

The Nature of Human Nature

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From the Editor's (formerly McGraw), author of It's Not Your Fault: How Healing Relationships Desk Change Your Brain and Can Help You Overcome a Painful Past. Analyzing the virtual pandemic nature of affective illnesses—particularly depression and anxiety disorders—McIlvride discusses in "Stigma, Depression, and the THE NATURE OF HUMAN NATURE Soul" how these emotional and mental problems inhibit our ability to feel that we can be a useful part of the community, often largely because of the stigma attached to such debilitating afflictions, whether overtly or affective disorder of depression, both subtly, of which are artistically suggested by members by family, friends, and other Keith Mellard's cover art sculpture I Think I Am, a clever play on the Cartesian proposition "Cogito ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"). of the community. This widespread attitude of discomfiture, even condescension by others is often accompanied by a judgmental stance that implies the sufferer is The first article, by highly regarded Bahá'í scholar and philosopher Ian deficient or simply unwilling to exert sufficient willpower to overcome Kluge, is an overview of the Bahá'í challenges of life. The obvious relationship the teachings' engagement with one of the most critical and challenging issues between the two articles, then, is that we confront in this life—the first piece gives the reader the foundational reality of human existence. Having worked on this study for opportunity to analyze how the essential reality of the individual—the human soul over a year, Kluge has devised in "The

Bahá'í Philosophy of Human Nature" and its powers of rational thought, a rather comprehensive analysis of the reflection— willpower, memory, and fundamental Bahá'í concept of human translates these capacities into physi- cal action through the intermediary nature, its source, and its operation as of the brain, and the second article shows he focuses on how the human soul how this process can be impeded by produces physical effects through its various mental disorders.¹ More to associative relationship with the phys- 1 Regarding this point, the reader ical apparatus that is the human brain would benefit from viewing the article and body.

"The Beauty of the Human Psyche: The The second article in this issue also Patterns of Virtues" by Rhett Diessner involves a great deal of research and la- in our previous issue (vol. 26, no. 4). The bor by psychologist Patricia McIlvrde Journal has also already published some 4 The Journal of Bahá'í Studies 27.1-2 2017

the point, McIlvrde's piece explains Bahá'í texts providing specific insights into the particulars of this the need for friends, caregivers, and relation- ship and, more precisely, how relation- the entire community to become bet- ship and, more precisely, how studying the relationship itself can help ter able to discern when someone is the relationship itself can help pre- pare us for the transition to the suffering from affective disorders so life to come. Therefore, if some life to come. Therefore, if some that intelligent assistance and comfort whether a physical or mental impediment— process. deters the normal process whereby can be offered to support the healing we chart the course of our lives through illness— without the information that both daily reflection, determination, and ac- tion, then we would obviously benefit

ness and of the appropriate methods
remove
for interacting with those affected by
hindrance.
it all too often distance individuals
deal
thus afflicted, causing them to remove
the
themselves from community activities
philosophy
for fear of being stigmatized as being
conscious-
unspiritual, weak, or simply "differ-
thing as
ent." Furthermore, both discussions
con-
are critical to the community at large
feel
because each of us is striving to com-
all our
prehend exactly how to navigate this
arbitrary
physical stage of our existence in or-
resident in
der best to prepare ourselves for the
our soul
life that lies beyond this realm.
body,
For while we may have some fun-
damental grasp of the concept of
the soul and how the conscious mind
challenging
communicates with the world through
emo-
the intermediary of brain-body asso-
what
ciation, we find that there is a virtually
result of
endless supply of information in the
and
relationships gone awry? The fields
very insightful articles on the subject of
brain-
mental health. See, for example, Michael L.
psychology
Penn's "Human Nature and Mental Health:
infancy as

greatly from learning how to
or otherwise deal with this
Furthermore, both articles
with areas of study that are on
cutting edge of religious
and science. Where does
ness reside? Is there such a
free will? Do millions of neurons
struct some illusion whereby we
we are in control when, in fact,
actions may be the result of
neural activity? Is memory
the brain? If so, then even if
continues after the demise of the
does that mean we lose our recollec-
tion of our earthly existence?
Similarly complex and
are the study and treatment of
tional and mental disorders. To
extent are these maladies the
genetics, environment, nutrition,
focused on the study of the
body relationship, such as
and psychiatry, are in their

A Bahá'í-inspired Perspective" (vol. 25, regards diagnosing, classifying, and nos. 1–2) and Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian's treating depression, anxiety disorders, "Depression: Biological, Psychosocial, and and other impediments to the pursuit of those goals prescribed in Spiritual Dimensions and Treatment" (vol. the 25, no. 4). Bahá'í teachings for our advancement.

From the Editor's Desk

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Moreover, the widespread nature of physical realm, this law is symbolized these disorders is demonstrated by the by the mutual attraction of all matter. In the metaphysical realm and in our fact that few among us do not have a friend or family member beset by these spiritual relationships, it can be dis-afflictions and have not observed the cerned in the affection we have and are toll they take on both the sufferer and exhorted to develop for one another the caregivers. so that, in time, there will emerge a These two articles by Kluge and global community that will function McIlvride thus function as collabora- like one soul in many bodies and foster tive attempts to help us understand a nurturing environment sufficiently several extremely important axioms infused into the global commonwealth about the physical or embryonic stage that none need feel alone, unloved, or of our existence. Both articles indicate helpless. that the intimacy of the associative Finally, we include two poems, connection between the soul and the both dealing with the examination body/brain is not trivial, nor does our of spiritual beliefs and the effort to knowledge of this relationship, how- understand and apply those beliefs in ever sophisticated, guard us against two distinct contexts. "Shahada," by the suffering that is an inherent part Caitlin Johnson Castelaz, depicts the of our mental and physical well-being. thoughts of a student in a classroom In the midst of depression, we can learning about Islam. "The Fragrance pray for the cessation of the darkness of a Poem" is a very powerful glimpse that seems to have enveloped our in- by Mahvash Sabet of the daily life most life, and yet the assurance that she experiences as a prisoner in Go- this malady will have no long-term hardasht Prison in Iran. We have

also

effect on our essential self does not included a photograph of a second
alone ease our pain or bring about in- sculpture by Keith Mallard, Warrior,
stantaneous relief. which seems extremely apropos of the

Implicit in both articles is an at- article by McIlvride that follows it.

tempt to understand human nature
not only at the level of the individual,
but also, importantly, at the level of
community, because as human beings,
we are inherently and inextricably
social beings. In this sense, our indi-
vidual and collective objectives are in
concert because the entirety of our
existence, whether in this realm or the
next, is governed by what 'Abdu'l-Bahá
describes as the law of love, the orga-
nizing force of the universe. In the

— The Nature of Human Nature (Used by permission of the curator)