental distrust of material creation and bodily enjoyments. Our relation to our social environment, while not so long-lasting, can be expected to have a similar effect. If we begin with the concept that the enlightenment was a wrong turn in history, unleashing forces of liberalism, relativism, individualism and rationalism which must lead to social disintegration, then the community's relation to its human surroundings will develop into an analogy of those extreme Calvinist villages which still survive in the North of Holland, in which the fallenness of the world and the cupidity of the soul are combated in a fortress apart, with rigorous self-examination to search out any trace of contamination from the environment. I sense that already the Bahá'í community feels much too comfortable about its critique of western liberalism, much too ready to reject the signs of western civilization: pluralism, liberalism, individualism, freedom of expression, freedom itself. If an attitude or institution can be identified as western, this in itself often appears to be sufficient to condemn it. This, with the universal spread of western influence, means that the emergence of Bahá'í values and Bahá'í social forms is largely
conceived of as beginning with identifying and rejecting the western (old-world) attitudes within ourselves. Of course we will not actively destroy this western society, but we hold ourselves apart, build up an alternative model, and confidently wait for it to fall. To some extent our apartness will even speed that fall: we refrain from the political process, for instance, knowing that the credibility of the process requires broad participation.

If on the other hand we can conceive of medieval society as the declining phase of the cycle, and the enlightenment and its spreading consequences as the spiritual springtime, producing an infant modern western society which gradually extends itself in many directions, frequently falling down as it learns to walk but gradually learning the lessons demanded of it by the new age - then our attitude to the human world must be basically different. Naturally this will affect not only the character-formation of the community, but also its immediate involvement with the world, with non-Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'í institutions. On a more abstract level, it is a question of the degree of continuity which we can expect between (historically) recent developments in the world and the new world order. We are charged with the duty of 'collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world...' We must then identify these forces. A very healthy scepticism of the Marxist critique of western societies would appear to be indicated: Marxism itself is an example of a mistaken assessment of the nature of western society leading, in reaction, to a disastrous alternative model. The Marxist critique has been widely used as a means of avoiding the effort, the risk, and the changes in power structure, which the application of the concept of individual responsibility to a social structure entails. We have seen assorted obnoxious dictatorships arguing that freedom of information is a western concept, one-party states arguing that pluralist democracy is 'western', outrageous oligarchies using the label 'western' to avoid any devolution of power. I hope that the use of 'western' as a pejorative label is coming to an end - it seems hardly credible anymore. The problem then is to distinguish, first those characteristics of western society that have led to its great strength, and then among the many problems of western society, which are frictional problems relating to the lag between means and responsibility, and which are structural failures requiring that the process of individuation and unity be extended to new spheres, perhaps branching off in new directions.

In addition to our 'character formation' and our stance in relation to the world, there are several internal questions which will be affected by the view we take of modern western society. Discussions of freedom of the press, the equality of men and women, modesty and morality issues, and others, have been affected by accusations of influence by western cultural values. If we ask whether western cultural values might be good values - i.e, anonymous Bahá'í values - some of these debates will be affected. The change in human consciousness which we call the enlightenment is the most decisive force shaping our present society - its effects are still being worked out. In particular it has affected the relationship of the individual and society, and working out how we feel about that has to be of interest to us all as individuals.

Let us say then that the question is worth asking. One view, with which I clearly do not agree, sees the grand thrust of history as towards increasing socialisation and integration, and those trends which we associate with the enlightenment, liberalism, westernism, etc. as a turning-aside from this great plan. Now I'll stand this model on its head, beginning with the concept of

evolution, to see whether the opposite view makes sense and is coherent in the light of the Bahá'í teachings.

Suppose that evolution is marked not by increasing integration, but by increasing individuation. Grains of sand exist individually, but they are only individuated numerically. Amoebas are more or less the same. Sand and amoebas cannot be said to have any degree of unity - only degrees of identity. A complex and developed ecosystem consists of many individuated species, and the more complex and able species consist of individuated members: wild dogs and baboons, for instance, form societies in which some members, even to an outsider, clearly have individual characteristics. Because they are much more strongly individuated they can also have a kind of unity, and can work collectively. Equally, they can have disunity, conflict, can dominate or be excluded from the group. Amoebas do not form societies. We can see an evolutionary trend towards individuation, and we see that individuation and social cohesion do not appear to be in conflict, in fact social structures arise from individuation.

The process of individuation reaches the moral level in the human being, who, as an adult at least, has the potential for individual responsibility. In addition to maturity, the individual requires certain means to exercise moral responsibility: material means (e.g., the right of property) and intellectual means (e.g., access to information). In the development of the child, and of the race, we see the means and the responsibility, like individuation and unity, spiralling upwards. The sphere of individual responsibility has successively widened, as the extent of the unity sought has increased. A 'western' society is a society which relies on and ensures the adulthood (the individual responsibility) of its members in the spheres first of economic activity, then of religion and politics, gradually now in the ecological sphere. This individual responsibility is a tremendous source of personal growth and motivation.

We can see that, in history, the development is towards greater specialisation, greater individuation, greater recognition of the autonomy and value of the individual. In economic and political terms this is self-evident, and we have to suppose that it has been a Good Thing: since as all men have been created to carry forward an ever advancing civilization, and God's intention cannot be frustrated, we are more or less committed to saying that whatever overall goal we find history to be working towards must be a good thing. Individuation is the trend of history. The principle of property is the expression of this, for property is not theft but responsibility. Property rights are human rights, involving choice and therefore moral autonomy, and moral autonomy is the characteristic (adult) human quality.

In the development of any one individual the same process is repeated. A newborn baby has marginal individuality. The liberation theologians would appear to be right in saying that the individual per se does not exist, he or she is formed by social relations. But observe the growing child: is not maturity the crystallization of a progressively formed individuality?

Individuation is accompanied by moral freedom, in a boot-strap process: moral responsibility (choice, therefore based on freedom) leads to maturity (it individuates the person), which extends the epistemological freedom (the ability to see with your own eyes), which makes the individual morally responsible for what can now be seen, etc.

It could be that we have two opposing tendencies here: a natural law leading towards individuation and a religious counter-force which seeks to submerge or at least restrain individuality. But I suggest that individuation is also the goal of religious history. In the beginning was the tribe, whose members shared one spiritual destiny, mediated by the shaman. If the spirits were pleased, if the totem was well, the tribe prospered. This collectivism is repeated in early Hebrew religion. The great step forward made by the Pharisees (and borrowed by the Christians and Muslims) was to individualise spiritual destiny. However, although salvation was a property now of the individual, it was a mass-produced salvation. Different religions, different theologians, etc might have different ideas about what salvation was and how it was obtained, but each thought that it was one thing, obtained in one way. Enter the Bahá'í Faith, which replaces the concept of salvation with that of growth: growth is individual, progressive, and relative to the challenges which an individual faces. An individuated salvation therefore accompanies individual epistemology.

The enlightenment has greatly extended epistemological freedom and freedom of action: as a result we are more troubled, more morally responsible, and more human than our ancestors. As the unitary society of the middle ages has progressively given way to a pluralist, specialised, voluntarist society, each step has been accompanied more or less by disasters. We note that many of these disasters resulted from turning away from the evolutionary movement to greater individuation, in favour of nationalist, racist, fascist, or communist theories which make the collective the source of the value of the individual, instead of vice versa. Other disasters have been caused by the process of individuation itself, imperfectly worked out: the capitalist society which Marx criticised, for instance, with its impoverished labour-suppliers and wealthy capital-owners. This particular disaster has been overcome, not by turning against the current of individuation (for a Marxist, read 'alienation') but by the process itself: labour became specialised, an individuated and marketable commodity, instead of being a common good whose supply was limited only by the food available. The capitalists lost their superior bargaining position and the working class no longer had coherent class interests. Capitalist society did not collapse, it grew - and as it has become more specialised, more pluralist, less and less of a unitary state, it has also become more durable and more flexible: it would be a brave person now who predicted its imminent collapse, having seen how it has overcome the challenges posed by its own cleverness.

What I am working towards here is a reinterpretation of history, specifically of modern western history, which will read some characteristically western trends in world thought which came to the fore in the Enlightenment as positive movements, precursors of the Bahá'í era, rather than as symptoms of

degeneracy.
Such a view of history will, I have suggested, fundamentally change our attitude to the world and in some respects affect our understanding of the Faith itself. It will certainly alter our picture of the society which we are building.

Commentary on Sen McGlinn's "Towards the Enlightened Society"

Commentators: Roshan Danesh and Gordon Dicks

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The fundamental point raised by Sen McGlinn in his essay "Towards the Enlightened Society"—that Enlightenment values of individuality were a positive development—is more than reasonable. Indeed, this conclusion is explicitly supported in Bahá'í writings: "Freedom of thought, freedom of expression, freedom of action are among the freedoms which have received the ardent attention of social thinkers across the centuries... A true reading of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh leaves no doubt as to the high importance of these freedoms to constructive social progress."(1) However, both the Writings(2) and observation of society suggest that any endorsement of individualism needs further exploration. Self-centred individualism is surely at the root of many of the most serious issues we face: weakened families and a sense of aimlessness amongst youth; environmental abuse; extreme and in many cases increasing disparities of wealth; a cynical political system centred as much on theatrical conflict as on real solutions; and a valueless legal structure so often held in contempt by criminal and law-abiding citizens alike. Given McGlinn's telling point that many of the worst disasters of western society are attributable to turning away from the movement towards individuation (81) it would be tempting to paraphrase Winston Churchill's observation about democracy and conclude that western individualism is the worst social system ever devised—except for any of the alternatives.

This, however, would be wrong, just as Churchill was wrong about democracy. The Bahá'í teachings offer a model of interdependence between individualism and community which goes beyond Enlightenment values without denying their individual focus. We would like to explore briefly this interdependence from political, legal, and economic perspectives.

The partisan political system commonly associated with western society is, in some ways, less individualistic than it might appear. Both the emphasis on political parties (groups) and the manipulation of the electorate by frequently shallow campaigning and advertising run counter to the trend of individuation. These features are absent in Bahá'í administration. Of course, it is easy to spot
communal elements in the Administrative Order, both in its structure and in its key tool, consultation; the absence of individual authority, the principle of universal acceptance of decisions, and the idea that contributions to consultation
are the property of the group, and not the contributor, spring to mind.

There is, however, an underlying reliance on individuals which should not be ignored. The principle that condemns "excessive centralization"(3) finds practical expression in the evolution of the structure and functioning of Bahá'í
administration. The central building blocks of the Bahá'í World Order are the local Spiritual Assemblies. It is these bodies that 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi first nurtured as the prerequisites to the formation of global institutions,
and it is the maturity of the local institutions which will coincide with the Lesser
Peace. Most important, however, are the repeated affirmations by the Universal House of Justice of the vital role of the individual.(4) The effectiveness of consultation depends on the participants' ability to be open and frank with their
views - evoking a "clash of differing opinions"(5) - as well as courteous and respectful. An electoral system without nominations or campaigns opens up a much wider range of choices for the voters, and places a heavier responsibility on them as individuals. As the House of Justice explains, "... a pattern is set for
institutional and individual behaviour which depends for its efficacy not so much
on the force of law, which admittedly must be respected, as on the recognition of a mutuality of benefits, and on the spirit of cooperation maintained by the willingness, the courage, the sense of responsibility, and the initiative of individuals—these being expressions of their devotion and submission to the will
of God."(6) We are being challenged to see individualism in a new light, appropriate to the era of human maturity.

This transformation in the meaning of individualism can also be seen in the legal sphere. Post-Enlightenment legal systems reflect a view of human nature which says that the most natural and best expression of a human being is the use
of their rational faculty. An outgrowth of this faith in human rationality is the
belief that individuals and society are best served by allowing for an unfettered
expression of one's rationality. This perception of human nature has caused a troublesome conflict to emerge. Since individuals must be free to act rationally,
the existence of any laws is problematic because by necessity they limit autonomy and independence. However, some laws are necessary, if only to maintain a degree of order and co-existence. The predominant solution to this paradox has been to make individual freedom the yardstick with which all laws are measured and enforced.

This centrality of individualism to post-Enlightenment legal systems has become problematic for two reasons. First, by making individual freedom an end

it itself, rather than a step in a process of development, current conceptions of individualism fail to include the notion of personal responsibility. Legal theorists presumed that the free exercise of one's rational faculty would result in the assumption of responsibility by individuals. However, this has not proved to be the case. Instead, individuals have assumed that they have freedom to be responsible for only those matters in their self-interest. Consequently, in many societies they have abdicated certain personal responsibilities by relying excessively on the state for support in various forms (and as an entity to be blamed for personal dissatisfaction)—ironically, passing responsibility to a collective body.

A second problem is that this ethic of individualism does not inculcate a sense of social responsibility and concern for the communal welfare. Enlightenment theorists presumed that at some point the free exercise of rationality would result in the appearance of communal values of fairness and equity, and eventually a semblance of social justice. This has not occurred. Enshrining individual freedom at the heart of the legal system has contributed to the deconstruction of social values rather than the appearance of them.

Should we, then, forsake individual freedom and emphasise the development of communal values in the legal system? Most certainly not. Bahá'u'lláh demonstrates that, contrary to Enlightenment beliefs, a legal system can encompass both an ethic of individualism and an ethic of communalism without contradiction. The reason, He suggests, is that there is no substantive difference between the goals and values of individualism and the goals and values of communalism. 'Abdu'l-Bahá illustrates this point:

In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. The attributes of his divine nature are shown forth in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice...(7)

In other words, the central feature of a Bahá'í community, which is unity, also constitutes the dynamic force which underlies the human reality. Thus, within the Bahá'í schema a focus on the true individual self, if done with a consciousness of human purpose, necessarily leads to the development of a communal ethic. From this perspective, the intense exploration of self which the Enlightenment has spawned is invaluable, since it has trained individuals to explore independently the dimensions of their being. Bahá'u'lláh, however, has provided a focal point for that exploration which does not result in the domination of either an individualistic or a communal focus.

The goal of Bahá'í legal systems, therefore, will not be the preservation of individual freedom, but rather to establish patterns of interaction most conducive to the appearance of unity—a goal which harmonizes with both a focus on the individual and the creation of a community. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas makes this point, stating that the laws of Bahá'u'lláh are at once "the breath of life unto all created things" and "the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples."(8) This is one possible understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's description of the Aqdas as the "Unerring Balance"(9)—this balance being between the spiritual reality of the individual human being and the social environment in which that individual grows and develops.

Much the same point is demonstrated in the Bahá'í approach to economic questions. Orthodox liberal economics is built on Adam Smith's famous observation of the "invisible hand"—the tendency of markets to direct self-interested behaviour in directions that serve the social good. Economists recognize exceptions to this rule—so-called market failures—which are so prevalent that it may be more reasonable to view them as the rule than as the exception. Examples include externalities (we ignore the environmental impacts of pollution because we are not obliged to pay for them); public goods (we are not motivated to provide an adequate number of lighthouses because we cannot oblige all of the beneficiaries to pay for them); rent-seeking (we use monopoly power, lobbying, advertising, or other means to manipulate free-market outcomes for private gain at the expense of society); and the pervasive costs associated with dishonesty (politely referred to, depending on their form, as adverse selection or moral hazard).(10) Every one of these is as much a moral failure as it is a failure of the market. Despite these problems, however, most economists remain sceptical of non-market solutions because it is generally assumed that the only alternative is government intervention—which has an almost universal reputation for wasteful ineffectiveness.(11)

It is significant that the strength of individualistic capitalism, contrary to popular belief, is not based solely on the acceptance of greed as the prime social motivation. Rather, as pointed out by the Austrian school of economics, this strength is also a result of "informational efficiency," the sheer practicality of a system which makes most of its decisions at a hands-on level in response to simple price signals and does not attempt to compile and manipulate masses of complex information. Psychologically, it is also apparent that people respond more readily when they feel they have some control and have a sense of belonging, regardless of any other motivation.

Complete socialization is not only impossible but most unjust, and in this the

Cause is in fundamental disagreement with the extreme socialists or communists. It cannot also agree with the other extreme tendency represented by the "Laissez-faire" or individualistic school of economics which became very popular in the late eighteenth century, by the so-called democratic countries. For absolute freedom, even in the economic sphere, leads to confusion and corruption, and acts not only to the detriment of the state, or the collectivity, but inevitably results in the end jeopardizing the very interests of the individual himself... The Cause can and indeed will in the future maintain the right balance between the two tendencies of individualism and collectivism, not only in the field of economics, but in all other social domains.(12)

Consider, for example, how the Bahá'í teachings propose to address the issue of economic injustice. While there are provisions for profit sharing, progressive income tax, and regulation, it seems that the fundamental approach is individualistic. Quite aside from the explicit affirmation of private property rights, this can be seen in the operation of the Law of Huqúqu'lláh, which though morally binding is never to be enforced. Responsibility is placed squarely on the individual. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation is particularly illuminating:

Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because of [sic] the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honour upon humankind.(13)

At last we have come to the nub of the matter. The political, legal and economic institutions we devise are physical reflections of how we perceive the reality of the human species. Most economists would dismiss 'Abdu'l-Bahá words as utopian fantasy, because of the ingrained perception of human beings as selfish and materialistic—an ironic outcome to the intellectual individualism of the Enlightenment, which upheld human nobility in the face of the traditional Christian perception of a fallen being. By contrast, the Bahá'í conviction that a human being is "a mine rich in gems of inestimable value"(14) lays the foundation for the moral autonomy spoken of by McGlinn (80). Bahá'u'lláh suggests why this is so: "The embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal."(15) Animals must be free to roam, and only need to construct a social environment for the

purposes of survival. Beyond this, community represents a dangerous limitation. Human purpose, however, transcends mere survival, and has both an individual and a communal dimension.(16) Moreover, even the individual dimension—which can be expressed as the development of virtues or spiritual qualities—becomes meaningful primarily in relationships between people and not in isolation.(17) While nature is characterized by interdependence in much the same way as human beings, the healthy evolution of the human reality requires that we consciously choose to develop it—an expression of the unique human capacities to know, to love, and to will.(18) Taking McGlinn's observation that the bases of feudal and capitalist societies were position and property respectively (76), we might offer as the basis for Bahá'í society the principle of service:

> ... the honour and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.(19)

The Bahá'í teachings, therefore, offer more than a mere balance between individual and community. Rather, they appear to embody a synthesis (we admit this sounds suspiciously dialectical) in which we embrace a holistic or communal worldview, but one which respects the instrumental freedom of individuals to choose their degree of participation. Alternatively expressed, it is an approach in which self-fulfilling individuals will increasingly orient themselves to the needs of the whole because they have, of their own accord, come to appreciate the objective interrelationships that bind us as the "members of one body."(20) Rather than self-centred individualism, we are offered other- or community-centred individualism. Might this not be another interpretation of the rich phrase "unity in diversity"? At any rate, it is one approach to understanding the following statements of Bahá'u'lláh:

> The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice.... By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour.(21)

> The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men.(22)

End Notes

Universal House of Justice, Individual Rights and Freedoms in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989) 7.
"The Bahá'í conception of social life is essentially based on the principle of the subordination of the individual will to that of society. It neither

suppresses the individual nor does it exalt him to the point of making him an antisocial creature, a menace to society. As in everything it follows the 'golden mean'" (Shoghi Effendi, cited in Universal House of Justice, Individual Rights 20).

Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991) 41.

The vital role of the individual in the unfoldment of the Bahá'í World Order is emphasised throughout the Writings of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice. Examples of this can be seen in the annual Riván messages of the House of Justice in which the following remarks have been made: "... it is primarily to the individual believer 'on whom' as the beloved Guardian averred, 'in the last resort depends the entire community'" (1984); "Armed with the strength of action and the co-operation of the individual believers composing it, the community as a whole should endeavour to establish greater stability in the patterns of development, locally and nationally..." (1984). For more examples, see Universal House of Justice, A Wider Horizon: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice, 1983-1992 (Riviera Beach, Fl.: Palabra Publishing, 1992) 1-95.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Principles of Bahá'í Administration 87.

Universal House of Justice, Individual Rights 9.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Bahá'í Revelation (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955) 264.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993)
21-22.

Ibid. 56.

For an exploration of these issues from a Bahá'í point of view, see Gregory C. Dahl,
"Evolving Towards a Bahá'í Economic System," Bahá'í Studies Notebook III.3/4 (1984):
39-52; and William S. Hatcher, "Economics and Moral Values," World Order 9.2 (1974-75):
14-27.

Study of the development of political and legal structures using an 'invisible hand' approach has likewise failed to demonstrate that evolutionary forces will necessarily favour systems that tend to operate for the public good. For a summary discussion, see Malcolm Rutherford, Institutions in Economics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 88-91.

Shoghi Effendi, letter of 25 August 1939, cited in Hooshmand Badi'i, comp., The True Foundation of All Economics (Kitchener, ON: Allprint-Ainsworth, 1994) 106-107.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 115.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988) 162.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Aqdas 63.

Bahá'u'lláh's dual statement of human purpose is given in the short

Obligatory Prayer and in another well-known passage: "I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know
Thee and to worship Thee" (Bahá'í Prayers [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991] 4); "All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization" (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971] 215).
See, for example, John S. Hatcher, The Arc of Ascent (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994) 79.
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